

Statement of Marcie B. Ries
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Bulgaria
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 18, 2012

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Barrasso, and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Bulgaria. I am grateful for the confidence placed in me by the President and by Secretary Clinton. The United States and Bulgaria share a very strong partnership and friendship, both between our governments and our peoples. If confirmed, I will work with Congress and this Committee to further strengthen the relationship and to advance U.S. interests in Bulgaria.

If you will permit me, I would like to introduce my family members who are here with me today. I am delighted and proud that my husband Charlie, who was a fellow officer in the Foreign Service for more than thirty years, as well as my son, Alexander Ries, and my mother, Mona Berman, are with me today. Although unable to attend this hearing, I would like to mention my daughter Meredith, who was also along through postings in Ankara, Brussels and London. While it was an honor and a privilege for us to represent our country abroad, I am especially grateful for my family's encouragement even when I was posted without them in Kosovo and Albania, and for their unswerving support when my husband and I were assigned together to Baghdad in 2007 and 2008.

This summer marks the 109th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and the United States. This is worth noting because our relationship with Bulgaria, a member of NATO and the European Union, exemplifies the sort of transatlantic cooperation that has been the cornerstone of our common security,

freedom, and prosperity. Bulgaria has generously contributed to NATO and EU missions, including in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia, Libya, Georgia, and off the coast of Somalia. If confirmed, I will apply my prior experience in NATO and EU matters, especially as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, to further enhance our cooperation with Bulgaria. I will also encourage Bulgaria's efforts to develop a military that is modern, deployable, and fully interoperable with its European and American partners.

Our relationship with Bulgaria is based upon much more than security cooperation. Bulgaria's experience transitioning from authoritarian rule to democracy and persevering through many challenges is commendable and provides positive lessons for others making democratic transitions. Today, Bulgaria plays a constructive role in promoting stability in the Western Balkans and supporting emerging democracies in the Middle East and North Africa, including by sharing these lessons.

I learned during my time as Chief of Mission in Pristina and Ambassador to Albania that ensuring the rule of law is both fundamental and a long-term endeavor. Bulgaria has made progress in rule of law, including taking important steps to pursue judicial reform, combat corruption, and fight organized crime. Bulgaria's new asset forfeiture legislation is a positive example of such progress. However, more needs to be done, and if confirmed I will do my best to support Bulgarian efforts to move forward via robust law enforcement cooperation, the Open Government Partnership, and engagement with the Bulgarian government and civil society.

The Roma population in Bulgaria, as elsewhere in Europe, has not fully benefited from Bulgaria's progress. The Bulgarian government has launched a new integration strategy, worked with civil society to develop an action plan, and is organizing a resource framework. If confirmed, I will work with the Bulgarian

government and the Roma communities to support and encourage effective implementation.

Bulgaria has taken noteworthy steps toward diversifying and securing the country's energy supplies while protecting the local environment. If confirmed, I will make working with the Bulgarian government, business and civil society toward achievement of this goal a high priority.

Bilateral trade with Bulgaria jumped from 429 million U.S. dollars in 2010 to 672 million in 2011. This includes a 33 percent increase in U.S. exports, directly supporting American jobs. Though Bulgaria is a small market of 7.3 million consumers, there are considerable commercial opportunities due to an educated work force and a strong work ethic, membership in the European Union, and approximately seven billion euro in EU funds to be spent in the coming years on infrastructure development and modernizing the country's institutions.

In conclusion, Bulgaria is a country with great potential for economic advancement, a proud history going back to ancient times, and warm feelings toward the United States. If I am confirmed, I will work with Congress and this Committee to expand and develop the strong partnership we have with Bulgaria, building on the fine work of outgoing Ambassador James Warlick and our country team at U.S. Embassy Sofia. As Ambassador, my highest priorities will be to advance United States interests in Bulgaria, including working together to counter organized crime and corruption, promoting economic growth and prosperity in both our countries, and strengthening security cooperation both bilaterally and within the NATO Alliance.

Madam Chairman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.