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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2015

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The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express our strong support for recent efforts by Ambassador John Bass and the U.S. Embassy staff in Ankara to develop closer ties with civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Turkey. Vice President Joseph Biden's recent meeting with civil society organizations working toward greater democracy and pluralism, is a welcome example of the high-level engagement with civil society that must be a key component in our relations with Turkey. We urge you to continue to stress the importance of media freedom, separation of powers, human rights, and the rule of law in your discussions with President Erdogan and other senior Turkish government officials. To this end, we strongly recommend the establishment of a formal dialogue with Turkey on these matters in parallel with ongoing discussions on trade and investment, security, and culture and education.

Support for civil society, democracy, and human rights has been a central facet of U.S. foreign policy for many decades, including under President Obama's tenure. We firmly believe that strengthening Turkey's commitment to democratic principles, due process and the rule of law is of utmost importance for this close and long-standing ally of the United States. Since only the Turkish people can remedy the systemic weaknesses that have fostered corruption and abuse of power within their country's political system, we feel that it is essential that U.S. officials include civil society groups and related issues in their discussions with Turkish officials.

Unfortunately, civil society and independent media in Turkey have been weakened by leading officials in the current and previous governments. The detention of hundreds of individuals during President Erdogan's time in office and conspiratorial "national security"-related charges have highlighted the diminishing space in which independent media and civil society are allowed to operate. The overlap of the executive and judicial authorities in particular has led to violations of due process, including the systematic manipulation of evidence by prosecutors. This has resulted in the imprisonment of thousands of lawyers, academics, journalists, ethnic minorities, businessmen and officials deemed to be enemies. The impact of this persecution, which has affected many U.S. citizens and their relatives, ultimately undermines a pluralistic vision of democracy in Turkey and thus is of great concern regarding the future of our bilateral partnership. Unfortunately, Turkey's Parliament is considering new security legislation that would further broaden police powers and reduce safeguards against their arbitrary abuse.

We are very concerned that without a clear statement that human rights, media freedom, and the rule of law are integral to U.S. policy toward Turkey, President Erdogan is likely to step up pressure on his

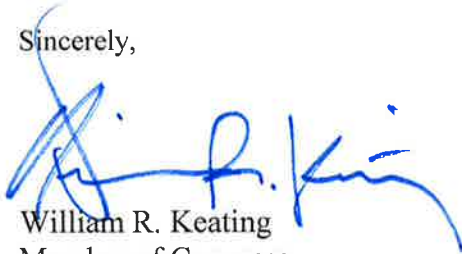
critics, opponents, and others who simply do not agree with his policies and thereby further undermine Turkey's democratic heritage. This would increasingly distance Turkey from the U.S. and Europe, and possibly provoke instability in its own society.

This growing problem would be most effectively addressed through the establishment of a formal dialogue on these matters founded on mutual respect and open communication. A structured dialogue will also have the potential to address the use of scapegoat tactics, including anti-Semitic and anti-American remarks by Turkish government officials. This type of speech is not only inappropriate, but can potentially endanger the well-being of those unfairly mentioned, including diplomats, visitors and officials on both sides of the Atlantic.

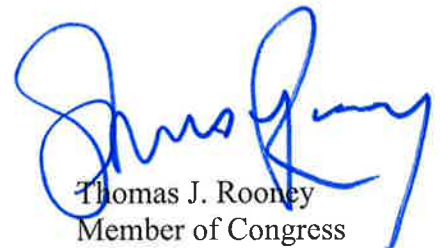
Again, we are encouraged by the strides your Department and the Vice President have made in reaching out to Turkish civil society, and we urge you to increase your efforts. As you and President Obama have repeatedly noted, countries that respect human rights and democratic values are stronger and more reliable partners. It is time to apply this maxim to the U.S. relationship with Turkey.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to secure the interests of the American people in Turkey and in other countries around the world.

Sincerely,



William R. Keating
Member of Congress




Thomas J. Rooney
Member of Congress



Edward Royce
Member of Congress



Eliot Engel
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