

Statement of Geoffrey Pyatt
Ambassador-Nominee to the Hellenic Republic
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 21, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Cardin for the honor of appearing before you. I would like to begin by acknowledging someone who could not be here with me today – that is my wife Mary, who is back in Ukraine finishing up the school year as a teacher. Many of you have met Mary in the course of your visits to Kyiv, and can appreciate the key supporting role she has played during a truly historic period in Ukrainian and European history. I would also of course like to express my gratitude to President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the confidence they have expressed in me through this nomination.

I am particularly honored to appear before you as the nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to Greece – the birthplace of democracy. I have had the pleasure of visiting Greece as a tourist, and while it's striking to visit sites such as the Acropolis, where the idea of representative government first came to life, one also gets a feel for the difficult challenges Greece has overcome along the way. Today, Greece continues along this path even as it tackles the most severe economic crisis in its post-war history, and the recent wave of irregular migration puts further strain on Greece's limited resources. But I believe, and I know this administration believes, that what happens in Greece matters – not just for Greece, but for the region, NATO, the European Union, and the United States. Greece's success will support a stronger, brighter future for all of us, and my goal – if confirmed – will be to pursue that future.

One of the things I have learned over the past three years is that events sometimes unfold differently from what one expresses in a confirmation statement, and with that in mind I will try to keep this one short and to the point. As Ambassador to Ukraine, I have also learned to respect even more the role that this Committee can play in the expression and implementation of American foreign policy. I am deeply grateful for the attention that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has devoted to Ukraine over the past three years and the many Congressional visits that have helped shine a spotlight on our policy – starting with Senators Murphy and McCain's historic visit in December 2013 at the peak of the Maidan and the separate, important visits by Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Senators Johnson and Shaheen before, during, and after the 2014 presidential elections that reaffirmed Ukrainian democracy. It is no exaggeration to say that Ukraine would not be where it is today, and would not have been able to

resist Russian aggression so effectively, without your consistent Congressional support. With that experience in mind, I assure you that if confirmed as Ambassador to Greece, I will continue the pattern of intensive engagement with the Foreign Relations Committee that has been so essential to my effectiveness in Kyiv.

The success of U.S. policy in Greece hinges on the effectiveness of the U.S. partnership with the European Union. We have witnessed Greece's struggles play out on the front pages over the past year –over one million migrants flowing across Greece's borders and a resulting spotlight on border security concerns, continued economic hardship, and difficult bailout negotiations with European creditors and the IMF. The successful resolution of these issues is critical to the long-term stability of Europe broadly, and Greece's success in many ways is a linchpin to broader European prosperity. For this reason, we depend on the strength of our own partnership with the EU to move forward policy objectives that will support a stronger Greece in the long-term.

The economy is the first thing that comes to mind when we talk about Greece. Having just secured a deal with its European creditors, Greece can breathe a small sigh of relief that this summer will not be as tumultuous as last summer. But the road ahead is far from easy, as the country continues to grapple with unemployment hovering near 25 percent and youth unemployment twice that. Greece has undergone years of budget cuts and tax hikes and must meet ambitious fiscal targets in the months and years to come under its bailout agreement. We need to support Greece's efforts to promote economic growth policies and to attract investment, because fiscal discipline and economic reforms are only part of the puzzle. But there are bright spots too – Greece has a tremendously entrepreneurial spirit. My friend and colleague Ambassador Pearce and his team have done great work to promote start-ups and small businesses, such as this year's initiative to send nearly 30 Greek entrepreneurs to pitch their businesses to investors at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas. If confirmed, I commit myself to supporting these efforts and seeking new ways to help stimulate our economic partnership.

We also benefit from a strong bilateral defense relationship with Greece. Particularly noteworthy has been our long-standing military presence at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the island of Crete, from which we conduct around 5,000 flights and hundreds of ship visits annually. As the only place between Norfolk and Dubai where an aircraft carrier can pull up pier-side and replenish, and with Greece being the closest European ally to the seamline between EUCOM, CENTCOM, and AFRICOM, Souda Bay's strategic location has made it an

important location for these combatant and strategic commands. Greece has been a steady NATO Ally since 1952, and has participated in missions in Korea, the Balkans, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Through NATO we have reinforced our bilateral defense relationship, and in fact, a U.S. ship arrived just last week to contribute to the NATO reconnaissance, surveillance, and monitoring activity in the Aegean Sea. NATO ships – including our own – are currently sharing information with the Greek and Turkish Coast Guards, as well as the EU’s border agency FRONTEX to prevent illegal migrant crossings from Turkey to Greece.

This brings me to the topic of the migration and refugee crisis, which has absorbed so many resources in Greece. As millions have fled violence and persecution in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere, Greece became a door into greater Europe for those seeking peace and a better future. Despite their own financial hardships, the Greek people have shown tremendous compassion. We’ve heard story after story about individual Greeks doing what they can to help people who are vulnerable – providing food and shelter when they needed it most.

Over 50,000 migrants and refugees remain in Greece today. The Greek government is working hard to improve living conditions, more quickly process asylum claims, and coordinate with EU partners and Turkey to implement the March 18 EU-Turkey Migration deal. It hasn’t been perfect, but Greece is doing its best alongside the EU, working with NGOs and international organizations. We would like to see even more such cooperation, particularly with UNHCR, which has the experience and expertise to help the Greeks. While Greece’s differences with Turkey will not be resolved overnight, Greece has demonstrated effective side-by-side cooperation with Turkey to manage the migration crisis in the Aegean, the front line of the crisis. That daily migration flows from Turkey to Greece have dropped from some 7000 per day in September and October of last year to less than 100 today is a testament to this cooperation. We have also done what we can to support the Greek government, including the State Department’s contribution of nearly \$44 million in humanitarian aid since the start of the crisis. We have worked with our DoD colleagues to provide humanitarian assistance items such as beds, blankets, and sanitary items to equip refugees camps. And our Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are working in close concert with the Greek public health authorities as they seek to ensure the public health and that of the migrant population is effectively safeguarded.

The migration crisis highlighted concerns regarding border security and counterterrorism, but has also given way to opportunities for improving cooperation and coordination on these very important issues. Our bilateral cooperation through agencies like DHS and the FBI is excellent, and we’ve forged

strong partnerships that allow us to counter security threats as a team. Right now, we are working with the Greek government to upgrade its border screening capabilities, and if confirmed, I will continue these efforts to strengthen our security partnership.

Let me conclude with a word on energy. Just last month, Greek Prime Minister Tsipras inaugurated the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, or TAP, at a ceremony in northern Greece. TAP is the final link in the Southern Gas Corridor, a multi-stage project that will bring gas from Azerbaijan to other parts of Europe via Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Albania, and Italy. A complementary project, the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector, would help liberate Bulgaria from its total dependence on Russian gas. These projects will inject millions of dollars into the economy, put thousands of Greeks to work, and make Europe more energy secure. As I have seen from my time in Ukraine, energy diversification is critical for the future of Europe, and I am committed to furthering our efforts to support infrastructure projects such as TAP.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, clearly Greece is an important partner and strategic ally on a range of diverse issues. If confirmed, I will dedicate my time in Athens to ensuring we bolster the Greek-U.S. relationship across the board. I will lead our U.S. government team and represent the United States to the best of my ability, and as I mentioned at the top, I would welcome you to Athens to continue the great Congressional partnership I have enjoyed during my time in Kyiv. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering your questions.