

Statement of Herro Mustafa
Ambassador-Nominee to Bulgaria
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Tuesday, July 30, 2019

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored and humbled to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Republic of Bulgaria. I am thankful to President Trump and Secretary Pompeo for the confidence they have placed in me to undertake this role. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with the Congress to advance our nation's interests in Bulgaria.

Family is extremely important to me and I'm blessed to have the love and support of so many members of my family, some with me here today and others watching via livestream in various parts of the world. I am proud to be the first American of Kurdish descent to be nominated as Ambassador. In the audience is my father, who is an incredible man who gave so much of his life so that we could live in freedom and have access to opportunity. My strong, courageous mother, who is the bedrock of our family, is also here today. My parents' one request of me and my siblings as we grew up in Minot, North Dakota was to always do good. They taught us to set our goals high, in every aspect of life, whether career or personal, to achieve those goals, and then aim even higher. That approach and optimism are what have shaped me into the person I am today and, if confirmed, will guide my vision for achieving success for America in Bulgaria.

Also in the audience are my incredibly hard-working brother, Helo, and sister-in-law, Willow, along with my niece Zara, and my almost two-year-old daughter Ashna. My two other brothers, Hawro and Barzan, are watching from California and Virginia. My loving husband, Ravneesh Garg, is with our almost four-year-old daughter Ariana watching with my in-laws and expanded family in India. Families of Foreign Service Officers sacrifice much, and being apart is sometimes a consequence of our service. I thank my entire family for the love and support and wisdom they show each and every day.

I have dedicated over two decades to serving the United States in the Department of State. During that time, much of my work has promoted rule of law, democratization, energy security, and anti-corruption efforts. Before joining the Foreign Service, I worked as an Elections Supervisor in Bosnia and my first Foreign Service assignment was in Athens, Greece. My experience with Europe has continued throughout my career, as I have worked with my European colleagues on issues of mutual interest, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran. My last assignment was in Western Europe, in Lisbon, Portugal, where I was the Deputy Chief of Mission and served for long periods as Charge d'Affaires. I am honored now to have the opportunity, if confirmed, to serve in Bulgaria, a country renowned for its incredibly beautiful mountains, hospitable people, and rich cultural heritage in a strategic part of the world.

If confirmed, my top priority will be ensuring the safety and security of U.S. citizens, including travelers and residents in Bulgaria, and my Embassy team. In addition, I will focus the work of the Embassy on the following priorities that I like to categorize as Connectivity, Collaboration, and Corruption, (the three Cs):

First on Connectivity: If confirmed I will work to strengthen and deepen the bonds between Bulgaria and the West, particularly the United States, on all fronts to include economic, military, commercial, cultural, and people-to-people ties. This connectivity should extend to civil society, including women and youth.

Bulgaria is a strong NATO Ally. Fifteen years ago this year, Bulgaria joined the Alliance, sealing its security bonds with the West and affirming its commitment to a strong and free Europe. Bulgaria has accompanied the United States in operations – and taken casualties – in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Bulgaria has also participated in coalition operations in Libya, Kosovo, and Bosnia. Bulgaria is actively taking steps to increase defense spending and modernize its military, to make Bulgaria an even stronger and more capable NATO Ally. If confirmed, I will work to sustain and expand our security relationship and encourage Bulgaria to play a greater role, especially in transitional Forward Presence on NATO's Southeast flank.

I am also committed to expanding our economic relationship. Overall bilateral trade between Bulgaria and the United States jumped from \$963 million in 2014 to \$1.36 billion in 2018. Increased transparency, predictability, and stability in the investment climate are key to increased economic ties. One way Bulgaria can enhance its appeal to U.S. businesses is by increasing transparency and ensuring good corporate governance. Greater transparency would benefit not only U.S. firms, but also Bulgaria as a whole. I want to see U.S. businesses thrive, and if confirmed I will work to ensure a level playing field for U.S. business in Bulgaria.

Second on Collaboration: If confirmed, I would like to work with my counterparts across the region to promote regional collaboration. Bulgaria has been a positive player in the region and a leader in advancing Western Balkan integration. They have also been supportive of the recent Prespa Agreement between the Hellenic Republic of Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia. It is exactly this type of vision and collaboration that is needed to strengthen the sovereignty of each of these nations and to bring peace and stability to the region.

Energy security is also a critical part of national security. Bulgaria imports most of its energy from Russia, including nearly all of its nuclear fuel and natural gas, which raises a range of economic, energy security, and NATO Alliance concerns. If confirmed, I will support Bulgaria's efforts to diversify its energy supply and foster increased energy collaboration across the region, in particular the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector.

Third on Corruption: If confirmed, I will also work with Bulgaria on fighting corruption and advancing rule of law, which is key to Bulgaria's continued growth. Rule of law reform is a long-term, multifaceted, and challenging process. Bulgaria has demonstrated a commitment to reform and taken some steps to build a more open, inclusive, and prosperous society. More needs to be done, however. If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with Bulgaria together to find ways to promote civil society, media freedom, an independent judiciary, and the rule of law.

If confirmed, I will take seriously my role as Chief of Mission to manage and safeguard our precious resources – our people, including our local staff who are an important part in fulfilling our mission, our embassy, and the strong reputation of the United States abroad. If

confirmed, I look forward to building the relations between our two nations and defending and promoting the interests of the United States in the Republic of Bulgaria.