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Cyprus Ambassador Says Turkey Must Play More Constructive Role to Reach Solution

AHI Hosts Seminar, Luncheon Speech to Mark 35th Anniversary of Cyprus Invasion
 Cyprus Ambassador Says Turkey Must Play More Constructive Role to Reach Solution

WASHINGTON, DC—Reaching a solution to the Cyprus problem depends on Turkey playing a constructive role in the process of reunifying the island in a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, the Cyprus ambassador to the United States said on July 22.

Speaking to a luncheon sponsored by the American Hellenic Institute to mark 35 years since Turkey invaded Cyprus, ambassador Andreas Kakouris said that Cyprus President Demetris Christofias and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community Mehmet Ali Talat launched direct negotiations last September and have met more than three dozen times since then. He said that although talks have covered all main clusters of issues, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus is not fully satisfied with the progress achieved so far at the negotiations. In this context, he reiterated President Christofias strong commitment to continue to work hard at the negotiations for a solution.

Referring to the negotiation process, ambassador Kakouris told the luncheon that this is a Cypriot led process, where the solution must come from the Cypriots themselves and serve first and foremost the interests of the Cypriots. He said that for this to happen, however, "the key to a solution was, is and remains in Turkey".

"Turkey's posture throughout this period ... has not been one of facilitating a solution that reunifies the island. It has been a posture of trying to cement the division of the island," he said. "Until such time as we get Turkey facing in the same direction as the international community for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation and moving away from policies and postures of wanting to keep troops on the island and having the right of intervention in Cyprus, it is very difficult to see how we can move forward on a solution."

The ambassador added: "Let the Cypriots negotiate. Turkey needs to give Mr. Talat the room to negotiate, but also Turkey needs to be constructive not only in the process but in the outcome of a solution."

Referring to the relations between the U.S. and Turkey, as evidenced by President Obama's recent visit there, the ambassador called on the U.S. government to impress upon its ally Turkey to end the illegal occupation of Cyprus, which is in violation of international law and legality and runs counter to the values and principles that President Obama espouses, including the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

The luncheon also heard from Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y. and followed an AHI-sponsored seminar on Cyprus that included Washington Times Managing Editor-print David Jones as moderator and panelists Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute, AHI founder Gene Rossides and attorney Nicholas Karambelas.

Congresswoman Maloney, who co-chairs the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, called on the United States and the international community to continue their support for the Cyprus peace process and said she remained hopeful that a peaceful settlement could be found.

"The people of Cyprus deserve a unified and democratic country," she said.

Mr. Carpenter, vice president for foreign policy and defense studies at Cato, agreed with the ambassador that Turkey was the "indispensable player" in getting a resolution of the Cyprus problem and called its continued occupation "an ongoing violation of international law" and "a very serious matter," particularly for a country that is a member of NATO and wants to join the European Union.

"There are certain standards that one expects from members of those bodies and Turkey's behavior in Cyprus, it pains me to say, violates those basic standards," Carpenter said. "I look forward to the day when Turkey might be a member of the European Union. I think that would be beneficial for both Turkey and the European

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Union, but that requires a significant change in behavior on Ankara's part and, as yet, we don't really see signs of that change."

He added: "The leading powers of the European Union need to make it clear to the Turkish government in words of one syllable that until the occupation of northern Cyprus ends and Ankara agrees to approve an equitable agreement, Turkey will not become a member of the European Union. Period. Full stop."

Carpenter said the United States "has very much been Ankara's enabler" in its occupation of Cyprus and that he did not expect a substantive change in Washington's policy in the short run. But he said that there are administration officials who have a genuine belief in the rule of law and that if the relationship between Washington and Ankara falters over issues like the status of the Kurds in northern Iraq, it could lead to a U.S. reassessment.

"I don't think we are going to see much of anything in the next year or two but looking beyond that there is some potential for an improved U.S. policy and that, in turn, could be a critical catalyst for a change in Ankara's perspective and behavior," Mr. Carpenter said.

"There is certainly no guarantee of this but I would have to say, on balance, the opportunities look more promising than at any time in the past 35 years," he said.

Mr. Rossides said "political action" was necessary to prod Congress to act in two respects. First, the introduction and passage of legislation that would put conditions on dealing with Turkey if Ankara does not take certain steps regarding Cyprus, the Aegean Sea and religious freedom in Turkey. Those steps include the prompt removal of Turkey's 43,000 illegal occupational troops and 180,000 illegal settlers/colonists. Secondly, he also urged the relevant committees in Congress to hold hearings and launch an investigation into the State Department's several violations of the rule of law.

Mr. Karambelas, founding partner of the law firm Sfikas & Karambelas, said there should be a "very clear" and "high-level" statement from the U.S. government recognizing Cyprus's rights under international law—and over Turkey's protests—to explore natural resources off its coast.

Countries are allowed to explore on their continental shelf and the Law of the Sea treaty also allows a country to declare an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for exploration out 200 miles from its coast. If that zone conflicts with another country's, the treaty sets out a mechanism to resolve disputes. The vast majority of countries around the world are parties to that treaty, with two notable exceptions, Turkey and the United States. Cyprus has declared an EEZ off its coast and has reached relevant agreements with Egypt and Lebanon. It has also announced that U.S.-based Noble Energy will undertake exploratory work of the Cyprus coast.

Turkey has objected to Cyprus's declaration of its EEZ, saying it infringes on Turkey's potential—but as of yet undeclared—zone or its continental shelf. Turkey's position, Mr. Karambelas said, is essentially that, because Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, no state exists between Turkey and Egypt to the south, and Syria, Lebanon and Israel to the east, Turkey claims that its exploration rights in the Mediterranean Sea are a matter between it and the nearby states excluding Cyprus. Turkey also claims that any exploration of the Cyprus EEZ has to benefit all of the island's population and that is not possible because the Cypriot government does not represent all the people of Cyprus.

Mr. Karambelas said Turkey's position borders on delusional since it is the only nation in the world that does not recognize the R

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AHI Executive Director Nick Larigakis opening the seminar.

Vice President for Foreign Policy and Defense Studies at the Cato Institute, Ted Galen Carpenter.

Founder of AHI Gene Rossides.

Ambassador of Cyprus to the U.S. Andreas Kakouris.

