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## **A SPECIAL MESSAGE TO TURKISH AMERICANS FROM YALCIN AYASLI TCA FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN**

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TCA, since its establishment in 2007, has worked hard to convey a strong and positive Turkish American voice in the halls of Congress. Sadly, these efforts were overwhelmed by the tensions in the bilateral relationship.

To understand why H. Res 296 (House Armenian Genocide Resolution), S. Res 150 (Senate Armenian Genocide Resolution) and H.R 4695 (House Turkey Sanctions Bill) passed, it is important to understand the general political atmosphere in Washington toward Turkey. Although the Senate has not considered the sanctions bill yet, S. 2641 (Senate Turkey Sanctions Bill) has already left the Foreign Relations Committee.

Among the many grievances that generated negative perceptions of Turkey in the mind of many in Congress were the purchase of the S-400 air defense system from Russia, the months-long detention of Pastor Andrew Brunson, the arrest of three Turkish nationals from U.S. diplomatic missions, skepticism, though unfounded, of Turkey's commitment to fight ISIS, allegations that Halkbank helped circumvent American sanctions on Iran, and the Sheridan Circle incident. These negative depictions were further exacerbated by Congressional concerns over domestic circumstances in Turkey regarding the perceived rule of law, corruption and freedom of press issues. Meanwhile, Turkish views of the U.S deteriorated because the U.S.s tactical partnership with the YPG in Syria reflected an apparent disregard of Turkey's security interests, which added to Turkish frustrations over the U.S. slow response after the July 15th attempted coup and the stalled repatriation process for Fetullah Gulen. Furthermore, Congress, which has been at odds with President Trump over many policy and presidential conduct issues, had a negative reaction to President Trump's apparent approval of Turkey's Operation Peace Spring initiative in Northern Syria.

The non-binding Armenian Genocide Resolutions passed by the House and Senate were a response to the accumulated weight of these grievances and not on historical or legal merits relating to Ottoman civilian strife during World War I. This is evident by the fact that during prior stints the Democratic Leadership was unable to deliver such a resolution to House floor, but was only able to do so in the crisis-laden climate. Thus, these resolutions passed specifically to send a political message to the Turkish government, and to some extent to President Trump.

It is important not to underestimate the growing anti Turkey mood in Washington and Congress's resurgent role in American foreign policy in recent years. Sadly, the measures passed by the U.S. legislators left many Turkish Americans disillusioned about the American political system. The measures passed by the U.S. legislators left the community disheartened. Turkish Americans felt disrespected because of the passage of House Armenian Genocide Resolution on the National Day

of the Republic of Turkey, October 29, and betrayed since they saw the U.S. as prioritizing the relationship with the YPG, which is affiliated with the terrorist organization PKK, over a NATO ally and 80 million strong Turkey. The Turkey Sanctions Bills waiting for the Senate approval contains even more hostile and slanderous language and sanctions.

Until the current environment changes, it will be a challenging and arduous road to rebuild a strong Turkish American presence in Congress. In the meantime, TCA will double its efforts to invest in the future of the Turkish American community with its educational awareness programs, youth congresses and internships, and support of grassroots activities. TCA will also, as in past years, recognize the contributions of the Turkish Americans to their adopted country as well as encourage Turkish Americans to run for public office. Lastly, TCA will maintain its Turkish American Legal Defense Fund (TALDF) to defend the legal rights of Turkish Americans.

We believe that the Turkish American community can build a stronger Turkish American presence in Washington and across the country so as to ensure that the Turkish American voice is not ignored again.

There are already four Turkish Americans who have announced their candidacy for elected office in 2020. Having active Turkish Americans in politics will help bridge differences and foster constructive dialogue. It is our strong view that this is not the time to withdraw from politics and the exercise of our constitutional rights but rather the time to make the Turkish American voice heard.

Sincerely,

Yalcin Ayasli

December 30, 2019

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Kaynak/Source: