

U.S.-GREECE RELATIONS AND REGIONAL ISSUES

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BEFORE THE
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OF THE
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CONTENTS

	Page
WITNESS	
The Honorable R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, U.S. Department of State	5
LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING	
The Honorable Robert Wexler, a Representative in Congress from the State of Florida, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Europe: Prepared statement	3
The Honorable R. Nicholas Burns: Prepared statement	9

U.S.-GREECE RELATIONS AND REGIONAL ISSUES

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2007

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:31 p.m. in Room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Robert Wexler (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Poe is here, we have about an hour before votes. As I mentioned, Mr. Gallegly will be joining us.

The Europe Subcommittee will come to order. Thank you for your continued interest and commitment to American security and transatlantic relations.

I am very excited about today's hearing. This is a very positive time in American-Greek relations. Part of my excitement and the primary reason for my excitement is that I think we have the finest witness we could have to talk about American-Greek relations.

I want to especially thank Secretary Nick Burns for testifying before the subcommittee on United States-Greek relations and on other critical regional issues.

It is an honor to have Under Secretary Burns here, given his leading role in addressing the central foreign policy challenges facing the United States, from our efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, to pursuing lasting peace and stability in Kosovo, Bosnia and in the Balkans, and finalizing the United States-India civil nuclear cooperation initiative.

It is a special honor to have the Under Secretary here to discuss United States-Greece relations, a relationship I know he cares so deeply about. As the former American Ambassador to Greece, Nick Burns is the foremost expert on Hellenic issues in the Bush administration. No one has greater knowledge about United States-Greece relations, and there is no one better to lead a discussion about further strengthening this long-standing partnership.

Like the Under Secretary, I am also a strong supporter of United States-Greece relations, which were forged during World War II, the Cold War, in the Balkans, in operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and now grow stronger as we face common challenges to our security in the form of terrorism, a resurgent al-Qaeda, the proliferation of WMD and the possibility of nuclear weapons in the hands of a rogue Iranian regime.

Mr. Under Secretary, as you know, we have a robust economic, political and security relationship with our NATO ally Greece that

is built on shared democratic values and a common commitment to peace and security. This partnership is bolstered greatly by millions of Greek-Americans who remain the bedrock of the unbreakable bond between the United States and Greece.

Over the past several months, we witnessed an outpouring of American support and financial assistance for Greece following horrific wildfires that swept across that nation in August, growing United States-Greek counterterrorism cooperation, positive movement forward on Greece's participation in the Visa Waiver Program—which I strongly support—and Athens' increasing role as a nexus in providing greater energy security for the United States, Greece and Europe. As it relates to counterterrorism cooperation, I want to highlight the extraordinary efforts of Greek authorities to dismantle two terrorist groups, the Revolutionary Organization 17 November and Revolutionary Popular Struggle.

In addition to bilateral relations, it is critical that we address important regional issues, including further integrating the Balkans into NATO and EU, resolving the status of Kosovo, the continuing improvement in Greece-Turkey relations, moving the process forward between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and resolving the ongoing name dispute between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

With respect to this last issue, I am particularly interested in the administration's efforts as well as that of the U.N. to resolve the ongoing name dispute between Greece and FYROM. From my perspective, this is a critical issue to resolve, and I urge the administration to take steps to seek a mutually acceptable resolution to Greece and FYROM. I also want to express my support to the efforts of the U.N. Mediator Matthew Nimetz to seek a resolution to this issue.

Mr. Under Secretary, as you stated recently “the time has come for progress on the name issue.”

As it relates to Greek-Turkish relations, while I understand there remain outstanding issues, the bilateral relationship that was strained at times during your tenure as Ambassador has dramatically improved. Congress should applaud the Greek Government's continued support for Turkey's membership in the EU as well as increased Greek-Turkish economic relations and defense cooperation. It is in America's interest that the Turkish-Greek relationship grows stronger and that we build on the progress of the last decade.

Again, I want to thank Under Secretary Burns for testifying today. I believe the unwavering connection between Americans and Greeks really hit home this fall following the deadly fires that raged in Greece as well as throughout Southern California. I think you would agree that there was not another group of individuals across the planet that had more empathy for the pain and suffering of Californians than did thousands of Greek families who also witnessed similar devastation to their lives, homes and communities.

I would ordinarily turn to Mr. Gallegly. If Mr. Poe would like to say an opening statement, that would be terrific. If I could just say one more thing to Ambassador Burns—if I could just compliment you—as a manager, your Europe division is terrific. Ambassador Fried, Secretary Fried, I think, enjoys the confidence of each and

every member of this subcommittee. He has dealt with us in a forthright, honest and very accessible manner. I applaud the organization you have put together.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wexler follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROBERT WEXLER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE

The Europe Subcommittee will come to order.

I want to thank Undersecretary of State Nick Burns for testifying today before the Europe Subcommittee on US-Greece relations and on other critical regional issues.

It is an honor to have Undersecretary Burns here given his leading role in addressing the central foreign policy challenges facing the United States—from our efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, to pursue lasting peace and stability in Kosovo, Bosnia and in the Balkans, and finalize the US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative.

It is a special honor to have the Undersecretary here to discuss US-Greece relations—a relationship I know he cares so deeply about. As the former American Ambassador to Greece, Nick Burns is the foremost expert on Hellenic issues in the Bush Administration. No one has greater knowledge about US-Greece relations and there is no one better to lead a discussion about further strengthening this long-standing partnership.

Like the Undersecretary, I am also a strong supporter of US-Greece relations, which were forged during World War II, the Cold War, in the Balkans, in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and now grow stronger as we face common challenges to our security in the form of terrorism, a resurgent Al Qaeda, the proliferation of WMD and the possibility of nuclear weapons in the hands of a rogue Iranian regime.

Mr. Undersecretary, as you know we have a robust economic, political and security relationship with our NATO ally Greece that is built on shared democratic values and a common commitment to peace and security. This partnership is bolstered greatly by millions of Greek-Americans who remain the bedrock of the unbreakable bond between the United States and Greece.

Over the past several months, we witnessed an outpouring of American support and financial assistance for Greece following horrific wildfires that swept across that nation in August, growing US-Greek counter-terrorism cooperation, positive movement forward on Greece's participation in the Visa Waiver Program—which I strongly support—and Athens increasing role as a nexus in providing greater energy security for the United States, Greece and Europe. As it relates to counter-terrorism cooperation, I want to highlight the extraordinary efforts of Greek authorities to dismantle two terrorist groups, the Revolutionary Organization 17 November and Revolutionary Popular Struggle.

In addition to bilateral relations, it is critical that we address important regional issues including further integrating the Balkans into NATO and EU, resolving the status of Kosovo (which is a topic I hope the Undersecretary Secretary will discuss and provide and update for members of the Subcommittee), the continuing improvement in Greece-Turkey relations, moving the process forward between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and resolving the ongoing name dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

With respect to this last issue—I am particularly interested in the Administration's efforts as well as that of the UN to resolve the ongoing name dispute between Greece and FYROM. From my perspective, this is a critical issue to resolve, and I urge the Administration to take steps to seek a mutually acceptable resolution to Greece and FYROM. I also want to express my support to the efforts of the UN mediator Matthew Nimetz's to seek a solution to this issue. Mr. Undersecretary, as you stated recently "the time has come for progress on the name issue."

As it relates to Greek-Turkish relations, while I understand there remain outstanding issues, the bilateral relationship that was strained at times during your tenure as Ambassador—has dramatically improved. Congress should applaud the Greek government's continued support for Turkey's membership in the EU as well as increased Greek-Turkish economic relations and defense cooperation. It is in America's interest that the Turkish-Greek relationship grows stronger and that we build on the progress of the last decade.

Again I want to thank Under Secretary Burns for testifying today. I believe the unwavering connection between Americans and Greeks really hit home this fall—following the deadly fires that raged in Greece as well as throughout Southern Cali-

ifornia. I think you would agree that there was not another group of individuals across the planet that had more empathy for the pain and suffering of Californians than did thousands of Greek families who also witnessed similar devastation to their lives, homes and communities.

I now turn to my colleague the Ranking Member Elton Gallegly for his opening statement.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Poe.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Burns, for being here. As you know, Greece heritage and Greek philosophy has a lot to do with the reason we are here today. We have incorporated a lot of their ideals, especially on democracy. We will always be grateful as a Nation, I know, for Greece and their heritage.

I am concerned about Greece's cooperation with United States on counterterrorism issues. Specifically, the Greek authorities have tried to dismantle the revolutionary organization, 17 November, responsible for killing five United States Embassy employees in Greece in the revolutionary popular struggle. But, specifically, where do we stand on that issue and how successful have those exploits been to stop those two organizations?

Terrorist attacks seem to continue, though. January of this year, a rocket-propelled grenade was launched at the United States Embassy in Athens. Even though no one was killed, I am concerned about domestic terrorism in Greece and the effect that it has on United States personnel specifically in Greece, and our relationship with Greece.

As the chairman mentioned, the other issue, of course, is what do we call Macedonia and what's going to end up? Where is that going to go and what the United States' official position is on naming Macedonia "Macedonia" or calling it something else?

Thank you once again, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. WEXLER. Just for purposes of housekeeping, my understanding is there is one procedural vote. My intention would be I will miss the vote. I will keep the subcommittee going so as not to disturb your schedule. If members want to go—it's just apparently one vote—if you want to go and come back, with everyone's assent, I think that would be the best way to proceed.

With that, I would like to introduce Ambassador Burns. Nicholas Burns is the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Department of State's third-ranking official. As Under Secretary, Ambassador Burns oversees U.S. policy in each region of the world and serves as the senior career Foreign Service position at the Department. Prior to his current assignment, Ambassador Burns was the United States' permanent representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. From 1997 to 2001, Ambassador Burns was the U.S. Ambassador to Greece. During his tenure as Ambassador, the United States expanded its military and law enforcement cooperation with Greece, strengthened our partnership in the Balkans and increased trade and investment in people-to-people programs.

From 1995 to 1997, Ambassador Burns was Spokesman of the Department of State and Acting Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs for Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Mr. Burns, a career senior Foreign Service Officer, served for 5 years, 1990 to 1995, on the National Security

rity Council staff at the White House. He was a special assistant to President Clinton and Senior Director for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasian Affairs. Under President George H.W. Bush, he was Director for Soviet, and then Russian, Affairs.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much for being here, and I do not think it is an understatement to say that we are extremely grateful for your presence. Thank you. Please go ahead.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE R. NICHOLAS BURNS,
UNDER SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Mr. BURNS. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the invitation to appear here before you and the other members of the committee today.

Congressman Poe, thank you for the statement you have made.

I have submitted a statement for the record. Mr. Chairman, I will not read that statement because you have it. I thought I would try to summarize it briefly and then we can go to your questions.

First, I do want to thank you for electing to have this hearing today. I think it is important we remember what an important ally Greece has been, a critical ally for the United States for many, many decades. It is a big relationship, it is very broad, it is connected to most of the vital interests and challenges that we face around the world, so I wanted to thank you for that. I also just wanted to thank my friend, Ambassador Alexandros Mallias, who is seated behind me, who is Ambassador for Greece to the United States. He has been a fine partner to our country, and I wanted to salute him for those efforts.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for what you said about Dan Fried in our Bureau of European affairs. Dan is one of our most outstanding Assistant Secretaries of State. I can tell you Secretary Rice and I agree with your judgment of his professionalism. I am happy that he is cooperating, he and his colleagues, so well with your subcommittee.

Mr. Chairman, what I will do is just make a few points, and many of them mirror the points that you and Congressman Poe have made in terms of where we put the point of emphasis, the place of emphasis with Greece. First, as Congressman Poe did, we have to start with history. We do derive some of our elementary values, as a people and as a government, from the ancient Greeks. Even more importantly, we were there when Greece fought its war of independence from the Ottoman Empire.

Americans were there, Americans left this country to fight with the Greeks and to support them. There is a statue in a park just across the street from our American Ambassador's residence in Athens, in downtown Athens, that pays tribute to the American Philhellenes, some of them descendents of the Revolutionary War veterans in our own country who went to Greece a long time ago to help the Greek people. It is important to remember that.

We have been a good friend of the Greek people. Of course, we prosecuted the Second World War along with Greece, and the same side of that war, to liberate Greece from Nazi tyranny. We have never fought a war with Greece. In every military conflict in which the United States has been involved from the beginning of the 20th

century on, we have been on the same side. We can say that with very few countries in our current NATO alliance.

Of course, the Truman Doctrine of President Harry Truman was written very much with Greece and Turkey in mind. We would oppose attempts by indigenous forces to overthrow democratically-elected governments in favor of communism in the 1940s, and Greece was the first and largest recipient in its first year of operation of the Marshall Plan in 1947.

So in our immediate post-World War II history Greece was a critical country of interest. As you and Congressman Poe have suggested, we also have a somewhat bitter history in more recent decades of the fact that five of our American Embassy employees, four of our diplomats and one of our Greek Embassy employees were assassinated by the group 17 November between December 1975 and the summer of 1991. Over 100 American officials were wounded in terrorist attacks during those years.

We had, during my tenure in Greece, over 20 American businesses bombed in 1998 and 1999. There was a very serious threat of terrorism posed against our country by the group 17 November and by other terrorist groups.

I am very pleased to say that because of the efforts of the Greek law enforcement authorities over the last several years, two of those groups have been entirely rounded up, they have been broken apart, and the threat posed by those groups has been relief to the Greek public as well as to the United States. I should say the greater number of victims of 17 November were Greek citizens, including the then-husband of the foreign minister of Greece, Mrs. Bakoyannis.

So the Greek people paid in blood for that terrorism, for the challenge of terrorism, they paid bitterly, as did the United States. The Greek Government has made an effort and a very positive effort to rid the country of terrorism, and we are its partner in that effort.

I would also like to say, Mr. Chairman, as a second point, that we are very fortunate to have the strength of the Greek-American community in our own country. Three million Americans owe their ancestry to Greece.

This community was the single most important source of support for me when I was Ambassador and has been to every American Ambassador. The Greek-Americans are a source of investment, of trade, of fraternal organizations that literally bridge the two countries and of constant support. I just wanted to say that the activism of this community is very much appreciated by our Government, and we will continue to work with it.

Third, I wanted to say that in terms of our current relationships, I think that the relationship we have now with the government and Prime Minister Karamanlis, Kostas Karamanlis, and Foreign Minister Theodora Bakoyannis is the best we have had in memory, certainly the best we have had in three decades with the Greek Government.

We are very grateful for the support that that government has given us to improve our bilateral relationship and you mentioned a number of important issues, visa waiver, the fires that have undergone—that the Greek people have had to experience quite tragically, the counterterrorism itself and they have also been an im-

portant partner for us in the Balkans. I wanted to salute the current Greek Government for the cooperation that we have had.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to say that there are many important issues, points of engagement before us. First and foremost is the Balkans. Greece, in many ways, is the keystone country in the Balkans. Strategically for the United States, it is very important to have a close association with Greece and a close strategic understanding with the Greeks about how we can accomplish our goals in the Balkans.

Greece is the leading investor in many of the countries in the Balkans and trade partner, including in Macedonia, Albania and Serbia. Greece has been very active with us for 8½ years in supplying troops for the Kosovo mission, a mission that will continue as Kosovo undergoes a transition in the next 2 to 3 months, a historic transition.

Greece, of course, is a country that is a factor of stability with Serbia. It is a country that can talk to Serbia. It is a country that shares an orthodox faith with Serbia. Therefore, Greece has been a very important connecting point for NATO and the European Union. Even when times were tough when I was Ambassador during the Kosovo war of 1999, a time when we undertook a military campaign, it was the Greek Government that was able to connect politically with Belgrade in a way that was very useful for the alliance, despite the fact that we had some disagreements with the Greek Government at the time about the prosecution of that war.

So I think the Greeks will remain our foremost partner in the Balkans. You and Congressman Poe have mentioned the issue of Macedonia, and I would like to say on that that we are very hopeful that there could be a solution to the problem of the name of a country, brokered by the United Nations envoy Ambassador Matt Nimetz. We give him full support. I have spoken to him in the last month, as have other American officials about our strong support for him.

On this issue, of course, the United States decided 3 years ago this month that we would recognize Macedonia under the name of the Republic of Macedonia, as have 117 other countries.

But we also note that this issue of the name is particularly important and complicated for the Greek people. Many of us have traveled to the region of Macedonia in northern Greece. We understand how important Macedonia is for the Greeks in terms of their history and their current life.

With that in mind, we have asked the Government of Macedonia to reach out to the Greek Government to be a good negotiating partner, to go the extra mile, to compromise. I do think the Prime Minister of Macedonia and his government can do more to try to arrive at a solution with the Greek Government itself.

Having said that, we hope very much that this disagreement over the name will not impede the efforts that may or may not be made by the European Union and NATO in the coming year to seek a closer relationship with Macedonia itself. That's an issue of strategic importance. That ought to go ahead, but we think the U.N. negotiations, led by Ambassador Nimetz, ought to be successful.

We hope for their success in a way that will be beneficial both to Greece and the people of Greece as well as the government in Skopje, the Government of Macedonia. I would be happy to talk about this issue. It is a very complex issue, but I wanted to give you the position of our Government.

Congressman Poe asked about counterterrorism. I have commented upon that. This once was, 10 years ago when I was arrived as an Ambassador, 10 years ago this month, the most important divisive issue. It is now a source of cooperation. We have close relations between our Federal Bureau of Investigation and other intelligence agencies of our Government with the Greek Government.

Greece has been a good partner in recent years. We do know that the Greek Government has made a supreme effort to break apart these terrorist groups.

Now, as in the United States, there is still a terrorist threat, as in most countries of the world. But I think we have seen a dramatically better effort in the last 4 or 5 years than we had seen previously. I thought I should say that as a way of responding to the comments you made, Congressman, but I am happy to discuss that in greater detail should you wish.

It is also important that we work together in Afghanistan. Greece is a NATO ally; Greece has contributed troops and equipment to the effort. We would hope that Greece could do more. We are asking Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Greece to contribute a greater number of troops to the NATO mission, and a greater level of equipment, such as helicopters.

We would like Greece to lead a provincial reconstruction team in 2009. One of the problems we have, Mr. Chairman, is that the great majority of the fighting in Afghanistan is taking place in the eastern and southern parts of the country. That is where al-Qaeda and the Taliban are. We need our west European allies and Greece to deploy southward and eastward over the next couple of years.

Right now, that burden is being borne by the United States and by Britain and by the Netherlands and by Canada and Poland and Romania and Estonia and several other countries. We need help. So our appeal would be for Greece to consider what it could do to augment and increase the level of its military forces to support the NATO mission itself. Bilaterally, we have a strong relationship.

As you know, the United States has recently—Secretary Rice has made the decision that we would like Greece to be part of the Visa Waiver Program. Now, that is the first step. We have invited Greece to apply. We now need the Department of Homeland Security to make a study of all the factors that we have to take into consideration before we can actually invite a country to join the Visa Waiver Program. I know there was great sentiment in the Congress about this, and I would be happy to talk about that in greater detail.

I also want to note, Mr. Chairman, you are right to note the fires in Greece. They were horrific fires. Greece, unfortunately because of its climate region, undergoes fires every year, but these were particularly devastating to the Greek people; the great loss of life; the great destruction of property. It was encouraging to see the Greek American community, as well as Members of Congress, as

well as our Government, respond the way we did with the assistance that we gave to the Greek people.

Finally, one more issue to put on the table, Mr. Chairman, would be to say that energy has become an important issue between Greece and the United States. Now we understand that Greece is an importer of Russian oil and gas. But we also know that on November 18, in just a couple of days, the Greek Government and the Turkish Government and the Azeri Government will inaugurate the interconnector gas pipeline that emanates, that begins, in Azerbaijan and extends through Turkey, through Greece, to Italy and then up to the Netherlands.

This is an important source of diversification of energy supplies for the European countries, important because we don't believe that any country, most notably Russia, should be in a dominating position in controlling energy supplies and transit points to our allies and NATO. Diversifying sources and supply is very important, as well as pipeline diversification.

Greece has taken a step in that direction, will take a step in 4 days' time, and we congratulate the Greek, Turkish and Azeri Governments for the work they have done on this interconnector gas pipeline.

I wanted to say those few words, Mr. Chairman, you have my statement in the record. I am happy to talk about any of these issues.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Burns follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE R. NICHOLAS BURNS, UNDER SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Chairman Wexler, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I thank you for allowing me to discuss a topic of great importance, one to which this Administration and the U.S. Congress are both strongly committed: the U.S.-Greece bilateral relationship. I had the privilege of serving as the United States Ambassador to Greece from 1997 to 2001, and I am proud to be among the many Philhellenes in the United States. I also want to recognize the Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the United States, the Honorable Alexandros Mallias, who is a dynamic advocate for U.S.-Greece relations. I thank him for his presence here today.

Let there be no doubt: Greece is a strategic Ally of the United States. As President Bush noted in his proclamation on Greek Independence Day last March, "Our two nations, were both born in the belief of liberty and self-determination, sharing common cultural bonds and national values. These bonds are strengthened by a mutual commitment to democracy and freedom worldwide."

Americans helped the Greeks to win their independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821. Americans came to Greece's aid through the Marshall Plan from 1947 to 1948. We delivered invaluable political and military assistance to Greece's democratic forces during the Greek civil war. We have been a strong ally of Greece in NATO and have admired Greece's role in the EU during the last three decades. We have stood together in every major conflict of the last century, including the World Wars, the Cold War, and the crises in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

These common values and beliefs are embodied by the millions of Americans who trace their ancestry to Greece, have enriched our own country and inextricably bind our two countries. The Greek-American community is the strongest and most durable bridge linking our two countries. Greek-Americans have established hundreds of fraternal organizations that provide support services and friendship to the Greek people. They have helped to stimulate trade, investment and two-way tourism. Our Greek-American community represents American values and interests in their interactions with the Greek people. Greek-Americans are invaluable to this relationship. I could not have done my job as Ambassador without them.

As members of the Trans-Atlantic community and as NATO Allies, we work together to advance shared interests in Europe and around the world. Whether working together to stem the tide of nuclear proliferation or the trafficking of persons

and illicit materials, or to protect the environment, our shared interests bring us together time and time again.

I believe that the close people-to-people ties between our two nations explain why Americans were so affected by the devastating wildfires that ravaged Greece this summer. I am confident that everyone here today can appreciate the parallels with the recent wildfires in southern California. Both events remind us that, in times of disaster, we rely on our friends and allies. I am pleased to report that the U. S. Government provided over \$1.9 million in assistance to Greece, including cash donations to the Hellenic Red Cross, non-perishable commodities, and funding for a team of experts to provide technical assistance in emergency management and reconstruction. In addition to this assistance from the U.S. Government, prominent Greek-Americans and Greek-American organizations were quick to come to the aid of Greek citizens affected by the fires. Americans' generosity helped with the vital rehabilitation following this disaster. We look forward to continued, robust cooperation between Greek and American firefighters and reconstruction experts.

In the Balkans, the United States and Greece share a strong interest in ensuring that Greece's neighbors move forward on a path towards integration with NATO and the European Union. Greece's leadership and economic investment in the region have helped promote rapidly growing economies, create jobs and infrastructure, and bring a sense of stability to the region.

Greece has significant economic ties with its neighbors in the Balkans. The level of Greek investment in Albania, Serbia, including Kosovo, Montenegro, and Macedonia, reached 3.5 billion euros last year. Greece's trade relations with its neighbors are also strong. Greece has taken full advantage of new economic opportunities in the Balkans, with a new market of 50 million consumers, and has had a stable level of trade of approximately 1.5 billion euros over the last six years. Greece has also provided considerable economic assistance to its Balkan neighbors. In 2002, Greece launched a five-year aid initiative called the Hellenic Plan for Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans. This is a 700 million dollar program designed to aid the economic development of Greece's Balkan neighbors, including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Romania.

The Balkans will require continued attention in the coming months and years to ensure a lasting peace, an ongoing economic transformation, and a permanent integration of all countries in the region into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Kosovo—the last unresolved legacy of the Milosevic regime—must see its status clarified. The United States has made this a priority for the coming months. The United States supports the EU/Russia/U.S. Troika-led negotiations as a final attempt to find a mutually agreed solution, but remains firm that its mandate will conclude on December 10.

In the absence of an agreement negotiated by December 10, the United States believes the plan for supervised independence, outlined by the UN Special Envoy Maarti Ahtisaari, is the best way forward. As a partner in NATO's Kosovo Force, Greece shares our interest in a timely resolution of this problem that maintains regional stability and ensures the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. We are working to ensure that the concerns of all parties are addressed in the negotiations now underway, but firmly believe a timely resolution of Kosovo's status must be achieved.

In the same vein, the United States and Greece share an interest in a prosperous Macedonia, one that is stable economically, politically and militarily. Macedonia has made great strides in these areas and has participated in NATO's Membership Action Plan for a number of years. This does not mean that Macedonia is guaranteed an invitation to join NATO at the Bucharest Summit this April. Our firm view is that Macedonia should be judged strictly on its merits, specifically whether it has met NATO's performance based standards.

Macedonia should not be denied an invitation to NATO for any reason other than failure to meet the substantive qualifications for entry. In Greece, some have raised the possibility of vetoing an invitation to Macedonia unless the "name issue" is resolved. While the United States agrees on the importance of resolving the name issue, we do not think that disagreement on the name alone is reason to block Macedonia's membership in international organizations.

At the same time, the name "Macedonia" is close to the heart of Greek citizens and is central and significant to the history of Greece itself. The United States is firmly committed to the UN process led by Ambassador Matt Nimetz to resolve this issue—as well as adherence to the 1995 Interim Accord, which allows Macedonia to enter regional and international organizations under the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. We believe our NATO ally Greece and Macedonia are fully capable of working quietly, constructively and directly with each other and within the UN framework to reach a solution. We ask that the Macedonian govern-

ment make a special effort to work with the Greek government to find a solution with which both countries can live. We ask for a spirit of compromise on both sides. The United States cannot impose a solution on either side. Finding a solution acceptable by both countries is something they need to do themselves.

It often takes considerable time for countries to join NATO. Spain didn't join until 23 years after NATO was created. It took the Baltic countries 11 years to join after their independence. But in every instance of a new member joining NATO, enlargement has benefited the Alliance and advanced peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. I think we all agree it is in everyone's interest to see Macedonia become a stable and cooperative neighbor of Greece and part of the NATO alliance.

Another interest that we closely share with Greece is our commitment to the diversification of energy sources and suppliers, particularly the advancement of reliable, long-term flows of oil and natural gas from the Caspian region. Energy security is inextricably linked with national security and economic prosperity. Global economic growth and stability depends on adequate, reliable and affordable supplies of energy. Greece's central position between energy producers in the Caspian and energy markets in Western Europe means that Greece has a major role to play in helping Caspian energy find its way to a wider market.

The Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector (TGI) pipeline will bring Azerbaijani gas to Europe, increasing the diversity of energy supply and promoting the stability and economic prosperity of the Caspian nations. It will help to ensure that no one country will hold a monopoly on energy flows to our allies in Western and Central Europe. TGI is making solid progress. The upcoming inauguration of the Turkey-Greece portion later this month will usher in the first Azerbaijani gas exports to the EU-15. Ultimately, a trans-Adriatic link will connect the gas grids of Greece and Italy, providing a reliable flow of diversified gas supply from Azerbaijan and, potentially, other Caspian nations.

Finally, I am happy to say that we continue to cooperate closely with the Government of Greece on Greece's participation in the Visa Waiver Program. At the end of this month, the Department of Homeland Security plans to send an assessment team to Greece. The DHS team will assess Greece's readiness to participate in the Visa Waiver Program and the potential impact on U.S. security, law enforcement and immigration interests should Greece join. While this process will take some time before a decision is reached, the Government of Greece has told us that it is ready and able to meet the stringent requirements for participation. That is good news—for Greece, the United States and the business and personal ties between our two countries.

In conclusion, I want to underscore that which we treasure: the deep historical ties between the United States and Greece. We continue to work to broaden and deepen our relations. The relationship between our two countries is the best it has been in decades. We have excellent relations with Prime Minister Karamanlis and Foreign Minister Bakoyannis, and are grateful to both for their strong support of a closer U.S.-Greece alliance during their time in office. We are working together to promote peace and stability in Greece's neighborhood, the broader Middle East, and beyond. We know we can count on our Greek friends and allies to meet these challenges, and Greece can count on us.

I thank you for the opportunity to come before you today, and welcome any questions you may have.

Mr. WEXLER. My understanding now is there are three votes. The second vote will be a 15-minute vote. If it is okay with Ambassador Burns, I would suggest we proceed for about 10 minutes, which will probably put us at about 5 or 6 minutes left of the second vote, and then recess for 10, 12 minutes until we can get back.

If I could, first of all, thank you very much for your statement, and for your comments. With respect to the Visa Waiver Program, as it relates to Greece, I think there are many members that feel there is no finer candidate than Greece for the Visa Waiver Program, nor would there be a better way to express our strongly-felt feelings of friendship for Greece than to make certain that we move Greece along as fast as is humanly possible.

Also, I think it would be a very strong statement to other candidates that if Greece were to successfully complete the Visa Waiver Program as fast as humanly possible, that there is hope for

other countries, because to the degree that there are impediments for Greece, they would only be compounded so much more so for other nations.

You began to talk about the Visa Waiver Program. I understand you are not in the Homeland Security division. What, at this point, can we do to further Greece's application and process along so that there is a happy ending here as humanly, as quickly as possible?

Mr. BURNS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I agree that it is a very positive development that Secretary of State Rice has nominated Greece for entry into the Visa Waiver Program. We began this effort back in 1999 when I was an Ambassador. Of course, the events of 9/11 necessarily made the administration and the Congress pause in our administration of this program, because we had to make sure that any country that came in could meet our national security requirements in an age where we have to fight terrorism.

What Greece has done well is that they have developed a biometric passport which is state-of-the-art. We began working with them on our National Passport Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire a decade ago. The Greeks have developed a very fine system now of passport controls and of integrity of the passport itself, which is a standard for a lot of other countries in the world.

Secondly, we do look at the nonimmigrant visa refusal rate. Greece, of course, our Embassy in Greece, our Embassy and consulate have a refusal rate that is well below the required minimum of 3 percent. That is encouraging.

The Department of Homeland Security will send a team to Greece late this month and early in December to do a survey. What would they be looking for? They will want to work with the Greek Government to make sure there are systems in place to prevent terrorists from entering Greece who then might use Greece as a point of embarkation for travel to the United States. This is a common issue to any country in the program.

Secondly, to look at border security for the same reason; and, third, to look at information on airline passengers which is, of course, as you know, with the European Union countries, a very important issue; and then to look at a system of controls and accountability for lost and stolen passports. Why do we focus on those issues? Because those are the ways that a visa waiver system can be compromised, if there are weaknesses in the system.

The number one obligation that our Government has is to protect the borders of our country and to protect future terrorist attacks for the American people. We think in nominating Greece that Greece is going to meet the standards, but our Department of Homeland Security has an obvious responsibility, and they are right to do so, to look at all of these issues.

What will happen is that they will come back and report to the interagency committee led by the White House and, of course, we will make a final decision in consultation with Congress as to Greece's candidacy.

Mr. WEXLER. I have several questions, I will ask one more and then go to Mr. Poe, but do you have any suggestions on how friends of Turkey can help persuade Turkey that it would be in Turkey's best interests to reopen the Greek Orthodox Seminary and to recognize the status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate? What can

friends of Turkey do to make the environment better so that we could see movement on that issue?

Mr. BURNS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it is important for Members of Congress, as well as for those of us in the administration, to keep this issue in the forefront of our discussions with the Turkish Government. It is an important issue. The Ecumenical Patriarch was honored by the Congress with a Congressional Gold Medal 10 years ago this August. He is a person of international—of great dignity and international standing. He is a noted environmentalist as well as a great theologian, and he is a man of peace.

The patriarchate, of course, has existed in Istanbul for well over 1,500 years. It is the seat of the Orthodox Church; many millions of American citizens look toward the patriarchate for spiritual leadership. Therefore, it is important that the patriarchate should have a chance to grow, to continue, not just to continue to exist, but to continue to grow and develop as an institution.

With the closure of the Halki Seminary in 1971 there is no longer a possibility of educating young Orthodox seminarians in Istanbul itself in a way that would replenish the ranks of the clergy for the church. President Bush and our administration have made this an issue of concern.

I was in Istanbul in September, 2 months ago, and I met with the Ecumenical Patriarch, with His Holiness Bartholomew and discussed these issues with him. I then went to Ankara and met the next day with President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan. Each of them said we strongly support the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We would hope that Turkey would find a way, working within its own system and its own legal structure, to reopen the Halki Seminary and to allow a freedom of operation for the patriarchate itself that we think that Turkey ought to, as a country, that, of course, harbors this tremendously important historical and spiritual institution in Istanbul. So we have made that point consistently. We will continue to try to make it.

Mr. WEXLER. Can I ask you on that point? I have great confidence in Minister Erdogan and President Gul. I don't have quite the history that you have in the region. Is that a fairly extraordinary thing that you experienced in terms of your conversations with the Prime Minister and the President, or is that just a continuation of what has occurred in the past with no movement, or is this something more significant?

Mr. BURNS. Well, I can say that in my own experience, there has been a consistent experience by President Clinton and now President Bush to keep this issue on the agenda of our relations with Turkey. Turkey is a great friend of the United States, and we are very supportive of Turkey, as you know, in nearly every respect.

But on this particular issue, we hope that the Turkish leadership can find a way, and it is a complex issue for the Turks. It has to do with the treatment that other religious institutions are given in Turkish society itself, so it is not easy. But we do think that it is possible to show the measure of respect for the patriarchate, as well as for the institution, and to reopen the seminary so that this very important religious institution can flourish in the future.

We have confidence that sooner or later, this will happen, and we want to work on a fair basis with the Turkish Government, work

with them, not against them, on this issue. I know that the Greek Government has the same feeling that we just need to continue to work in the spirit of friendship with Turkey on this. I think Members of Congress showing interest is a very good thing, and certainly members of the administration should do the same.

Mr. WEXLER. Terrific. As a long-time supporter of American-Turkish relations, and as one of the co chairs of Turkish Caucus, I think it is fabulous that you state this issue in the way that you do and the effort to work with the Turkish Government, as you say, with them not against them, to help resolve this, I think is very important.

Mr. Poe.

Mr. POE. Mr. Chairman, a couple of questions on Kosovo. The United States' position seems to be independence for Kosovo, but it has not worked out, is that correct?

Mr. BURNS. Congressman, our position has been that we support the plan of the United Nations envoy Mr. Ahtisaari, which is for a period of supervised independence for Kosovo, supervision leading to independence. We support that. We are just at the end now of the negotiations that the United States, Russia and the EU have led over the last 4 months, the negotiations between Belgrade, the government in Serbia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership.

If by December 10, in just a couple of weeks time, there is no agreement between the two, then I think the United States and many members of the European Union will have to take the necessary—make the necessary conclusions from the failure of that diplomatic process and move forward. But it is our belief that Kosovo will soon enter a transitional phase, and we have not deviated from our position of support for the Ahtisaari plan at all in any way, shape or form.

Mr. POE. If I understand, Greece is opposed to Kosovo independence, is that correct?

Mr. BURNS. I think it would be wrong for me to try to state an opinion of another government. I wouldn't dream of doing that.

Mr. POE. What has our Government heard or been led to believe, then?

Mr. BURNS. Well, I think what we have heard is strong support for the Ahtisaari plan from most of the countries in the European Union, but some nervousness by many of the countries that live in the Balkans. That is understandable, that they fear, perhaps, dislocation, that they fear an outcome that might perhaps lead to instability. We believe that the greatest risk of instability is if we delay implementing the Ahtisaari plan.

We think the best way to avert violence is to implement the Ahtisaari plan. We want to see that implemented as soon as possible following these negotiations.

Mr. POE. On December 10, when it comes and goes and the Serbs and Kosovo haven't worked out an agreement, do you see instability in the region, or do you think that this secondary plan is actually going to work and there will still be stability?

Mr. BURNS. We see no reason for instability, and we very much hope that the Serb government will not try to instigate instability, particularly north of the Ibar community in Mitrovica in a place

where there is a divided community between Serbs and Albanians. We hope that people will act for peace and stability.

Our view is that the greatest way to ensure stability will be to implement the plan of the United Nations, the plan that we have supported since March of this year.

Mr. POE. The last question on that issue. So, that's what we want to happen, I know, but assume that it doesn't happen, there is instability, so what does the United States—what is our position? What happens when instability, violence breaks out?

Mr. BURNS. We have 17,000 NATO military personnel in Kosovo. That is including about 1,500 American troops. Those troops are there to maintain law and order. They will put down any attempt by any party to take the law into their own hands or to seek a partition or to seek instabilities. I think we can trust NATO do their job and at the same time, trust our diplomacy to be successful in convincing the people of the country to move forward, considering the fact that 95 percent of the people who live in Kosovo now are Kosovar Albanian Muslims.

That has why we support the U.N. plan. I think we will see that effectively implemented should these current negotiations fail by December 10.

Mr. POE. One more question, and if you would give me a brief answer, I know your knowledge is vast, but try to make it simple.

On the issue of counterterrorism, going back to that issue right now, what threats, if any, are there in Greece, terrorist organizations, and who are they?

Mr. BURNS. Well, there is a remaining threat. There was an RPG fired at our Embassy, in fact, the Ambassador's office, Ambassador Reese's office at the beginning of this year. We are working with the Greek authorities to counter what we perceive as an indigenous threat in Greece. Also, we are mindful of the international terrorist threat to which both of our countries, both Greece and the United States, have been exposed. Greece has been a very fine partner and a very sound partner with us.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will yield back.

Mr. WEXLER. Thank you, Mr. Poe. With respect to the firearm issue, you began talking about it. What do you anticipate will be happening in the near future? What, if any, positive role can Congress play?

Mr. BURNS. Well, we have encouraged Ambassador Nimetz to continue his mediation between his two governments as he has done in the better part of the last decade. That's a very important role, number 1. Number 2, it really is important for the government in Macedonia to make an effort to reach out to the Greeks and to be understanding of the fact that symbols are important in history, and names are important. Name of an airport is important; the airport in Skopje.

I know the Greek Government is willing to engage in constructive negotiations because we have had that assurance from the Foreign Minister of Greece. But we need to see the Macedonian Government come to these negotiations with a constructive spirit, first point.

Second point is that NATO is going to have to make a decision in the beginning of 2008 and the first month of 2008 about whether

or not to issue an invitation to Macedonia to join the NATO alliance at the summit meeting in Bucharest, Romania, in April. We have not made a decision as an alliance.

The United States Government has not made a decision as to whether or not Macedonia has earned that right to become a member of NATO or has met the qualifications. But we don't want this issue. We don't believe it is proper for this issue of the name, the difference between Greece and Macedonia, to be an impediment into Macedonia's eventual entry into NATO whether it is in 2008 or 2009 or beyond and of the European Union because it is in our common interest that all the countries of the Balkans be part of the two transatlantic institutions so that the Balkans can be peaceful and stable. I just wanted to make that point as well.

Mr. WEXLER. I don't, in any way, want to put words in your mouth. My impression is there may be a sense that the government in Macedonia has not been quite as forthcoming as it might on this issue. On that score, is there any role that the Congress can play that might help put Macedonia in a posture that might be more positively viewed?

Mr. BURNS. Well, Macedonia is a friend of our country and a future ally, we hope, when that day comes. I think Members of Congress could be active in trying to convince the Prime Minister of Macedonia that his government should understand the sensitivities that the Greek people have about Macedonia and its role in history, about symbols.

The President of Macedonia has been a very fine and constructive interlocutor. We think more could be done with the government. Of course, in any negotiation, both sides need to be open to compromise, and that and that includes the Government of Greece as well as the Government of Macedonia. We try to be an arbiter between two friends, one an ally, Greece, and the other a close friend of the United States.

I think Members of the Congress can be helpful in discussions with the United States Government in conveying that point of view to the government.

Mr. WEXLER. With respect to Turkey's entry or process of entry into the European Union, Greece, in my view, is taking an historically important, progressive, smart position, setting an example for what nations can do to better relations between historical combatants at times. Where is that process, from an American perspective, in terms of America's, Greece's and Turkey's cooperation in that regard? Not an overall process as to where Turkey stands, but just in term of America's and Greece's efforts in this respect.

Mr. BURNS. Thank you. I agree with your question and your sentiment, Mr. Chairman.

It is enlightened and the right strategic decision for the Greek Government to support Turkey's eventual ascension into the European Union. Prime Minister Karamanlis deserves great credit for that transition that he has had. We share that vision.

We think that Turkey must be part of the European Union. Turkey is a singularly important country, vital for all of us in Europe as well as the Middle East. I think the Greek Government has taken the right position. Secondly, I would say that since the two horrible earthquakes of 1999 that were devastating to both coun-

tries, you have seen a period of Greek-Turkish rapprochement led by two successive Greek Governments and two successive Turkish Governments. It is very promising to see that.

Third, the United States does not need to mediate between the two countries because they can meet themselves and they can resolve these issues, but we always want to be helpful. I think to see a continued diminishing of differences between, particularly over the tricky issues concerning the border, islands and air space is a good thing for the alliance, to the NATO alliance and both countries. We are confident that both countries can continue in this positive direction.

Mr. WEXLER. With your indulgence, my constituents are going to ask for a percentage of my pay back if I don't go vote today.

So if it is okay with the Ambassador—and I know Mr. Sires and others will be coming back—there are two votes, but we have about 6 minutes left with the first of the two, and I will come right back after the second. I think others will as well. So we will stand in recess for just a short period. There could possibly be a third vote, we don't know. With that reservation—

Mr. BURNS. I will wait.

[Recess.]

Mr. WEXLER. If I could bring the Europe Subcommittee back to order.

The ranking member, Mr. Gallegly joins us. I thank him. Before I turn it over to Mr. Gallegly, who would like to ask the Secretary, I think you had spoken about cooperation with respect to environmental issues, which, coming off the fires would seem to be highlighted in both California and in Greece and our country and theirs.

Are there particular opportunities to work with Greece in the context of environmental issues at this point that you might be able to share with us and things we might be able to do here in turn as a result of your advice?

Mr. BURNS. Well, unfortunately, we do have this shared experience that you mentioned, the shared experience of Southern California and Greece both very similar in topography and climate. Over the years, we have tried to share experiences and tried to increase the ability of our countries to prepare for fires but also earthquakes.

I was in Greece in 1999 during the great earthquake there, and, of course, parts of our country are susceptible to earthquakes as well. We have shared experiences in the past, and we will continue to do that. I think the Greek American community is also a bridge here because some of the fraternal organizations like AHEPA have been very quick to respond and raise funds for those Greeks who were displaced by the fires just a few months ago.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Secretary, you had mentioned that Ambassador Mallias was here. I, too, want to acknowledge the Ambassador and repeat your praise and maybe go a bit, a step, further. In my experience, dealing with a number of different Ambassadors, few have shown the degree of proactive effort that Ambassador Mallias has to better relations between Greece and the United States.

I stand in admiration. You do a fine service for your country, that is for sure, and we very much appreciate your being here today.

Mr. Gallegly.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for calling this very timely hearing today on United States-Greece relations.

It has been my belief that relations between our two countries are very strong. We share many interests in common, and we appreciate greatly the role of Greece's military and civilian support as part of our NATO forces in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Macedonia. In addition, Greece has contributed to the European Union's peace-keeping forces in Bosnia.

We also recognize and strongly support Greece's efforts to improve relations with Turkey and Greece's support for Turkey's accession into the European Union.

Both our nations agree that a stable Turkey integrated into Europe is a better neighbor than is a Turkey that is more closely aligned with some of its neighbors in the Middle East.

There are two other issues that I would briefly like to touch on. First, with regard to Cyprus, I would like to compliment the Greek Government for their full implementation of the July 8, 2006, agreement between Cypriot President Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot leader Talat. As reflected in a resolution that passed unanimously in the House of Representatives, the House is fully supportive of the July 8 agreement as a way forward for negotiations leading to a permanent political settlement in Cyprus.

Second, as you know, this is a critical period in the Balkans. I am aware of Greece's strong historical and economic ties with countries in the region. I would urge Greece to use its influence in the region to support the current U.S.-Russia and U.S. negotiations. Even in the absence of an agreement between the two sides, it is my hope that Greece will assist in the resolution that maintains peace and stability in the region.

Again, I would like to thank all of those responsible for holding this hearing, and I would like to thank you, Secretary Burns, for making yourself available to testify and answer whatever questions we might have.

This really is a timely hearing. I appreciate your leadership, Mr. Chairman, and would yield back.

Mr. WEXLER. Thank you, Mr. Gallegly.

Mr. Bilirakis has joined us. I am happy to recognize Mr. Bilirakis and give you a moment to settle in.

The Under Secretary has graciously agreed to stay until 4:15, so you still have some time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Mr. Secretary. I appreciate it very much.

Good afternoon, Secretary Burns. Thank you so much for appearing before the subcommittee and providing your much-appreciated testimony. I commend you on your many years of loyal public service to the United States. You have had your work cut out for you, and you have done an extraordinary job, in my opinion.

As a member of the subcommittee, and also as co chair of the Hellenic Caucus as well as a Greek-American, I have a particular

interest in enhancing United States relations and helping to resolve regional issues that are not only troublesome for Greece but provide anxiety for the European Union and the United States.

As you know, Greece has been a consistent steadfast ally of the United States since the beginning of our Republic. Greece's response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on American soil were swift and unequivocal. Greece provided strong political support as well as the military assets and use of airspace for United States and coalition forces as we launched Operation Enduring Freedom throughout the Taliban and al-Qaeda from Afghanistan. Indeed, Greece's participation still persists in the war against radical Islam.

Greece continued to provide peacekeeping forces and support operations throughout the world as we fight terrorist elements. Greece has been diligent and persistent in combating home-grown terrorism in her own country. Greek authorities have dismantled two main domestic terrorist groups, November 17 and the Revolutionary Popular Struggle.

These stepped-up efforts to secure Greece were unveiled in Athens during the historic Olympic Games of 2004. These efforts and more have made Greece right ripe for entry into the Visa Waiver Program. I commend you and Secretary Rice for nominating Greece to the Department of Homeland Security as it enters the home stretch of acceptance into the program.

I have every confidence that Homeland Security will agree that Greece has made the eligible criteria, and short-term visitors from Greece will be allowed to travel to the United States without visas. This will help to enhance America's image in Greece and obviously inure to the economic benefit of the United States with increased tourism.

Greeks love America. I know we would love nothing more than to come visit the United States while at the same time helping increase our tourism industry, particularly since its downturn after September 11.

Greece has become an economic dynamo in the European Union. It has evolved from being a recipient of foreign aid to now being a donor Nation. Greece has invested billions of dollars in its Balkans neighbors, neighbors that historically have been openly hostile to Greece. Greece has worked to bolster those fledgling market economies in places like Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the intent to cultivate growing economies that would create security and stability in the region.

I wholeheartedly commend Greece for this long-term strategic plan. I have, or share with Greece, concerns she has with two very critical and timely issues that have yet to be resolved: Reaching a mutually agreed upon name for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia between Greece and FYROM that is sanctioned by the U.N. and obtaining a U.N. sanction agreement between Serbia and Kosovo regarding Kosovo independence. Later I will follow up with questions, if we have time, time permitting, of my concerns.

Finally, while we all appreciate Turkey's importance as a strategic ally in the war against radical Islam, and while we all desire a secular and democratic Turkey free from radicalism, it is difficult to comprehend how a country that is positioning for entry into the

European Union can continue to deny its citizens even basic human rights such as freedom of religion, the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression. I am particularly concerned over the viability of eastern orthodoxy in the near future.

Turkey, which shut the Greek Orthodox seminary in Halki and refused to open it—I believe it has been closed for 30 years—continues to maintain a policy of disallowing anyone but Turkish citizens to ascend into the position of Ecumenical Patriarch.

As elders in the Orthodox Church age, this Turkish policy essentially will end the nearly 2,000 year-old church that over a quarter of a billion faithful, as a matter of fact, nearly 2 billion here in the United States, for American citizens. It is very disturbing and untenable. It is an untenable position that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been placed in. I fear for the longevity of my Orthodox faith, and I am here to represent not just Greek Orthodoxy but Orthodoxy throughout the United States.

Additionally, by keeping nearly 30,000 troops in Cyprus, Turkey continues to display hostility to the rule of law and thumbs its nose at exercising even basic common sense. I am interested to know from you why the United States, the beacon of liberty for justice and good throughout the world, does not use its unmatched influence to prod Turkey into acting like a secular democracy instead of a third world totalitarian state. I look forward to hearing from you on all of these issues of great concern to me and my constituents.

Once begun, thank you for your service to this Nation and your testimony here today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Mr. WEXLER. If we could do this, maybe, with the indulgence of the members, the Under Secretary has 15 minutes. If maybe we can just go to all the members first and get all questions out and then leave the remaining time to the Under Secretary to respond, if that's okay.

I know, Mr. Gallegly, you have got to go. Out of deference to Mr. Gallegly, if you would like to go first.

Mr. GALLEGLY. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, I will be brief. There are many things that I would like to go over and avail myself of Secretary Burns, but in the interest of time, I will limit my questions to one, although I have many others.

Earlier this year, I traveled and spent the better part of a week in Cyprus. It is not one of the most traveled destinations of Members of Congress, but while I am not one of the great travelers in this body, I found that to be one of the most eye-opening trips that I have ever taken.

I have spent time on both sides of the green line trying to get a better feel for the dynamics of what is going on there.

Mr. Secretary, we know that Greece has been a supporter of the implementation of the July 8 agreement. How can the United States better work with a Greek Government to get this agreement back on track?

Mr. WEXLER. If it is okay, could I ask members to go ahead, and then we will get the answers at the end. Mr. Engel and Mr. Sires.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Welcome, Mr. Secretary, I am sorry we have had all these votes. I have long, since my days in Congress,

been a strong supporter of close United States-Greece relations. I know people have mentioned the problem with Cyprus. I was wondering if you could enlighten us in ways that we are working with both the Greek and the Cypriot Governments to ensure that that island is not divided anymore and that people that need to go home to sectors that now that they are barred from can go home. So I would wonder if you could comment on that.

I am told earlier in the hearing—with regard to Kosovo, as you know, I have been a strong supporter of Kosovo independence for many years. Earlier in this hearing you have said the United States, and this is a quote, “is unwavering in its independence for Kosovo and the Ahtisaari plan.” You have talked about this, and I appreciate those comments very much.

I am wondering if you can give us a sense of what is coming for Kosovo in the days ahead, especially after December 10 when the 120 days are up. Also, earlier this year there had been some rumors that the United States might withdraw its troops from Kosovo in 2008. In my opinion, that would be a disaster because the American troops held the backbone and political will underlying K4, so I am wondering if those rumors are true.

I am wondering if you could also enlighten us in terms of Greece. I know Greece and Serbia have had a long and traditional alliance in terms of relations, and I am wondering if perhaps we are leaning on our Greek friends a little bit to help modify some of the Serbian behavior. Thank you.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Sires.

Mr. SIRES. Mr. Ambassador, I apologize for having to miss this meeting. I am heading a CODEL to Greece and Cyprus on the 26th, and I wanted to get a stronger sense of my background, but with all these votes—I know you talked about all these things.

There are two things. One is the oil pipeline that Greece is building, and then the other one is how have they handled the immigration problem in Greece. I know they have had a number of immigrants come from some of the former Yugoslav countries, and they don't seem to have problems with immigration like we have in this country.

What are they doing that is so successful in taking in all this immigration? That is all, two simple questions.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Secretary, please.

Mr. BURNS. Mr. Chairman, I will take them one at a time. A number of members, including Congressman Engel, have asked about Cyprus. I just want to say that we strongly support the United Nations efforts to try to redress the problem on Cyprus after 40 years and to achieve a bizonal bicomunal federation, an agreement that would focus on that as the central solution.

I met with President Papadopoulos in September at the United Nations. I think Congressman Gallegly was right to talk about the June 8, 2006, agreement. We thought that was a step forward. There is going to be an election in Cyprus at the beginning of 2008.

Following that election, I think you will see the United States support vigorously renewed United Nations efforts to try to resolve the Cyprus problem. I intend to go to Cyprus myself. We have not had a senior official there in a number of years. It is very good,

Congressman, that you will be going on this trip. We need to have more American voices in Cyprus.

Mr. WEXLER. You will have to go after he goes because he will set it back a couple of months.

Mr. BURNS. But we certainly need, as Americans, to speak up for peace and to speak up for a solution so that the terrible problems that have afflicted the people of Cyprus for 35 years now can be overcome. And we supported the Annan plan, as you know, several years ago, that effort did not succeed.

We are now looking for the United Nations to reestablish a diplomatic effort to try to achieve a solution. We will support that. I promised President Papadopoulos we would do that. Of course, we want to work with the Turkish Government and with the Turkish authorities as well on Cyprus toward that end.

Congressman Bilirakis mentioned Halki and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. I answered the question from the chairman before, but I am very happy to say that we are very much hopeful that this problem can be resolved. We hold in high esteem the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, his All Holiness Bartholomew. We have consistently advised the Turkish Government that the Turkish Government should find a way to reopen the seminary, to allow the patriarchate to evolve whereby it can train seminarians to train clergy who are so vital to the church.

I did raise this issue with President Gul and President Erdogan after I had seen his All Holiness at the patriarchate itself in Phenar in Istanbul. This has been a policy of support that extends back to President Clinton's administration and President Bush, of course, wholly supports, fully supports this effort to try to restore the freedoms to patriarchate that are essential to its continued existence, as you said, Congressman, to its future. We are fully, I think, in agreement with you on that issue.

Congressman Engel asked about Kosovo. I came from a meeting this morning with Wolfgang Issinger, who is the EU negotiator, and Frank Wisner, who is the American negotiator. They will have two more rounds of negotiation in the next 2 weeks between Prime Minister Kostunica and the Kosovar Albanian leadership. We would hope that those negotiations could succeed in achieving an agreement between the two parties.

If that is not possible, we have said that December 10 will mark the end of that negotiating phase. We will not be supporting a continuation of that phase because it will be time then for all of us to make a decision as to how we want to help Kosovo enter and succeed in a period of transition where it has been over the past 8½ years under United Nations' administration. We very much still support the plan by President Ahtisaari, the United Nations emissary, for a period of supervised independence of Kosovo. We have not given up on that. We had hoped that there could be an agreement between the parties, but that if that does not happen, we will all have to take our responsibilities.

We will, of course, want to work closely with the European Union in that respect. So I think we are heading toward a very consequential period in the month of December and the month of January where we will all have to step up and make the right kind

of decisions. I am confident that the international community will do that.

Thank you, Congressman, I know you have been involved in the very beginning in the struggle of justice for Kosovo, and you were a great supporter of what the Clinton administration had to do back in 1999 and what the Bush administration has done since to keep American troops there. I can tell you we have know plans to withdraw American military forces from K4, and we think K4 is, in fact, going to have the central role in providing security during this transitional phase.

I said before to the chairman that it is our very strong expectation that no one will try to challenge peace in Kosovo, that no one will try to take law into their own hands because K4 will be there to maintain law and order. That is the obligation that K4 has and that's why we are there.

Congressman, you are quite right to mention the Greek role. Greece has a relationship with Serbia that is long-standing. It is a political relationship, as well as a religious relationship that ties the two countries together through faith in the Orthodox Church.

And so we hope that the Serbian authorities will continue to listen to Greece and to view Greece as a model of what Serbia might someday become.

And I just think that Congressman Bilirakis mentioned the fact that we all have to hope that relationships among these competing countries and competing faiths will change. And there is an opportunity to do that now for Serbia to effectively end the tensions from the 1990s and to seek a place in the European Union in the future and to seek a relationship with NATO and to live in peace with its neighbors. That is the opportunity that Serbia has.

Greece is a country that has overcome a lot. Greece is a country that was invaded by every single one of its neighbors in the 20th century and yet now lives in harmony with all of them and is the leading country in the Balkans and the leading Ambassador in trade partners. So I do think Greece is a positive example for many of the Balkan countries as we hope to try to pacify the Balkans and bring it into association with the EU and NATO in the next decade or so.

I believe, Mr. Chairman—excuse me. I have one more question that you asked, Congressman, about energy.

We have had a very active discussion with the Greek Government about diversifying energy supplies and energy pipelines. Now we understand that Greece is an importer of Russian oil. Many countries in Europe are. But we don't want to see, as an ally to Europe, Russia be in a dominant position in terms of its energy supplies. And so we have long championed, as did the Clinton administration, a multiplicity of pipelines. We saw the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline opened and now we are seeing, 4 days from now on November 18, there will be the inauguration of the interconnector gas pipeline from Azerbaijan, through Turkey, through Greece, to Italy and up to the Netherlands. And that is going to be a very important pipeline to affirm the independence of these countries and the fact that multiple sources of energy are our country's best long-term assurance for security.

So I am sure you will hear about this and talk to the principles involved when your congressional delegation visits Greece itself. Thank you.

Mr. SIREN. Can you comment on immigration?

Mr. BURNS. I apologize. I forgot about that question. I apologize.

Well, I think the Greek Government has been successful in attempting to integrate some of the minority communities into Greece. Greece has been very much, as you know, a homogenous country like many others in that part of the world. Greece has been open to Albanian immigration, which has been a very important factor for the economy of Greece. And as Albania went through a transition over the last 20 years, it was important that people had an opportunity to live in a democratic country, Greece. And now they have an opportunity to live in a democratic country called Albania.

So if you look at the situation between the two countries during the Cold War, it was an absolutely closed border, Albania living under the worst form of communism, and now the people of Albania have the opportunity to live in their democratic country. But also those who wish to immigrate have been able to do so to Greece as well as to our own country.

So I do think the Greeks have been largely successful. We can always look for lessons to be more successful ourselves, although I think one of the great hallmarks of our country is that we are all immigrants, we have all been welcomed to this country, and all immigrant groups have been able to succeed. So while we can always be more successful and learn lessons from other countries, I think we do many things well here in our own country.

Mr. SIREN. Mr. Ambassador, I arrived here when I was 11 years old. I was not born here.

Mr. BURNS. Thank you very much, Congressman.

Mr. WEXLER. I think Mr. Bilirakis had one quick question if you can indulge us.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I have a few questions. But I wondered if you could address a firearm issue and also if you could keep in touch with me, Mr. Secretary, on the Patriarchate and also Halki. We are running out of time. I appreciate your efforts, but we are running out of time. If you could address those two issues. I have a question, a lengthy question with regard to Cyprus. But maybe we can talk at another time, please. Thank you.

Mr. WEXLER. The Secretary has been very generous with his time. He has told us that he needs to go at 4:15. Maybe if you can just take a stab at the first part and then we will respectfully respect your other commitments.

Mr. BURNS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, Congressman, I will be very happy to keep in close touch with you on the issue of Halki. It is an issue we have on the agenda with the Turkish Government.

As I explained to the Chairman in an earlier question, we are trying to work with the Turkish Government, and we know this is a difficult issue within Turkey itself. It is a complicated issue. We have a clear position. The seminary should be reopened, the Halki Seminary. The Patriarchate in itself should be allowed to progress and to expand and to evolve as an institution. It has been there

for well over 1,500 years, and there are few institutions in the world community more important than that institution for those who are of the Orthodox faith, as you know better than me.

So I can assure you we will keep this at the head of our agenda, and that is why I did raise it with President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan personally and encourage them to meet the Patriarch as a new government in Ankara. And I can tell you that we have the greatest respect for him. I remember that he was given the Congressional Gold Medal by the Congress 10 years ago this August, and so we don't forget that either.

On the question of Macedonia, I in my written testimony essentially said that we know how complicated this question of the name issue is. I lived in Greece. I understand the passions and sensitivities of this issue from the Greek perspective. And Macedonia is a fundamental part of Greek history, the name and the role of Philip Macedon and Alexander of Macedon and their legacy. And so it has been a difficult issue.

Now we have said that there should be a United Nations mediating effort. There is. Ambassador Matt Nimetz, an American, is the mediator. We have wished him well and we have encouraged both countries to work with him. And we have suggested—and I have said this today—that we hope that the Prime Minister of Macedonia will understand the sensitivities on the Greek side and work with the Greek side actively for a solution to the problem.

I have also said today that the differences between the two on this issue should not impede the possibility of Macedonia entering into NATO and the EU in the future should it qualify for both organizations. And this is going to be an issue that we have to look at in the beginning months of 2008. There will be a NATO summit in April 2008 that President Bush will attend. He and the other NATO leaders have will have to make a decision as to whether Croatia and Macedonia and Albania should be invited in to be new members of NATO.

We have not yet made that decision in our own Government. In fact, we have just sent our NATO Ambassador Victoria Newman on a fact-finding tour of the three countries last week. So we haven't come to a conclusion, but we wouldn't want to see this particular issue of a difference over the name impede the ability of a NATO alliance which operates by consensus. So all countries have to agree to make that decision should we wish to make it. And so that that is the way I answered the question. That is a summary of what was in my written testimony. I would be happy to stay in touch with you, Congressman, on this issue as well.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Chairman, if I can just for 15 seconds not ask a question, but I just want to say that in all the years that I have been on this committee and all the years I have been in Congress, I think there is no finer American servant than Ambassador Burns. I think that every time he comes and every time I meet with him, I am always impressed with how much he knows and how smart he is and how hardworking he is. And I want to say that publicly, we all appreciate your efforts on behalf of our country. Thank you.

Mr. WEXLER. Agreed.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I appreciate it very much. I look forward to working with you.

Mr. WEXLER. Do you want to compliment him?

Mr. SIRES. It has been pretty tough today, Mr. Chairman. I do want to compliment him. And I do apologize for not being here. I had to take the votes. I don't have 14 years in Congress like some people have.

Mr. WEXLER. Thank you so much for your generous time.

Mr. BURNS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WEXLER. The subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:20 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

