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President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the nationwide members of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I write to thank you for inviting Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to Washington and to share AHI's perspective on the U.S.-Greece relationship in advance of your meeting with the prime minister on October 17, 2017.

Last month, U.S. Ambassador to Greece Geoffrey Pyatt stated, "The United States looks at Greece not just as an important bilateral partner, but as a pillar of our strategy in the region." We could not agree more. The U.S. should have a "special relationship" with Greece, recognizing its strategic location in southeastern Europe where the U.S. has important political, economic and military interests. Greece is a pivotal ally for the advancement of these interests that include greater stability in southeastern Europe, the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Greece's support for sanctions on Iran, counterterrorism exercises with the United States, and the significant strengthening of bilateral relations with Israel are all examples of how Greece advances the U.S.' security interests. Greece is also a frontline state in the fight against terrorism.

Defense cooperation between the United States and Greece is strong, but there is room for enhancement. Despite Greece's economic difficulties, it continues to be of vital geostrategic importance for the projection of U.S. interests because of its geographic location and its strong, unwavering support for NATO. Greece is home to the most important naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, **Naval Support Activity (NSA) Souda Bay**, on the island of Crete. Via NSA Souda Bay, Greece has been critical to the delivery of U.S. troops, cargo, and supplies, providing access and extending the U.S. and NATO's reach into the Middle East and North Africa. To illustrate:

- In 2016 alone, NSA Souda Bay hosted 122 USN ships (for a total of 518 U.S. ship days), 7,041 aircraft, and processed 21,802 personnel. These numbers reflect significant increases in operations – more than a 55% increase – over the previous year.
- NSA Souda Bay provides maximum capabilities with minimal manning and cost. For example, in February 2017, the ability for the U.S.S. George H.W. Bush to be repaired at Souda Bay, as opposed to returning to Norfolk, resulted in significant cost savings to the U.S. government.

- Greece is a top contributor to the defense efforts of NATO, spending an estimated 2.38% of its GDP on defense. Greece is second behind only the United States in this regard.

The United States' use of the Greek facilities at Souda Bay is governed principally by the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA), which has been renewed on an annual basis. The United States must work with Greece toward securing the capital improvements, necessary, to the facilities at Souda Bay, especially if increased utilization is projected for the future.

Separately, the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program at the U.S. Embassy in Athens, Greece, advances the professional military education of the Greek Armed Forces. It enhances interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces such as Greece's. Through the training of Greek military officers and noncommissioned officers in a multitude of professional military education and technical courses in the United States, IMET provides strong United States-Greece military-to-military relations.

However, since FY2006, U.S. funding levels for Greece's IMET program have declined, resulting in an estimated 400 to 500 Hellenic Officers (20 to 30 being General Officers) who did not receive education and training. We urge the administration to fund Greece's IMET program at \$420,000. Funding the program at this level will help it to recover from the "opportunity lost" of educating and training the proper amount of our NATO ally's military officers.

Furthermore, AHI encourages high-level visitations by your administration to Greece, especially to facilities such as NSA Souda Bay, to gain firsthand knowledge of Greece's geostrategic importance to the United States' national security interests.

Greece's Economy

It is imperative to the national interest of the United States for Greece to be successful in its economic recovery. Therefore, it is important for the U.S. government to assist the Greek government at every opportunity as Greece turns the corner on its economy toward recovery. The United States can help by continuing to urge creditors to take the steps to ensure Greece's path to recovery is attainable.

The administration can also assist by reversing its position on the elimination of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). AHI backed successfully a policy shift that stated OPIC is authorized to do business in Greece if there are "strong development or foreign policy reasons to proceed." The policy objective was aimed to help spur commerce investment in Greece as Greece endures its economic crisis.

Finally, Greece's economy could realize a boost if it were possible for Greece to claim its full exclusive economic zone (EEZ) without being challenged by third-party interests. Doing so would allow Greece to understand fully the hydrocarbon reserves it could potentially exploit for the betterment of its economy. According to a *Wall Street Journal* article, "An estimated €100 billion (\$130 billion) of undersea hydrocarbon reserves—if proven—could ease the country's crippling debt burden and make Greece a significant energy supplier for Europe..."¹

Mr. President, the perspective on the U.S.-Greece Partnership is presented by AHI in the best interests of the United States. The strong bilateral relationship between Greece and the United States was established at the very founding of both countries, and throughout the 20th century, Greece was one of a few countries that allied with the U.S. in every major international conflict. A NATO member since 1952, Greece is an immensely valuable, proven, and reliable strategic ally for the U.S. AHI expects the U.S.-

¹ "Greek Maritime Claims Rock Boat with Turkey," by Alkman Granitsas and Stelios Bouras, *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2013 ([web page](#)).

Greece relationship to continue to build on an already sturdy foundation as a result of your meeting with Prime Minister Tsipras and his visit to Washington. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



Nick Larigakis
President

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