

TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the subcommittee, it is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the work of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). RFE/RL is "smart power" at its best, as Secretary Clinton put it when she recently visited RFE/RL's new broadcasting headquarters in Prague. We are proud of our history. At the end of the Cold War, RFE/RL was widely credited for having played an important role in ending Soviet Communism. If I may say, we are proud that we continue to remain on the cutting edge of the struggle for human rights, democracy and media freedom.

Mr. Chairman, RFE/RL is referred to as a "surrogate broadcaster." In a word, our primary mission is to provide reliable domestic news and information to countries and areas where free media do not exist; or where indigenous independent media are not yet fully established.

The idea of RFE/RL rests on a simple conviction. We do not tell people what to think. We do not broadcast propaganda. The simple belief behind RFE/RL has always been that people will always choose truth over falsehood and freedom over tyranny when given a fair chance to decide. RFE/RL is guided by a set of American values that are, as President Obama likes to remind us, truly universal.

That is why, from 1950 when we began broadcasting, RFE/RL has sought to provide its audiences with accurate, fair-minded news and information. For more than a half a century RFE/RL has remained committed to honest, truthful reporting in the name of pluralism, tolerance and respect for diversity.

Mr. Chairman, RFE/RL broadcasts to 21 countries in 28 languages. We maintain bureaus in 19 countries. Our broadcasts reach Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Central Asia and the Caucasus, several important east European countries, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. And thanks to the support of the American Congress we will soon be extending our reach into the critical tribal areas of Pakistan.

If I might take a moment, permit me to share highlights of our current work with you.

RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

As Russia has trended toward greater authoritarianism, RFE/RL has become increasingly important for audiences seeking independent, reliable news and information. An outstanding team in Prague is complemented by a bureau in Moscow and an extensive network of freelancers across the 11 time zones of the Russian Federation. RFE/RL's Russian Service provided valuable news and analysis during President Obama's recent visit to Moscow. Last year at this time our Russian and Georgian colleagues were reporting on a build up of Russian forces and the escalation of tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi.

RFE/RL's executive editor tells the story of a recent visit to Moscow, where a taxi driver, listening to Radio Liberty, complained that he feels forced again, just like in Cold War times, to tune into our station for news he can trust. Russians turned to Radio Liberty, for example, for President Obama's speech during his recent trip to Moscow, as state television failed to make time for the address.

It's not easy reaching our audience in Russia. Three years ago we had 27 affiliate partners throughout the Russian Federation. Today we have seven, the majority having been lost due to political pressure. We don't intend to give up on radio. We do plan to devote even greater attention to our internet offerings and, as we do across our services, avail ourselves of the newest technologies. As Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy Judith McHale puts it, new technologies can be a "game changer."

Whether it's a report on a Russia-Azerbaijani oil deal; plans of a Russian journalist union to investigate more aggressively the murders of Russian reporters; or an inside look at how the Kremlin seeks to rewrite history or co-opt cinema, Radio Liberty will get the news out.

Mr. Chairman, I mentioned at the outset that we don't do propaganda. Let me add in this instance that we don't do anti-Russian programming either. Russia is an important nation with a remarkable history and culture. The colleagues of our Russian service are patriots. They may differ on a range of issues, but they all agree on one thing: that their country deserves decent, accountable government, free media and institutions that promote and protect pluralism and tolerance.

In Ukraine, Mr. Chairman, our work is guided of course by the very same values. Democratic development in recent years has fared better in Ukraine than it has in Russia. Still, the "Orange Revolution" had faltered. Ukraine faces a long, difficult march toward mature, stable democracy.

Our listeners tell us we need to stay to do our part in this process. We'll continue to report on religion and politics, culture, corruption and economics. We'll remain practical and

relevant. One recent program examined mining safety and labor issues. Another reported on maternity care options.

Let me also add, Mr. Chairman, that the quality work being done by my colleagues in Ukraine is expected to reach even more listeners. I'm pleased to inform you that we've just concluded an agreement with two national affiliates. This will enable us to widen our reach.

BELGRADE TO BELARUS

I recently had the privilege of visiting our bureau in Belgrade. As you know, Serbia has made progress in its transition to democracy. I met with President Tadic who continues to push his country to greater association and cooperation with the European Union. But there's much still to be done. Serbian society has not yet fully recovered from the extreme nationalism and anti-Americanism of the Milosevic years. The security services have not been fully reformed. RFE still has an important role to play, both in Serbia and elsewhere in the region.

Mr. Chairman, the Washington Post published an important editorial on Sunday, July 19th. The editorial referred to an open letter signed by former Czech President Vaclav Havel and other luminaries from central and eastern Europe. The letter voiced concern about new "nationalism, extremism, populism and anti-Semitism" in some of their countries. We share those concerns. Of course, there is no simple answer to these growing problems. But I'm firmly convinced that there is no meaningful solution that does not include a free flow of accurate information and liberal, democratic ideas. That's why we're still at work in the Balkans and in Moldova today.

During his recent trip to the region, Vice President Biden called for leaders to move beyond "narrow ethnic and political interests." The U.S. Congress can rest assured that RFE/RL will help to provide leaders and citizens alike in Bosnia, Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia--and in Moldova—with the reliable news and analysis they need to make informed decisions about their lives and future.

Mr. Chairman, in northeastern Europe, after six decades of service, we still broadcast to Belarus. Some refer to Belarus as "Europe's last dictatorship." The country's civil society is weak. Its opposition is divided. Alexander Lukaschenka's grip on power seems firm. After a recent visit to Minsk, however, I left inspired. I had met with student hunger strikers, independent journalists, NGO leaders and Western diplomats all of whom pressed upon me the need for Radio Liberty. One opposition leader likened Radio Liberty to the air we breathe.

A particular focus of our Belarus service is citizen journalism. We seek to give the people of Belarus a voice. By asking them to participate actively, by giving them their own platform, they're able to speak to each other. They're able to engage their own government and stimulate debate.

I can recall a case when an "editor-for-the-day" chose as her topic for a show, the prevention and treatment of breast cancer. Indeed, a vibrant free press is oxygen for civil society and RFE/RL does what it can to help.

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

Across Central Asia, where autocracy is the rule and Islamic extremism is on the rise, RFE/RL continues to provide in-depth coverage of important political, economic and social issues. We've tracked Turkmenistan's tentative steps toward ending the country's isolation. We've witnessed even greater authoritarianism in Uzbekistan. RFE/RL continues to foster liberal thought in Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan you'll find us reporting on issues such as a new law that seeks to curb access to the internet. In Tajikistan you'll see us covering subjects like corruption and extremism. Tajikistan has a 1,000 mile border with Afghanistan. I don't have to tell you, Mr. Chairman, of the grave consequences, should this fragile state become a failed state.

We are just as valuable to our audience in the Caucasus. In Chechnya terrible violence persists. In Armenia and Azerbaijan democrats struggle to gain traction. In Georgia's fragile democracy, old authoritarian tendencies do not die easily. Illiberal trends in Russia have had their effect in Russia's neighborhood, too. Mr. Chairman, count on us to stay the course, even when others lose confidence. RFE/RL never loses heart.

AFGHANISTAN, IRAN, IRAQ

In Afghanistan, RFE/RL delivers breaking news, in-depth reporting, and sound analysis on the struggle against resurgent Taliban forces. Radio Free Afghanistan (known as Radio Azadi, broadcasting in Dari and Pashtu) has played a critical role in promoting religious tolerance and civic responsibility. Surveys show that Radio Free Afghanistan is the most trusted source of news in the country, reaching nearly 50% of the adult population.

In Iran we're trusted as well, even if our audience is smaller. As you know, Mr. Chairman, the government of Iran jams our radio signals and blocks our website. Still, people have turned to our station Radio Farda ("radio tomorrow") for round-the-clock breaking news on the June 12th elections and their aftermath. If someone wants to learn about why it's forbidden to discuss the Iranian constitution or which women's rights activists have just received international awards, they tune into Farda. Recently, they turned to Farda for an exclusive interview with Iranian Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, who expressed dismay over her government's violent crackdown against peaceful protestors.

In Iraq, despite a dangerous environment, the journalists of Radio Free Iraq continue to provide accurate and objective coverage of that nation's difficult transition. Radio Free Iraq's civic-minded programming remains popular and relevant. When one of our colleagues was kidnapped, messages from Iraqi listeners poured in, imploring us not to retreat or to lose faith.

As you know, many of our journalists are often at risk. In the last two years we've had two colleagues murdered, three kidnapped, several beaten. Numerous others have been threatened. Some are subjected to financial blackmail. Recently, the father of one of our Afghan colleagues was kidnapped by Taliban fighters as he was leaving the mosque in his village one evening. In Turkmenistan, Mr. Chairman, a school teacher who regularly participated in RFE/RL roundtables was arrested and incarcerated in a psychiatric ward. Last year, Uzbek state television denounced our journalists and aired the addresses of families and relatives inside the country. Our journalists and their families risk a great deal.

I'm proud that our colleagues are recognized for their work. They win prestigious awards. They are cited in places like the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times, the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times. You will see some appearing on CNN, MSNBC, Fox television and elsewhere. But Mr. Chairman, this is no ordinary media organization. Our colleagues are motivated by a desire to serve their audiences and support and advance democratic values in their respective home countries. RFE/RL is an institution of idealism and ideals. This was the case during the Cold War. It's the same today.

Mr. Chairman, there is much I could add. We've had the privilege recently to interview General David Petraeus. We've hosted in Prague former Czech President Havel and the current Presidents of Estonia and Romania. We've also had the pleasure of hosting many of your colleagues. We were delighted that Chairman Wexler of this subcommittee could visit RFE/RL in Prague recently. Our colleagues appreciated his thoughtful interview on national security objectives and human rights policy.

NEW HEADQUARTERS, NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Mr. Chairman, progress in our business is slow and incremental, but we are in for the long haul. This year we moved into a new state-of-the-art headquarters in Prague. The facility is a six story, 20,942 square meter broadcast center featuring multimedia recording studios and a modern newsroom. The building is energy efficient. Most important, it is secure. Our move has been generously funded by the Congress, with the assistance of the Czech government, and I wish to take this opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to thank you and your colleagues for your support.

RFE/RL, with support of the BBG's International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) continues to broadcast over AM and FM bands, and shortwave radio. Taken together, RFE/RL programs are available on 254 local AM, FM, UkV and television affiliates across our broadcast region.

As technology has moved forward RFE/RL has not stood still. Today we have state-of-the-art websites and video content. We use texting, Facebook and Twitter to interact with our audiences and to allow them to interact with each other.

Mr. Chairman, given the unique challenges that we face in reaching our audience, we remain committed to employing the newest, most effective technologies. Of course, as fast as we employ new technologies, autocratic governments are quick to find their own countermeasures. RFE/RL has already been subjected to cyber attacks. We will continue to turn challenges into opportunities. The Pentagon, the State Department, NATO, friends in private industry and the government of Estonia, an expert in cyber terrorism, have all been very helpful.

Of course, RFE/RL is a news service, and in the end we cannot do our job without a proper appreciation of the needs of our audience. That's why we, in cooperation with the Broadcasting Board of Governors, routinely conduct listener panels as well as surveys to help us estimate audience size. Numbers matter. It's important that Radio Azadi is the most popular station in Afghanistan.

But numbers do not tell the whole story Mr. Chairman.

In January 2008, a man calling himself Mohammad Fairuse phoned into our Afghan service. He said he was from the province of Kandahar. He said that somebody had offered him \$500,000 Afghanis--about \$10,000--to "blow himself up." But, he said, he had been listening to our service and decided to find a way out. RFE/RL may be in the media business. As some of my colleagues remind me, however, our greatest export is hope.

We face challenges. In Russia and Central Asia we'll have to find new ways to reach our audiences. In Afghanistan and Pakistan we need to discover new means to help win the battle for hearts and minds. It's time for a fresh look at how we can meet the needs of the people of Iran in this critical period.

Mr. Chairman, as we move forward to meet these challenges, let me thank our oversight board, the Broadcasting Board of Governors. The BBG and its staff have assisted us in numerous ways, including crucially in our move this year. We count on their support.

Let me thank the hard working, dedicated individuals who work for RFE/RL in support of our mission. They work in finance and legal, human resources and technology, in audience research, program evaluation, communications and other important parts of our company. Their contribution is essential. I would be remiss if I didn't also mention the role played by our central newsroom colleagues. They are central to our success.

I also wish to thank the Congress for the indispensable role it has played in helping to shape RFE/RL's story. RFE/RL's story is a tale of human freedom, with crucial chapters still to be written.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to be with you today. I would be happy to take questions at this time.