

Testimony of John R. Bass
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Turkey
July 15, 2014
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Johnson and all the Members of the Committee. I am honored to come before you to be considered for the position of Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, and I am grateful for the confidence President Obama and Secretary Kerry have shown in me. If confirmed, I pledge to work with all of you to protect and advance our interests by promoting security, prosperity, democracy and human rights – both in Turkey and in the many places beyond its borders where we work together.

I'm grateful to be joined today by members of my family – my wife Holly, who also serves the nation as a career officer; my sister, Kristin Bass; and my mother-in-law, Mary Holzer. I also want to recognize colleagues here today who became my family during our work on the front lines of diplomacy in Baghdad.

I have spent much of my career working to achieve a cornerstone of U.S. policy— completing the project of building a Europe whole, free and at peace. In each chapter of my efforts – from conventional arms reductions across the former Soviet bloc, through the bloody wars in Bosnia and Kosovo and the enlargement of NATO and the EU, to our work with European friends to address new threats further afield from terrorism, violent extremism and a prospective nuclear Iran, Turkey has figured prominently. I've watched Turkey's transformation into a modernized G20 economy and a confident partner of the United States in many new areas of the world. Our partnership has never been more important – or more complex.

Our core security partnership has anchored our relationship for decades – and with good reason. A NATO ally for 62 years, Turkey has bordered potential or active conflicts for that entire period. In recent years, it has stood with us in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya. It hosts key elements of NATO's missile defense architecture. Turkey has joined fellow allies in rejecting Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea and encouraging de-

escalation of the ongoing crisis. It also is contributing military assets to reassurance activities in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the same time it supports collective security, Turkey faces very real challenges on its own borders. ISIL's gains in Iraq pose significant dangers for regional and international security, as the group's seizure of Turkish citizens and diplomats demonstrates; we continue to urge their immediate release. Turkey is working closely with us and other partners to help Iraqis achieve the objective of a federal, democratic, pluralistic and unified Iraq.

Even before ISIL's metastasis into Iraq, Turkey was grappling with the spillover of terrorism and violence from the war in Syria. Over 70 Turks have died as a result of cross-border fire or terrorism emanating from Syria. Just as the United States has provided more than \$2 billion in humanitarian assistance for Syrians affected by this conflict, Turkey has also borne a significant burden from hosting more than one million displaced Syrians. The Turkish government has dedicated enormous resources to operating 22 refugee camps, while facing ongoing challenges in providing services to the many Syrians who struggle to survive in urban areas.

Turkey has been a critical facilitator of U.S. assistance to Syrian people in need and to the moderate Syrian opposition. Turkey is a key member of the Friends of Syria Core Group, and we are working closely with Turkey to find a political solution to the conflict and reinforce support for the moderate opposition. Concurrently, we are working with the Turkish government to mitigate the risk posed by violent extremists and foreign fighters exploiting Turkey's geography. If confirmed, I will work closely with Turkey and other regional partners to stem the flow of fighters, money and expertise to and from Syria.

Our cooperation has been similarly important on Iran, with respect to non-proliferation matters generally and on sanctions specifically. As a neighbor, Turkey is acutely aware of the threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran, and understands the importance of supporting the sanctions regime to spur Iran to meet international obligations on its nuclear program.

The instability along Turkey's southern border gives renewed urgency for Ankara to build stronger relationships with other neighbors – Israel, Armenia, and Cyprus. We continue to encourage Turkey and Israel to restore positive official relations by completing the normalization process,

which would enhance regional stability and complement their continued strong trade and investment relationship. In Cyprus, Turkey – along with Greece – is playing an important and constructive role in supporting the peace process. As Vice President Biden reiterated during his historic May visit to Cyprus, the United States remains committed to supporting the UN-led effort to reunify the island as a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. After four decades of division, there is a real chance for a lasting settlement that would bring positive benefits to the entire Eastern Mediterranean. Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will work closely with you and your colleagues to help the parties achieve this vital goal.

One issue that confronts all democracies as they look to the future is how they deal with the past. We continue to encourage Turkey and Armenia to move towards normalization as a means of creating the peaceful, productive and prosperous relationship that the people of both countries deserve. On this year's Remembrance Day, Prime Minister Erdogan expressed his condolences to the grandchildren of those Armenians killed during World War I. That gesture and other positive efforts by the Turkish government in recent months indicate that the space for dialogue is opening. But more can be done, and we encourage both sides to pursue a full, frank, and just acknowledgement of the facts surrounding the tragic events of 1915.

Turkey is one of the oldest democracies in the region. But as President Obama noted when visiting Ankara in 2009, "Democracies cannot be static – they must move forward. Freedom of religion and expression lead to a strong and vibrant civil society that only strengthens the state, which is why steps like reopening the Halki Seminary will send such an important signal inside Turkey and beyond." Five years later, events have led to questions – including from Members of this Committee – about the trajectory of Turkish democracy: whether media and online freedoms are adequately guaranteed; whether rule of law is sufficiently protected; whether citizens have the right to free assembly and expression; whether the judicial system is free from political interference; and whether the voices of all minorities are being heard.

These are ultimately questions Turks will answer through the choices they make, but we will continue to advocate – as we do around the world – for transparent and accountable government. As Turkey prepares for its first direct Presidential election in August, the ongoing debates in Turkey could lead to an even stronger and more successful democracy – if Turks embrace

tolerance and respect for a diversity of viewpoints. If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, I will urge Turkey to live up to all the universal democratic principles, enshrined in its own foundational documents and international commitments, that undergird true national strength. Allowing space for free and independent media, strengthening the rule of law and checks and balances, empowering women, and encouraging a robust role for civil society – these steps not only make countries freer, but also help them grow. In the same vein, we commend the important steps to advance peace talks between the government and Turkey’s Kurds, which could bring an end to 30 years of armed conflict and lead to a more stable and prosperous Turkey.

Mr. Chairman, Turkey’s democratic progress over the past decade has spurred strong growth, tripling the size of its economy. U.S. exports to Turkey also tripled in the last decade. But for all the growth in bilateral trade, Turkey is still just our 34th largest trade partner, at about \$18 billion in total trade in 2013. We can and should do much better than this. If confirmed, I will be an advocate for U.S. business who leads our mission in Turkey to strengthen business-to-business ties, identify opportunities for Turkish investment in the U.S., and promote the National Export Initiative. I further expect that my work promoting the integrity of independent institutions, the rule of law, and respect for fundamental freedoms will serve to bolster Turkey’s reputation as a country with which U.S. companies want to do more and better business.

Investment in our political, security, and economic ties with Turkey and the surrounding region would yield little without the ties between our two peoples and societies that are so fundamental to U.S.-Turkey relations. In 2012-2013, Turkey sent more students to American universities than any other European country. If confirmed, I will sustain and amplify our public outreach in Turkey, finding new ways to connect our two societies through education exchange programs, science and technology partnerships, and entrepreneurship programs.

And finally, a word about a core purpose of our overseas missions: service to Americans – whether they are your constituents with an interest in Turkey, or our fellow citizens visiting or living in Turkey. I pledge to provide the highest level of service to all of them with the same focus and energy which I and my colleagues will apply to promoting American interests and values. Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to continuing our work together.