

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR EUROPE & EURASIA
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STATEMENT BEFORE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, CENTRAL ASIA, AND
NONPROLIFERATION

Chairman Bera, Ranking Member Chabot, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak at this timely hearing.

The International Trade Administration (ITA) is committed to building a more prosperous economy by strengthening the competitiveness of U.S. industry and workers; promoting trade and investment; encouraging high standards for safety, health, labor, and the environment; respecting human rights; and enforcing fair trade rules and practices.

At ITA, our work is grounded in the conviction that economic security is national security. Between the economic disruptions of COVID-19 and the consequences of Russia's unlawful war in Ukraine, the importance of economic security is clearer today than ever before. At the same time, our security depends on our competitiveness which means ensuring fair and open markets, expanding export opportunities, especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises, and doubling down on investments into the United States.

Commerce Department Engagement in Central Asia

Eurasia is the front line of our "Compete in Europe and Eurasia" strategy, which aims to help U.S. companies compete successfully and counter growing non-market economic activity. The region represents an opportunity for U.S. companies to offer superior technology without the types of geopolitical strings we see attached to the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's regional economic initiatives like the Eurasian Economic Union.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to new economic challenges for the Central Asia countries, but, even in this context, underlying U.S. competitive advantages remain largely unchanged. U.S. companies are finding more receptive audiences as countries seek to avoid secondary effects of international sanctions and export controls and look for alternative trade routes to diversify trading partners and engage dependable western supply chains.

The Department of Commerce began a commercial dialogue with Uzbekistan's Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade to discuss opportunities and address market access challenges. We recently launched a similar dialogue with Kazakhstan's Ministry of Trade and Integration, and we expanded our presence in Kazakhstan by adding a second Commercial Officer in Almaty.

As a means of increasing engagement with host governments and U.S. company awareness, we rolled out a series of multi-market virtual events. As a result of this activity, we assisted an increasing number of companies to enter or expand in the region.

Our Special American Business Internship Training (SABIT) program leverages relationships with the U.S. business community to spur contacts with business managers throughout Eurasia to

help give them tools that they can employ in their own enterprises. Additionally, the Commerce Department continues regional technical assistance through its Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP). CLDP works closely with Central Asian governments on subjects critical to trade such as anti corruption, customs facilitation, digital trade, cybersecurity, women's economic empowerment, and intellectual property rights protection and enforcement.

Through our work with private sector partners and our network of domestic offices, we maintain a dialogue with U.S. companies to inform them of market opportunities for exports. Our work supports U.S. government priorities including alternative routes for transit of goods and commodities, resiliency of global supply chains and human rights due diligence; better environmental stewardship; and adoption of renewable energy options.

Plans for Further Engagement

We are taking a proactive approach to strengthen our relationships and support American businesses. We will hold training sessions focused on U.S. trade policy and best business practices for counterparts posted to Eurasian country embassies in Washington, D.C. This fall, Under Secretary for International Trade Marisa Lago will conduct a week-long visit to Central Asia, visiting Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. This will be the first high-level visit by a Commerce official to the region in several years.

In addition, Central Asia is integral to the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment Initiative launched in collaboration with our G7 partners last summer. This initiative aims to tackle immense unmet infrastructure needs in a way that promotes high standards and creates jobs at home.

Conclusion

While we are cognizant of the challenges U.S. businesses face in a region that has long been influenced by Russia and is seeing increased PRC economic activity, we believe that American companies are second to none when it comes to quality, value, customer service and technological advancement.

Leadership at Commerce has doubled down on efforts to reengage with the world, strengthening international commercial ties to bolster U.S. competitiveness—in trade and technology alike. Whether working bilaterally or multilaterally, ITA's global engagement is laser focused on creating new opportunities for U.S. businesses and their workers, by not only expanding exports, but also by holding accountable those who seek unfair advantages.

My thanks once again for the opportunity to share with you some of the work we are doing to support U.S. companies in Central Asia. I look forward to our discussion.