

**STATEMENT BY THOMAS O. MELIA
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UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
JULY 22, 2015**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia (E&E) at the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID). I am grateful for the trust and confidence placed in me by President Obama, Acting Administrator Lenhardt, and Secretary Kerry at this critical time for the region.

I want first to recognize the outstanding work being done by Susan Fritz, who has been leading the Bureau as acting Assistant Administrator since January. Ms. Fritz has served our country with great distinction throughout a 25-year career at USAID and is a true expert on the development challenges we confront in the region. I also want to acknowledge with appreciation Paige Alexander, the previous Assistant Administrator for E&E, and to thank her for advice and guidance during this process. I worked closely with Ms. Alexander in my previous position at the Department of State and know how effective her leadership was in the region and in the U.S. government's inter-agency deliberations.

I also want to thank my family, friends, and professional colleagues whose support and encouragement have allowed me to pursue this opportunity. I am especially pleased to be joined today by my best friend, my spouse, Amy Conroy, and our son Tomás. It happens that Amy grew up in a USAID family, as her father pursued a career in the Agency and its predecessors from the early 1950s to the 1980s, working to advance U.S. interests in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Her sisters were born in Ethiopia and Iran, when the Conroy family was posted to those countries. Since then, Amy has built a distinguished career promoting women's participation in American politics and in leading some of the best-known and most important non-profit advocacy organizations in the U.S. For more than thirty years, she has been making significant contributions to strengthen American democracy. Tomás, meanwhile, as he prepares to enter the seventh grade, is learning the importance of public service at the community, national and international levels.

For more than thirty years, I have worked to promote democratic governance and fundamental freedoms throughout the world, mainly while working for non-governmental, non-profit organizations, including the National Democratic Institute and the bipartisan Freedom House. Since leaving government service earlier this year, I am proud to be working at Democracy International, an exciting new entrant in the community of democracy support organizations. As a university teacher and occasional writer of articles and books, I have also had the opportunity to discuss with scholars and practitioners how the United States might better help those men and women in other countries who share our values to build their own democratic societies and institutions. While each country's path will be decided by its own citizens—we as outsiders will only ever be supporting actors in other nations' national dramas—I believe that the United States can and should always be a reliable friend of democracy and its advocates worldwide. This is

why it is so important that the U.S. Government's recently released second Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) highlights, as one of the nation's four top strategic priorities, "promoting open, resilient and democratic societies." For this is the only sure path to enduring development outcomes for the poorest and least resilient societies. It is the only political framework that can ensure that universal human rights are respected, and that the voices of the poor and the marginalized are heard by their leaders.

From 2010 to earlier this year, I served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL). In that role, I oversaw the Bureau's work in three regions, including Europe and Eurasia. I know this region and its people well. I have worked with political leaders, including government officials and opposition leaders, human rights activists and community leaders. I have coordinated our efforts with our closest allies. I was the U.S. chair of several bilateral working groups, and led delegations to address human rights, civil society or rule of law issues in countries in this region—including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary, Moldova, Russia, Turkey—and of course Ukraine, where I led official U.S. missions more than six times in three years.

Senator Cardin may recall that I led or participated in many U.S. delegations to meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) during those five years, including each year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, where I led our interaction with civil society and human rights activists from across the OSCE region. I was honored to serve and work closely with both Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry in the annual ministerial meetings of the OSCE. Moreover, during these past five years, I was also fortunate to work with impressive colleagues from across the U.S. Government, including at the Department of Justice and Department of Defense, as well as the National Security Council staff, and most frequently with USAID counterparts, so I know the inter-agency apparatus and procedures well.

Having begun my professional career working for more than five years for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, I understand and appreciate the important role the Congress plays – and in my view *should* play – in the development and execution of U.S. foreign policy. The Congress is the democratic fulcrum that ensures our international policies are leveraged to properly project American values and remain focused on core national interests. If confirmed in this role, I would welcome the opportunity to work closely with this Committee as together we chart the way forward to advance USAID's mission: to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies—while advancing our own security and prosperity.

USAID's Bureau for Europe & Eurasia was created a quarter century ago, pursuant to specific legislative mandates enacted after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with the goals of promoting Euro-Atlantic integration and fostering a Europe whole, free, and at peace. I have seen first-hand the effectiveness of development assistance as an important aspect of our foreign policy, particularly in the formerly communist countries of Europe and Eurasia. For well over two decades, the United States and USAID have played a key role in the region, supporting successful transitions from assistance to partnership in 10 formerly communist countries that have joined the European Union. Today, we count several of these countries as some of the United States' strongest and most able allies. The region serves as a

model for the principles of sustainable development, for creating the conditions where international assistance is no longer needed.

However, even with this success, the region's transformation is incomplete, and we find ourselves today at a tipping point. In a growing number of countries that had appeared to have successfully transformed, the threat of political and economic backsliding still remains. Multiple political crises and the recent resurgence of extreme nationalism in multiple countries across the European continent remind us of the fragility of the post-war social compact we once thought had been secured by creation of the European Union. Trafficking in persons continues to be a serious human rights challenge in the region. Conspicuous high-level corruption undermines public confidence in the viability and utility of democratic institutions and open markets. It turns out there is more to be done to secure the transition from totalitarian rule to the Europe we all have envisioned—whole, free and at peace.

Development assistance remains a strategic imperative in a region facing rising internal and external pressures. Structural instability and democratic and economic stagnation are all exacerbated by Russia's aggressive actions, reminding us that the United States still has an important role to play.

Ukraine is a central focus of USAID's E&E Bureau, as it is across the Obama Administration. The agency continues to play an important role supporting the Government of Ukraine's accelerated reform efforts across key sectors, providing macroeconomic assistance, helping strengthen civil society, supporting energy security, and providing humanitarian relief to conflict-affected communities in the east. While progress is being made, Ukraine must continue to aggressively pursue not only enactment of new laws, but also actually implementing real reforms. In order to be successful, Ukraine will need continued support and technical assistance from the international community, and I want to acknowledge the many members of this Committee in particular who have led the Congress in providing vital support to the people of Ukraine.

I want to emphasize, however, that Russian pressure is not limited to Ukraine. At a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations hearing on February 24, 2015, Secretary Kerry, in response to a question regarding Russian influence in the region, stated, "Whether it's Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, other places—they are all in the firing line." If confirmed, I will be a strong advocate for strong continued USAID engagement in the Balkans, as well as in Georgia and Moldova, where increased Russian pressure has the potential to destabilize those countries and threaten important progress toward implementation of the historic Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements with the European Union. It is important that the United States continues to support the sovereign right of these countries to choose their own futures and help them meet the conditions of these agreements. I also want to say—to the peoples of Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and Russia—that we support their aspirations to live in prosperous, democratic countries, at peace internally and with their neighbors, and more fully integrated into Europe and the modern world.

This is a pivotal moment for the wider European region, facing its most significant challenges—economic, social, political and military—in decades. The United States and USAID have an

important role to play in the region and must continue to demonstrate leadership and commitment to Europe's success. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and all of our partners to achieve our objectives in the region.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions you might have.