

State of Rhode Island

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Senate Chamber

SECRETARY
Committee on Judiciary

Committee Special
Legislation & Veterans' Affairs

March 25, 2021

Consul General Ceylan Özen Erişen
Consulate General of Turkey
31 Saint James Avenue, Suite 840
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Consul General Erişen:

It has come to my attention that you have written the Rhode Island State Senate President seeking the withdrawal of my resolution celebrating Greek Independence Day and the strong relationship between Greece and the United States.

In the spirit of peace and harmony you referenced in your lengthy mischaracterization of my work, let me suggest that actively seeking to silence voices your government doesn't like here in the United States is not going to be well received. No doubt I'm not the first U.S. legislator you've attacked in this manner and U.S. media outlets that dare to question the Erdoğan regime's actions. Such actions may come naturally when representing a Turkish government that has become known for its corruption and assaults on democratic institutions, to say nothing of diminished press freedoms and attacks on minority groups, but they reflect a fundamental rejection of American values, such as freedom of speech.

Quite honestly, no American legislator needs to be lectured by an official from a regime which decided to celebrate International Women's Day by shocking the world and withdrawing from the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Turkey was the first country to sign onto this important effort and it was named the Istanbul Convention. Yet last week, President Erdoğan inexplicably chose to turn his back on a cooperative, global effort to prevent domestic violence and protect the rights of women.

It seems to me the cause of peace and harmony is under much greater threat in Turkey than it is here in Rhode Island and that your time and efforts might be better spent fighting for the freedoms of your own people rather than trying to undermine the rights and freedoms American citizens enjoy. We've seen the damage done by the thuggish tactics of the Erdoğan regime and I would respectfully suggest trying to get the elected officials in this country to silence your critics, seeking to shut down academic programs that rightfully question the tactics of your government and using strong-arm tactics to challenge American media outlets is not an effective strategy in our country. And it is certainly not reflective of "a vision for a world in peace, cooperation and harmony" you claimed to be interested in promoting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Leonidas Raptakis", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Leonidas Raptakis
RI State Senator