

**Statement of Eric Rubin  
Ambassador-Nominee to Bulgaria  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Wednesday, December 2, 2015**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

It is a privilege to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Bulgaria. I am humbled and honored by the trust that President Obama and Secretary Kerry have placed in me, and I thank you for your time and your willingness to consider my nomination.

Mr. Chairman, for over 30 years I have cherished my association with the U.S. Foreign Service. On four continents, I have done my utmost to advance the national interests of our country, and the values and priorities that we share as Americans. For me, appearing before you to ask you to consider my nomination is also a chance to express my gratitude for the opportunity I have had to serve our country and to advocate for our shared vision of a world based on peace, prosperity and liberty.

Before I go further, allow me to acknowledge some of my family members, both those who are here with me today and those unable to attend. I am forever thankful to my parents, who introduced me to the wider world and taught me not to accept things as they are, but to try to change them for the better. I am deeply grateful to my wife, Nicole Simmons, for her love and support over these many decades. She has been my constant adviser, best friend and advocate. Together with our two beautiful daughters Rachel and Liana, she has also been my constant partner in the work we have done to represent the United States and the American people.

I first visited Bulgaria in 1991, when I helped to organize the first security dialogue and military-to-military exchanges between our two countries at the end of the Cold War. Those were heady yet difficult days, but Bulgarians set a course for the future, toward European integration and the Atlantic Alliance. Bulgarians have achieved much in the years since – Bulgaria today is a staunch NATO Ally that lies in a strategic location at the southeastern edge of the European Union. But there is much more that we can and should do together. When Secretary Kerry visited Bulgaria in January, he recognized the important collaboration between our

countries, and announced jointly with Bulgaria the formation of bilateral working groups on National Security and Defense, Energy Security, Education and People-to-People Ties, and the Rule of Law. These working groups have been so well received that we recently added a Counterterrorism working group, which first met last week.

Bulgaria is among the newer NATO members and has the second-lowest GDP per capita in the Alliance. Nonetheless, it has been a stalwart Ally. It sent troops to – and took casualties in – Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a tireless participant in training exercises and hosts one of the NATO Force Integration Units on NATO’s eastern flank. It is prudently setting aside more resources toward modernizing its military and preparing for tomorrow’s missions.

Our newest bilateral working group, as I mentioned, focuses on counterterrorism. Bulgaria takes counterterrorism seriously, and the recent attacks in Paris underscore the importance of this work. Bulgaria is a part of the Counter-ISIL Coalition and plays an important role in helping stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters due to its location at the crossroads between the Near East and western Europe.

Of course, national security is not limited to defense. Bulgaria relies almost entirely on Russia for natural gas and nuclear fuel. We are supporting Bulgaria’s efforts to diversify its sources and routes of energy, in line with EU goals. Gas from the Caspian Sea could be an important part of the solution.

Bulgaria’s potential lies in its ability to overcome a past associated with corruption and crime. The state of rule of law affects almost every line of effort we share with Bulgaria. Though corruption is still common in Bulgaria, we are encouraged to see some positive technical and legislative steps, and, if confirmed, I commit myself to working to help Bulgarians tackle these difficult challenges.

Our trade relationship has just about doubled over the last six years. Hewlett-Packard, which already employs more than 6,000 Bulgarians, in April opened Europe’s only HP Technology Lab, which will simulate technology and business processes and train the company’s experts in Bulgaria. If confirmed, I would continue the Embassy’s advocacy for our commercial interests, leading to similar success stories.

Person-to-person exchanges are sometimes the most effective form of diplomacy, particularly in light of efforts by some in the region to undermine the strong U.S.-

Bulgarian relationship. Bulgarians participate in public and private sector exchanges, and the Embassy is expanding its engagement with alumni of these programs.

We have many agencies represented at Embassy Sofia. Beside the Department of State, there are the Departments of Defense, Energy, Commerce, and Agriculture. We have law enforcement colleagues from the FBI, Secret Service, and DEA. If confirmed, I would do everything in my power to ensure the Embassy's efficient operation.

If given the opportunity, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues on these and other important issues. I would welcome you to Sofia to witness the good work of our dedicated Embassy staff on behalf of the American taxpayers, cultivating this important bilateral relationship. I thank you again for your willingness to consider my nomination. Thank you.