

Testimony of Francis J. Ricciardone
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Turkey
August 2, 2011
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, having served in that capacity as a recess appointee since January 20, 2011. I am grateful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for their trust and confidence in me. With me today is my wife Marie, who both studied and taught in Turkish universities. During my 33-year career in the Foreign Service, I have had the pleasure of having previously served three times in Turkey, most recently as the Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires from 1995 to 1999. Through more than three decades I have observed Turkey's continuing transformation into a more democratic, more open, and more economically vibrant, modern state and a player with growing influence on the world stage. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues, as well as with the many private American organizations with a strong interest in Turkey and throughout the region, to advance United States interests in this critically important and complex relationship.

Turkey remains as ever a key ally and strategic partner of the United States and an important member of the NATO alliance. It is also a member of the G-20 with one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Noting Turkey's history as a majority Muslim nation and as a secular democratic state that respects the rule of law, President Obama has cited Turkey's "critical role in helping to shape mutual understanding and stability not only in its neighborhood, but around the world." If confirmed, I will continue to do everything possible to reinforce Turkish-American cooperation in support of our common goals.

For decades, Turkey and the United States have cooperated intensively to promote regional stability, including by countering terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; resolving regional conflicts; promoting energy security; expanding trade, investment, and economic development; and, essential and integral to all of these, strengthening democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Several such strategic priorities merge in cases of particularly immediate consequence, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, the quest for peace between Israel and all its neighbors, and Iran's evident pursuit of nuclear weapons. Other conflicts with historical antecedents require no less sustained and intensive joint

attention and cooperation, including the unresolved issues of Cyprus and normalization of relations with Armenia. I have been privileged to serve in Ankara during the “Arab Spring,” during which I have strived to enlist Turkish support for the NATO role in Libya, for a successful transition to democracy in Egypt, and pressure on the regime in Syria to cease its brutal repression and to heed the will of its people. Just as the Turkish Government has played an important role in promoting these political transitions, the Turkish Government and private sector are keen to support economic development in Egypt and Tunisia that are so critical to long-term stability in the region, by increasing their trade and investment in these countries. Wherever possible, they are looking for partnerships with U.S. companies.

Let me describe Turkey’s role in relation to our foreign policy priorities. If confirmed, my continued responsibility will be to strengthen Turkey’s cooperation with us in all of these areas, as a key bilateral partner and also as an essential NATO ally.

U.S.-Turkey cooperation in Iraq and Afghanistan has been robust and critical to our success. Turkey shares our vision of a stable Iraq and actively helps the Iraqi people develop a sovereign state that is at peace with itself and its neighbors. This requires progress in Iraq’s security, political, and economic infrastructure, and in each of these areas Turkey has been an essential partner for our mission. Turkey’s high-level strategic dialogue with the Government of Iraq and its outreach to the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government have contributed to the stability of Iraq. Turkey also is contributing to Iraq’s progress by hosting regional meetings on political and economic cooperation, and through trade and investment that promote Iraq’s reconstruction and help develop Iraq’s oil and electricity infrastructure.

Additionally, Turkey is a crucial logistics hub, supporting U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly 70 percent of the air cargo for our mission in Iraq transits Incirlik Air Base, which is also the primary refueling stop for flights to Afghanistan. Turkey provides blanket clearance for U.S. aircraft supporting these operations and authorizes the use of its bases and ports to support humanitarian and reconstruction operations in Iraq, as well as the retrograde of U.S. forces from Iraq over the course of 2011. The Habur Gate border crossing serves as a key line of communication to Iraq; through it, 25 percent of our fuel and 40 percent of other sustainment requirements enter Iraq. There are more than 1,700 U.S. military personnel stationed in Turkey. Turkey has a long tradition of hospitality to our service men and women, including hosting the USS Eisenhower in January.

Turkey is one of our strongest partners in the fight against international terrorism. Turkey and the United States are working together to fight the regional transit and support of international terrorists, and last month arrested an alleged al-Qaeda cell plotting to bomb western interests in Turkey, including the U.S. Embassy. I have urged the Turkish Government and Parliament to pass stronger legislation against terrorist financing, and hope the Parliament will pass the Government's bill when it reconvenes this autumn.

We support Turkey's foremost security objective of defeating the terrorist violence which the PKK continues to perpetrate, which has led to the deaths of over 30,000 Turks since the 1980s. We support Turkey's operations against the PKK; we cooperate with EU partners to cut off PKK facilitation efforts in Europe; and we support the growing cooperation between Turkey and Iraq, including the Kurdistan Regional Government, against the PKK elements that find refuge in Iraq. We are in consultations with Turkey to step up law enforcement cooperation against terrorism. Turkey's leaders also recognize the need for political, economic and cultural measures to counter PKK terrorism. Turkey's "National Unity Project" or "Democratic Opening" aims to improve the human rights and economic situation for Kurds and other communities of vulnerable groups in Turkey. We believe that further pursuit of this initiative can help not only to undermine the terrorism still conducted by the PKK, but it will also advance and strengthen Turkish democracy and the human rights of all Turks. A record number of Kurds were elected as independents to Parliament in June and we commend their professed commitment to participation in a non-violent, lawful political process to secure the full rights of all Turkey's Kurds as Turkish citizens.

From my current service in Ankara as well as my tenure as Deputy Ambassador in Kabul, I can attest that Turkey has also been an essential partner in Afghanistan, where it has long-standing cultural and historical ties and has been a leading proponent of Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Turkey shares our goal of a stable Afghanistan that can protect itself from al-Qaeda and any other terrorists who would use that country as a base for international terrorist attacks. Turkey has some 1,600 troops serving in the International Security Assistance Force, commands the Regional Command for Kabul, and this year has sent still more civilian humanitarian relief and development assistance experts to establish its second Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Jowzjan Province. It is also a leader on training the Afghan National Security Forces. Turkey has pledged to train a brigade's worth of Afghan National Army troops. Just last week, I was proud to participate in the opening of Turkey's special

training center in Sivas for the Afghan National Police. Turkey has also pledged \$300 million for development projects in Afghanistan, built schools and clinics, and invested in the repair or construction of bridges and roads and the drilling of new wells, as well as facilitated economic development through support to the agriculture, marble and carpet sectors. In addition to our cooperation with Turkey through NATO/ISAF and our two Embassies on the ground in Kabul, we see Turkey undertaking an influential and highly positive role in rallying international support for Afghanistan's economic development, and in fostering political reconciliation of its violent conflict with the Taliban. In support of cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Turkey has hosted trilateral summits in Turkey with the participation of both the Afghan and Pakistani presidents, and later this year will host another summit of Afghanistan and its neighbors.

Turkey and Israel are both important partners of the United States. The two countries have shared vital political, economic, security, and military ties for many years. The strains in their relations since the May 2010 Gaza flotilla incident, risk setting back the vitally important interests of both those countries, and of the United States, in regional peace and stability. Therefore we have underscored to both countries the importance to them, to us, and their region of repairing their mutually beneficial relationship. Secretary Clinton continues to urge both sides to find a way to put the flotilla incident behind them, and we hope that efforts toward this goal over the past year will soon meet with success.

On Iran, we work closely with Turkey on a range of the challenges we face with Iran. Turkey shares a long border and history with Iran. Turkey has said that it shares the international community's concerns about the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran, and repeatedly has reaffirmed its commitment to upholding UN Security Council resolutions in this regard. But we have not always agreed on tactics regarding Iran, particularly with regard to sanctions. Turkey shared our disappointment that Iran failed to engage meaningfully in the talks hosted by Turkey in Istanbul last January between Iran and the UN Security Council's permanent five members plus Germany. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will continue to urge Turkey to persuade Iran to engage directly and seriously with the IAEA and P5+1 on the international community's concerns about its nuclear program. On sanctions, we continue to urge Turkey to fully enforce UN sanctions, which Turkey has publicly pledged to implement. We also are engaging vigorously with Turkey to ensure that the CISADA (Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act) sanctions are fully respected and to educate Turkish entities of the consequences should Iranian companies attempt sanctioned transactions via Turkey.

The United States continues its long-standing support for Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union. The prospect of EU accession has been a strong impetus for Turkish reform. Over the past few years, Turkey has implemented meaningful political and economic reforms necessary for EU membership, but more needs to be done. Turkish citizens themselves are demanding further progress on promoting human rights and the rule of law, including freedom of the media and religious freedom. They seek, for example, the rights of minority religious institutions freely to own their property and operate their institutions. There could be no more powerful modern testimony to Turkey's historic legacy of religious tolerance than reopening the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Halki Seminary. Just this past month, I was privileged to join Secretary Clinton in advocating for the reopening of Halki Seminary and protecting the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate during her recent visit to Istanbul, and I will continue my advocacy until this is addressed. If confirmed, I look forward to celebrating the reopening of Halki Seminary with His All Holiness Bartholomew, and the leaders of the Government of Turkey (including the democratic opposition) who, I dare hope, will show the courage and foresight needed to redress a historical wrong.

The division of Cyprus has gone on far too long. The United States encourages the negotiations between the two communities under the auspices of the UN Secretary General, and we urge the leaders of the two communities to seize the moment to negotiate a settlement that reunifies the island into a bizonal, bicomunal federation. Turkey and Greece can play a constructive role in helping the Cypriot parties toward a lasting solution to their differences, and we continue to urge them to do so.

Facilitating regional integration is a high priority for the United States. Rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia will foster increased stability and prosperity in the entire Caucasus region. We commended the governments of Turkey and Armenia on signing the historic protocols on normalization of relations on October 10, 2009 in Zurich. During her visit last month, Secretary Clinton again urged Turkey to ratify the protocols, and we will continue to support programs that build understanding between Turks and Armenians. Last year, the Government of Turkey permitted Armenians to celebrate religious services at the ancient Akhtemar Church in Lake Van, for the first time in decades. I was glad to see increasing numbers of private Turkish citizens turn out this past spring in five cities across Turkey to protest the 2007 murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, and to call for justice against the perpetrators. Last week, the courts convicted and sentenced the murderer to 22 years in prison, and we understand that

official investigations, urged by President Gul himself, continue into the conspiracy that reportedly supported the heinous assassination.

The President and Secretary Clinton have established economic cooperation with Turkey as a strategic priority, and have emphasized the importance of supporting American firms and promoting U.S. –Turkish trade and investment. During President Obama’s April 2009 meeting with Turkish President Gul, the two leaders agreed to elevate our economic relations to the level of our already strong political and military relations. To follow through on this commitment, the U.S. and Turkey launched a Cabinet-level dialogue – the Framework for Strategic Economic and Commercial Cooperation – during Prime Minister Erdogan’s visit to Washington in December 2009. In addition to our official dialogues, we have launched a public-private sector U.S.-Turkey Business Council to advise the U.S. and Turkish governments on strategies for increasing trade and relationships, improving the business climate, and eliminating impediments to trade and investment. Turkey is a leading focus in the President’s New Export Initiative to double U.S. exports globally in five years. Turkey’s economic role has only grown in importance since 2009, as its booming economy is increasingly important to the global economy and to propelling regional growth. Turkey has set an ambitious goal of becoming a top ten economy by 2023, which will triple the size of the economy and create more opportunities for U.S. firms. The Turkish Government and private business associations enthusiastically have supported our Global Entrepreneurship Program, and our “Partnership for a New Beginning,” both intended to foster a culture of entrepreneurship, especially among the young.

Building on our close cooperation in the 1990s that helped make Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) a reality, the U.S. and Turkey are working together to bring Caspian gas to European markets for the first time through a new route called the “Southern Corridor.” We welcomed the June 2010 agreement signed by Turkey and Azerbaijan on the gas purchase and transit of Azerbaijani gas to Turkey as an important milestone in laying the foundation for the Southern Corridor. The corridor would provide commercial benefit for the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia and also create a long-term partnership based on mutual interests with Europe. Overseeing the safe passage of oil through the Bosphorus Straits and the transport of oil through the BTC pipeline, which pumps nearly a million barrels of oil a day to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, Turkey plays an important role in world energy markets.

Many Americans, including my family and I, have had wonderful experiences living and working in Turkey. It has been a special privilege to return

to Ankara over these past six months to strengthen the communications and friendship between our two peoples in all fields of private as well as official endeavors, including the fields of education, science, and health – in which my wife has practiced while on previous service in Turkey. Led by this committee, the Senate has formally recognized the importance of public diplomacy. Increasing contacts and communications between Americans and Turks must be a primary means of advancing our interests on all issues we face today. If confirmed, I pledge that all members of U.S. Mission Turkey will continue warmly to welcome the advice and support of the American people, both through our elected representatives and through direct and continuous contact and communication. In particular, I would pledge the highest standards of service to the American community and American travelers, whether for business or for the private advocacy of the cause of freedom and human rights supported by our Administration and our Congress.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, if confirmed to continue my service as Ambassador, in my service in Ankara as in my past service at other posts, I will trust to your support and advice, and that of your colleagues.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.