

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 15, 2005

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, Northwest
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madame Secretary:

As the Republic of Turkey begins to negotiate for membership in the European Union, it is vital that the United States continue to work to advance its interests as a friend and partner to both the European Union and the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, we request that you provide us with an update on the State Department's efforts to address the following concerns:

Blockade Against Armenia. Despite violating international law and condemnations on behalf of the United States and the European Union, Turkey continues to impose its blockade against Armenia, now in its twelfth year. The EU has repeatedly called upon Turkey to lift the blockade, and the European Parliament has declared the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations a precondition for Turkey's accession to the organization. As you know, Turkey and Azerbaijan are the only states that engage in a blockade of a fellow Council of Europe state.

A recent report¹ prepared by the World Bank highlighted the profound economic impact Turkey's blockade has had upon Armenia. This continued action on the part of Turkey violates international law, as well as treaties it signed with Armenia recognized under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties and the Convention on Succession of States. It also has a debilitating effect on Turkey's ability to expand its economy, while allowing its foreign policy to be held hostage by the interests of Azerbaijan. Overall, this policy acts against the interests of the European Union and is counterproductive to US interests to support broad engagement with the nations of the South Caucasus to help them "remain independent, and [to] become democratic, stable, and prosperous partners of the United States."² So long as the blockade continues, it will act against a stated precondition of Turkey's admittance to the EU.

Human Rights. Despite substantial pledges, there remains significant concern regarding Turkey's progress in the realm of human rights. While Turkey founded the Human Rights Inquiry Commission and the Human Rights Coordinating High Committee, Turkey continues to under fund these programs and undermine their ability to implement their mission. Last year, the Turkish government commissioned a report on Turkey's minorities. However, when the final report criticized Turkey's mistreatment of minorities as non-compliant with its own treaty obligations, the Turkish government promptly disowned it amid nationalist threats against its authors. Also unfortunate is Turkey's failure to abide by the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The European Commission has expressed disappointment with the progress Turkey has made in this regard. In the first 9 months of 2004, for example, Turkish courts tried 416 persons on charges relating to spoken or written expression.³ Most recently, Hrant Dink, a Turkish journalist, was handed a suspended six-month prison sentence for a newspaper article that insulted Turkish identity. Moreover, internationally renowned novelist Orhan Pamuk is facing three years in jail for commenting on the Armenian genocide. The US Helsinki Commission has properly condemned this prosecution.

¹ World Bank, "Recent Policies and Performance of the Low-Income CIS Countries: An Update of the CIS-7 Initiative, April 23, 2004

² Assistant Secretary of State A. Elizabeth Jones, *U.S. Engagement in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Staying Our Course along the Silk Road*, Speech at the University of Montana, April 10, 2003.

³ Department of State "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2004" Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.


Additionally, we condemn Turkey's toleration of assaults against its Greek and Armenian Orthodox minority, its continuing illegal closure of the Greek Orthodox Halki Patriarchal School of Theology, and its illegal seizure of Greek and Armenian Church property.


Occupation of Cyprus: A fundamental requirement for joining the European Union is for Turkey to recognize all member states of the EU, including the Republic of Cyprus. Not only has Turkey failed to recognize Cyprus, but it continues to occupy illegally over 37 percent of the island with a standing force of over 43,000 Turkish troops after invading the country in 1974 and expelling over 180,000 Greek Cypriots. However, we are concerned about two recent events that seemingly undermine stated US policy regarding non-recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). You recently invited Mr. Mehmet Ali Talat, the recognized leader of the Turkish-Cypriot community, to formally meet with you in Washington, DC. Additionally, we feel that the State Department's support for the travel of U.S. citizens, U.S. government personnel, and Members of Congress with direct flights to the Tymbou Airport is an additional cause for concern, as it is not a designated legal port of entry. The U.S. government should be discouraging U.S. citizens, U.S. government personnel, and Members of Congress from entering Cyprus illegally, and not encouraging them to participate in Turkey's violation of the Chicago Convention.⁴


The Armenian Genocide. Few tragedies in our shared history are as comprehensively documented as the fate of more than 1.5 million Armenians living within the Ottoman Empire from 1915-1923. The international community is formally recognizing this event as genocide in increasing numbers, and the European Parliament recently passed a resolution stipulating Turkey's recognition of this event as a precondition for admittance to the EU. We believe that only by acknowledging the Ottoman Empire's genocidal legacy, can Turkey fully return to the community of nations. Should Turkey choose to recognize this event in its nation's history, it will communicate its commitment to step from the shadows of its past and bring Turkey squarely in line with the values and possibilities it stands ready to embrace today.


While the Republic of Turkey continues to make progress in these areas, as reflected in the decision to open accession talks, we recognize that the European Union has outlined the above concerns as symptomatic of their hesitation with Turkey accession. Turkey is at the crossroads of Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. It has the opportunity to play an important role in the ongoing developments in the region. We note that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ministers have made repeated references to the values that they share with our nation, and that constructive actions with regard to the outstanding issues noted above would confirm these statements. Therefore, we restate our desire that the United States work to bring about these promising possibilities.

Sincerely,









⁴ The Convention on International Civil Aviation (the Chicago Convention), signed December 7, 1944. See Article I and Article IV.

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