

Chairman Robert Wexler
Subcommittee on Europe

“Strengthening the Transatlantic Alliance”
An Overview of the Obama Administration's Policies in Europe

June 16, 2009

The Subcommittee on Europe will come to order. I want to welcome and thank Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Phil Gordon for testifying.

We are thrilled you are here today. I am especially pleased that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have chosen an Assistant Secretary with your extraordinary background, experience, and foresight. I am highly confident and fully expect that you will represent the U.S. in the highest capacity and will further America's national interests and strategic partnerships in Europe and Eurasia.

Today's hearing comes at an historic juncture for the United States and our European allies as we face a myriad of difficult issues, including a global economic crisis, accelerated global climate change, a resurgent Russia, instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the possibility of a nuclear armed Iran. Within Europe and on its borders there are also many challenges for American and European policy makers, including resolving frozen conflicts, rising nationalism and right-wing extremism, energy security, and significant backsliding by a number of nations in the areas of political, judicial, and economic reforms.

The good news is, according to recent polls, that European public opinion has embraced President Obama's message of renewed American engagement and partnership. The President's outreach to European allies and its public, which culminated in a successful spring trip to the G20 in London, NATO's 60th Anniversary Summit, and US-EU meetings in Prague, has laid the groundwork for deeper collaboration between the U.S. and transatlantic allies.

Unfortunately, the more sobering news is that greater European public support has not translated “fully” into policy successes that benefit the welfare and security of both sides of the Atlantic. If President Obama and the new Administration are going to succeed in addressing issues such as global non-proliferation, Middle East peace, the long term stability and security in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Iran's nuclear program, then we need a stronger commitment from our European and international partners.

Given the far-reaching foreign policy agenda of the Obama Administration, we are eager to learn more about your efforts and those of the Administration to strengthen historic transatlantic relations and to build stronger economic, political, and security links with our NATO and EU allies.

It is essential that the Administration continue to work with willing partners in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and Balkans regions, as these nations struggle with democratic reforms and push for greater engagement and inclusion in transatlantic institutions such as the EU and NATO. I want to applaud Vice President Biden for his statement during his recent trip to the Balkans, that the “Obama-Biden Administration will sustain and re-energize the long standing American commitment to a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.”

I also want to highlight the extraordinary effort of the President and Secretary of State for reaching out to our ally Turkey, and for their efforts to resolve the ongoing Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts. Turkey is a key partner in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and the Middle East and President Obama’s vision of a “Model Partnership” must be further fleshed out.

The President’s April trip to Turkey was historic, and I implore the Administration to continue to support Turkey’s EU aspirations, Armenian-Turkish reconciliation, and work with Ankara to combat PKK terrorism.

There is no greater challenge facing the U.S. and Europe than our relations with Russia. While I share the Administration’s efforts to reach out to Russia, to hit the “reset button” and desire to work with President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin on critical issues such as the START treaty, Iran, and North Korea, it is essential that we are realistic and clear eyed about the true intentions, actions, and interests of the Kremlin.

As Secretary Clinton stated during a town hall meeting in March, “Europe is our essential partner.” I could not agree more with Secretary Clinton and look forward to working closely with you over the coming months to strengthen the transatlantic alliance.

I would now like to invite the ranking member, Mr. Gallegly from California, to give his opening remarks.