Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr President:

Congratulations on your historic victory! We look forward to working with you in the coming days on many issues of importance to our nation. This letter conveys our particular appreciation for the sensitivity you and Vice President Biden have shown in the past on issues concerning Greece and Cyprus within the overall formulation of American foreign policy towards Southeastern Europe

On May 17, 2007, in a speech to the 23rd Annual Cyprus, Hellenic and Orthodox Issues Conference in Washington D.C., you reaffirmed your strong support of a just resolution to the Cyprus problem and expressed equal appreciation for our ally Greece. We believe solving the issues that are related to the religious freedom and rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Orthodox Christians, the occupation and division of Cyprus, Turkey's activities in the Aegean Sea and finding a suitable name for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will bolster American interests in a critical part of the world. We hope that your administration will reflect in its policies and personnel the positions that you and Vice President Biden have taken previously on these important issues

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

On November 29, 2006, you and Vice President Biden joined 73 Senators in sending a letter to President Bush demanding support for the religious freedom of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We appreciate your long term support for Orthodox Christianity and for your concern, expressed in the November 2006 letter, that "policies of the Turkish government pose a grave threat to the future of the Ecumenical Patriarchate." We commend you and Vice President Biden for calling on Turkey to restore the full rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, including its property rights, and to reopen the Halki Theological Seminary.

We remain distressed by the Turkish state's continued refusal to respect the basic human rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This refusal is an abdication of Turkey's obligations under international law and custom to uphold, preserve and protect this ancient Christian See. We note that the 2003 EU-Turkey Accession Partnership and the 2005 EU negotiating framework require Turkey to conform to European standards regarding religious freedoms and minority rights. Failure to do so constitutes a major obstacle to Turkey's EU aspirations and normalization of its relations with Greece. We commend you on your willingness to speak out in support of Orthodox Christianity

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REUNIFICATION OF CYPRUS

We applaud your commitment to exercise U S. leadership in the negotiations for a just solution on Cyprus. For more than three decades, Vice President Biden has been unwavering in his support for ending the Turkish military's occupation of Cyprus. We agree that a solution to the Cyprus problem should be achieved along the lines of a single, sovereign country within a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. In that regard, much of the groundwork for a federated Cyprus comprised of a single citizenship and two politically equal communities has been set-forth in the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the High Level Agreements of 1977 and 1979.

We encourage you to support a negotiated solution on Cyprus that would end the Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus and repair the island's tragic division while paving the way to prosperity and peace throughout the entire region. The current ongoing reunification talks between President Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat offer real promise for such a solution.

To advance these ongoing talks, the United States can use its influence to help the Cypriot people retain ownership of the reunification process and ensure that Cypriots come to an agreement by their own accord. Such is the process embodied in the July 8th Agreement (2006) reached between then President of the Republic of Cyprus Tassos Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat and we note that the House of Representatives unanimously passed H. Res. 405 supporting this agreement by voice vote in 2007. We believe that the process embodied in this resolution is also in line with your view expressed in the 2007 speech that any solution to the Cyprus problem must be "based on the rule of law, on UN resolutions passed on the Cyprus issue, and on the very principles and standards of the EU of which Cyprus is a member."

Since the partial lifting of the restrictions on crossing to-and-from the occupied areas in 2003, the Cypriot people have sought to overcome the barrier of the green line by achieving more than 13-million incident free crossings. A solution to the Cyprus problem will allow all Cypriots to enjoy the complete benefits and advantages that only reunification can bring, including that of European Union Membership.

By their own peaceful conduct, the Cypriot people have demonstrated the will and desire to reunify their country. It should be noted that, all too often, the most strident demands made at the reunification talks represent the interests of the Turkish military. The United States has considerable influence with the Turkish military and it should use its influence to support a reunification process that is negotiated by Cypriots on behalf of Cypriots. A solution of the Cyprus problem will give immense impetus to Turkey's EU aspirations.

THE AEGEAN SEA

At this moment, tensions between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea are impeding ongoing diplomatic efforts aimed at improving relations between our two allies. These tensions arise from Turkey's aggressive stance in the Aegean, which include unwarranted shows of force and the threatening of Greece that its implementation of certain provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea will be considered *Casus Belli* We urge you to press Turkey to abandon its displays of force in favor of the diplomatic process. Once again, this is an issue on which the European Union requires Turkey to achieve progress with Greece in order to satisfy the EU accession criteria

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

We commend your original co-sponsorship of Senate Resolution 300 in the 110th Congress calling on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to cease dissemination of materials that violate provisions of the United Nations-brokered Interim Agreement between FYROM and Greece regarding "hostile activities or propaganda" The resolution further calls on FYROM to work with the United Nations and Greece to achieve longstanding United States' and United Nation's policy goals for finding a mutually acceptable official name for FYROM. Your efforts in the Senate were widely supported by 119 bipartisan members of the House of Representatives who cosponsored House Resolution 356, which also calls on FYROM to comply with the Interim Agreement We look forward to your Administration supporting the process embodied in the Interim Agreement in accordance with S. Res. 300 and H Res. 356

In that regard, we note that Greece has already made a major goodwill gesture by agreeing that the word "Macedonia" in the future name of FYROM is acceptable so long as it is combined with some geographic qualifier to make clear that there are no designs on the historical boundaries of the Greek province of Macedonia. While Greece desires to support FYROM joining NATO and the EU, it cannot do so as long as the authorities in Skopje indulge in behavior that threatens the territorial integrity of our NATO ally Greece. It is a condition of the European Union accession process that FYROM maintain good neighborly relations with Greece.

On November 5, 2004, the prior Administration, without any prior consultation with the Congress or our allies, recognized FYROM as the Republic of Macedonia. This recognition undermined the negotiations that have been ongoing since the execution of the Interim Agreement and brought about a severe erosion of the relationship between FYROM and Greece It also strained our relationship with our steadfast ally Greece Once again we commend you for the foresight you displayed on this matter while in the Senate

VISA WAIVER PROGRAM

In September 2007 the State Department formally nominated Greece to participate in the Visa Waiver Program Greece has earnestly worked alongside U.S. officials in order to meet the Program's qualifying criteria. However, Greece has not yet been designated a Visa Waiver Nation. In that regard we ask you to consider this matter in the context of your statement made at

the 2007 conference "that one of our strongest alliances is with Greece, and that it's no accident that Greece and the United States were on the same side of every major conflict of the 20th Century, and that it's no accident that Greece remains one of our closest partners in the Mediterranean."

It is significant that Greece is one of the original fifteen member states of the European Union and the only Schengen country not included in the Visa Waiver Program. As a Schengen country, nationals of Greece travel freely to-and-from fifteen EU countries including France and Germany, countries noted for their high security standards. We believe Greece's inclusion is long overdue, and we urge you to work with Greek officials to ensure that the process for its entry into the Visa Waiver Program moves as expeditiously as possible.

MOVING FORWARD

In closing, we look forward to engaging our colleagues in the Hellenic Caucus and throughout the Congress and working with you and your administration on these and other issues of import facing our great nation in these challenging times. We trust that you will assemble a foreign policy team that will approach these issues with the same spirit and understanding that both you and Vice President Biden have shown over the years.

Sincerely,

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress

Shelley Berkley
Member of Congress

Zachary T. Space
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Patrick J. Kennedy
Member of Congress

Joe Sestak
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Scott Garrett
Member of Congress

Lincoln Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress

Joseph Crowley
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Loretta Sanchez
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Rush D. Holt
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James R. Langevin
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Barbara Lee
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