

Remarks to Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, Istanbul, Turkey

Submitted on June 25, 2012 - 10:30am

Categories:

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Monday, June 25, 2012

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Acting U.S. Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank Remarks at Luncheon Hosted by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), Istanbul, Turkey

Thank you. It's wonderful to be here with Ambassador Kirk, Ambassador Ricciardone, Consul General Kilner, and the distinguished members of our delegation.

I want to thank TOBB for hosting this luncheon. I would also like to recognize the American Business Forum in Turkey and the Turkish-American Business Association. Thank you all for your continued work to strengthen the economic ties between our countries.

I would also like to thank our Senior Commercial Officer Michael Lally, Principal Commercial Officer Manoj Desai and the entire Embassy team who have done a remarkable job putting together all our events on this trip.

Now, as you heard from Ambassador Kirk, it is clear that Turkey has come into its own as a global economic player.

You know the facts: In 2011, Turkey had an economic growth rate of over eight percent. And Turkey is now the sixteenth-biggest economy and an active member of the G-20, the WTO and the OECD.

Each day, we are uncovering new ways to link one of the world's fastest-growing economies—Turkey—with the world's largest economy—the United States.

At this crucial moment in the global economic recovery, we have a unique opportunity to lead together through what President Obama has called a “model partnership.”

And a critical part of this partnership is a deeper engagement on trade, investment and commercial issues.

Already, we have elevated our commercial relationship to the strategic level.

That's why tomorrow in Ankara, we will meet with Turkish leadership as part of the Framework for Strategic Economic and Commercial Cooperation—or FSECC—to continue framing the terms of our economic and commercial relationship, working to build a positive agenda that will lead to economic growth and shared prosperity.

In part because of this more strategic focus, our public and private sectors have worked intensely to foster stronger dialogue and greater collaboration in recent years. And we will continue to prioritize their input.

Already, we are seeing the first fruits of these interactions.

As you heard earlier, our bilateral trade of goods has nearly doubled in just two years to almost \$20 billion—a record high. What's more, so far in 2012, Turkish exports to the U.S. have been particularly strong at over one-half billion dollars each month.

The FSECC and the U.S.-Turkey Business Council are helping us build on this momentum.

And it's clear that we should now be looking at ways to strengthen our partnership beyond just trade.

In particular, we should foster stronger and more balanced bilateral investment.

U.S. companies have directly invested several billion dollars in Turkey over the years. In 2011, the U.S. was the fifth-largest foreign investor in Turkey.

Meanwhile, Turkish business investment in the U.S. remains under \$1 billion. The good news is that an increasing number of Turkey's businesses are seeing the benefits of choosing the U.S. for their next investments.

We want to empower more of them to do just that through the Commerce Department's SelectUSA initiative.

Through SelectUSA, our commercial service officers here in Turkey will help Turkish businesses that want to expand their global reach and build on their success by investing in America.

And I should note that if we increase Turkish investment into the United States, this will also help pull more Turkish exports to the U.S.—fostering even greater balance in our relationship.

The examples we have seen are encouraging. For example, Turkish-based Kermit makes durable and environmentally-friendly roofing tiles. Last year, local leaders from Muncie, Indiana, went to Turkey.

They hoped Kermit might put a new manufacturing facility in their city. They worked with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation to win that investment of \$12 million.

KermitUSA plans to create 70 jobs in Muncie over the next five years. They're the first tenant in Muncie's new Turkish Business Center.

We need more stories like that.

So my message to Turkey's business leaders this week is absolutely clear: We welcome your investments in America.

With stronger trade and investment as a foundation, we can look to do even more. Several examples come to mind.

We can work together to ensure the best possible infrastructure—including energy infrastructure—here in Turkey, helping drive Turkey toward its “10 by 23” goal.

Our businesses can form strategic partnerships to bring greater economic growth, development, and stability to countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

Our universities and researchers can share ideas and breakthroughs to help both our countries be more competitive and innovative in the global marketplace. And, we can work together to fully unleash Turkey's vibrant spirit of entrepreneurship, building on efforts such as the Global Entrepreneurship Program.

Clearly, we should do everything possible to seize these seemingly unlimited opportunities to bring more prosperity and more jobs to people in both of our countries.

But make no mistake. We must also address the barriers that get in the way.

The U.S. private sector has expressed concerns related to market access, transparency, predictability, intellectual property protections, and more.

And I know that Turkish businesses have questions and concerns of their own.

I look forward to discussing both the challenges and the opportunities in our relationship over these next two days. And I'm confident that we can reduce or even eliminate our challenges in order to take full advantage of the immense opportunities.

I'll close with a simple quote from Ahmet Ertegun.

He came to America in 1935 as the son of the first Ambassador to the United States from the Republic of Turkey.

Ahmet started Atlantic Records. He brought to the world the blues music of singers like Ray Charles, and the rock and roll of groups like the Rolling Stones. He was laid to rest here in Istanbul in 2006.

He once said, “Whatever you decide to do, the important thing is to do it well.”

Clearly, he lived that creed and knew how to identify talented, hardworking musicians who did their work well.

Today, the U.S. and Turkey have decided to lead together. The important thing, now, is that we do it well.

If we are successful, we will help usher in an era of greater prosperity for people in both countries—and, in fact, we will help lead the entire world to a more prosperous place.