

This office conducted site visits to meet with representatives from all of the projects listed above.

35TH YEAR OF INVASION AND
OCCUPATION OF CYPRUS

HON. JOHN P. SARBANES

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2009

Mr. SARBANES. Madam Speaker, today I rise, like so many have done before me for 35 years now, and lament the unjust division of the Republic of Cyprus.

For more than 60 years, the United States has extended the hand of friendship to Turkey, offering her material support, offering her military protection and most importantly, engaging our Turkish friend and ally with the respect, admiration, and dignity that emanate from our great Nation's democratic values.

Just a few months ago, President Obama paid a historic visit to Turkey where he called upon the European Union to embrace Turkey's application to join that body of peace loving, democratic nations, and as well, he called for a just and lasting settlement that reunifies Cyprus as a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.

Last year, upon this remembrance, I commended the noble efforts exerted by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities to reunify their island republic. Today, 1 year later, I again praise President Dimitrios Christofias and Turkish Cypriot Leader Mehmet Ali Talat for their commitment to peace and unity.

So why then, with Cypriot leadership committed to reunification, Turkey's NATO membership since 1952, United Nations' diplomatic initiatives and the appointment of numerous special American, British and E.U. envoys, does Cyprus remain divided and occupied for 35 years?

For three and a half decades, the international community has unequivocally called for the removal of the 45,000 Turkish troops garrisoned in the occupied north, so that the people of Cyprus may be relieved of the humanitarian hardship and injustice brought on by Turkey's hostile occupation.

In 1975, this Chamber imposed sanctions upon Turkey and refused to allow sales or aid of American military equipment to Turkey, because of its unlawful invasion and occupation of Cyprus. That embargo was lifted by the exigencies of the Cold War, because the Turkish military retaliated against the United States by denying use of strategic military assets located in Turkey.

From the outset of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus to this day, the United Nations has repeatedly called for the removal of Turkish occupation forces and for the respect of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus.

Following high level U.N. brokered talks in 1979, Turkey agreed as a confidence building measure to withdraw and handover the uninhabited city of Famagusta to its rightful inhabitants. In this regard, U.N. Security Council Resolution 550/1984 calls for the transfer of the occupied, but uninhabited, city of Famagusta to the United Nations for the orderly resettlement of the city by its rightful inhabitants. To this day, Turkey has reneged on its pledge to comply with the agreements achieved during the high level talks and has completely disregarded the U.N. resolutions on Famagusta.

As recently as May 2009, the U.N. Secretary General placed the blame for the failure to return Famagusta to its rightful inhabitants squarely upon the Government of Turkey. This Chamber has also enacted section 620C(a)(5) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2373 (a)(5)) in support of the United Nations Secretary General's efforts to resettle the occupied, but uninhabited, city of Famagusta by its rightful inhabitants. Turkey, our NATO ally and beneficiary of significant American support, has ignored America's calls for compliance with the return of Famagusta, just as it has ignored the U.N.'s.

Today, Senator CARDIN and Congressman HASTINGS of the Helsinki Commission held a briefing on the destruction of the history, heritage and culture in the occupied north of Cyprus. As that briefing pointed out, despite clear international commitments on the importance of preserving religious and cultural heritage, hundreds of churches, chapels and monasteries in the northern part of Cyprus remain in peril. Thousands of icons, manuscripts, frescos, and mosaics have been looted from sites in northern Cyprus—many ending up on international auction blocks. The United States, the E.U. and the United Nations have all called on Turkey to honor its international obligations and cease and desist from this further hostility to the people of Cyprus. This begs the question, how can Turkey seek to join the European Union, all the while it is destroying the very existence of European history and culture in the north of Cyprus.

The European Union has also called on Turkey to honor its agreement to open its ports and airspace to Republic of Cyprus flagged vessels. Rather than comply with its commitments, Turkey demands that the E.U. engage in international economic activity with the unlawfully occupied north of the island republic. It is incredible that Turkey would refuse to open its ports and airspace and extend legal recognition to a member state of the European Union all the while it seeks to become a full fledged member of that Union.

The United States rightly places great importance in strategically mooring Turkey to the E.U. and America, but I am greatly concerned that Turkey does not share our vision or commitment to the liberal democratic processes that works to ensure global peace and stability. There are no greater advocates for Tur-

key's acceptance into the European Union, than Greece, Cyprus and the United States. Despite the fact that Turkey has bullied and beaten the small island Republic of Cyprus, Cyprus has shown great humanity by demanding of its fellow E.U. members that Turkey should be afforded the right to join the E.U.

The Republic of Cyprus has gone the extra mile to keep its Turkish speaking citizens engaged in its democratic and economic successes, it has gone the extra mile to engage Turkey and normalize relations, and it has gone the extra mile by becoming an advocate of Turkey's entry into the E.U. Unfortunately, Turkey has not responded in kind. To this very day, Turkey violates the territorial integrity of Cypriot seas and air space. It acts to limit the economic activities of the tiny republic and it subjects it to the menacing threat of a massively armed contingent of 45,000 soldiers.

The division of Cyprus is a matter of invasion and occupation, and not as Turkey claims, a matter of inter-communal conflict. On this very point, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has held time and time again that Turkey exercises "effective overall control of northern Cyprus through its military presence there . . ." and stresses the point "that Turkey's responsibility under the [European] Convention could not be confined to the acts of its own soldiers and officials operating in northern Cyprus, but was also engaged by virtue of the acts of the local administration . . ., which survived by virtue of Turkish military and other support." There can be no doubt from the rulings of the ECHR that the division of the Republic of Cyprus continues because of the Turkish military occupation.

The Cyprus problem pits American allies against one another and impedes the orderly progress of NATO and the E.U. in a strategically vital part of the world. The time has come for us to ask ourselves, is the Government of Turkey part of the solution or is it the very heart of the problem. How Turkey resolves the division of Cyprus will work to define how Turkey will be engaged by Europe. Should Turkey continue to occupy Cyprus as a post-imperial power with no regard for its prior commitments to international agreements and with no sense of obligation to the very European heritage, history and culture that it must uphold as an aspirant member of the E.U., Turkey will by its own hand foreclose its chances of joining the European Union.

Madam Speaker, Turkey is gambling with more than even the democratic liberties of the people of Cyprus. I fear that should Turkey fail to honor democracy, human rights and the rule of law, Turkey will drift away from the United States and Europe and chart a course that will be openly adverse to the interest of NATO, America and the E.U. It is high time that we engage our ally, while we still can, and ensure a democratic resolution to the division of Cyprus.