

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador-Designate James Jeffrey by
Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 24, 2008

Question:

What concrete steps will you take to press Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide?

Answer:

The United States has strongly encouraged Turkey to come to terms with the dark spots in its history and believes that establishing an honest dialogue within Turkey on these events would help facilitate reconciliation, economic prosperity, peace, and stability in the region and would help encourage a full understanding of these terrible events. If confirmed, I will strongly support this effort, and in particular will emphasize its importance to bilateral relations.

Question:

Do you dispute that U.S. diplomats serving in the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide documented a systematic, government-sponsored campaign “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part” the Armenian population?

Answer:

No. I have read many of the historical records from 1915-1916 related to U.S. diplomatic reporting on these events in Turkey, and I do not dispute that Ambassador Morgenthau, Ambassador Elkus, and other diplomats during that time period reported on what they described as an attempt to exterminate the Armenian population.

Question:

Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code is used by the Turkish government to stifle the debate on the facts of the Armenian Genocide. As the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey what specifically will you do to press the Turks to repeal Article 301 and promote freedom of speech in Turkey?

Answer:

The Administration is encouraged by recent amendments to Article 301, an article which had previously criminalized “insulting Turkishness;” the amendments reduce the possibility for imprisonment and require the Minister of Justice to determine whether to accept a case for prosecution. While the amendments do not go far enough to meet

European and American standards for free speech, the Minister's new role should help reduce the number of cases brought by overzealous prosecutors for political and ideological motives.

If confirmed, I will continue to press the Turkish authorities to further this progress by ending legal action against citizens for expressing their views, whether under Article 301 or other laws used to prosecute individuals for their speech, and to fulfill Turkey's OSCE and EU commitments.

Question:

What specific steps will you take to address Turkey's ongoing blockade of Armenia, different from what has been attempted before?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will continue U.S. efforts to support the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations and the opening of Turkey's border with Armenia. I am encouraged by increasing exchanges and commercial activity between Turkey and Armenia over the past several years, including the historic visit by President Gul to Yerevan at President Sargsian's courageous invitation, and will endeavor strongly to further such cooperation.

Improvements in travel between Turkey and Armenia over the last few years bode well for further economic openings between the two countries. Turkey lifted visa restrictions on Armenians in 2002. Armenians receive 90-day visas upon arrival at any Turkish port of entry. According to official Turkish estimates, more than 70,000 Armenian citizens live and work in Turkey without interference, sending substantial remittances back to their home country. Commercial flights operate twice weekly between Yerevan and Istanbul; during summer months a weekly charter service operates between Yerevan and Antalya. During the crisis in Georgia, Turkey permitted all flights to and from Yerevan to transit Turkish airspace. Trade between the two countries, mostly via Georgia, is valued at about \$60-\$120 million annually. If confirmed, I will seek to build on these opportunities as part of the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, including in close consultation with our Ambassador to Armenia.