

of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

TURKEY'S DECADE-OLD BLOCKAGE AGAINST ARMENIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening to discuss the decade-old blockade against Armenia by Turkey. This is one of the most egregious violations of international law by Turkey, and it is one that hardly gets any attention in the international community. I have been encouraged, however, by two recent reports on the Turkish blockade. The first was done by the State Department at the request of me and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KNOLLENBERG) and the second was written by members of the European Parliament.

Last year, members of the Congressional Caucus of Armenian Issues, of which the gentleman from Michigan and I are cochairs, identified a bill that would grant some Turkish goods duty free status. We protested very early about this, Mr. Speaker; and when it came time to include the bill, we obtained assurances from the administration that they would try to offset this provision for Turkey by pressing for Armenia's accession to the World Trade Organization. The letter from Deputy Secretary Armitage in this regard specifically stated, and I quote, "The administration is pressing Turkey to restore economic, political and cultural links with Armenia, and is encouraging Turkey to open its border with Armenia. We believe that such action would promote the economic development of both Turkey and Armenia." We were also promised, Mr. Speaker, a report by the State Department and the U.S. trade representative on the Turkish blockade by March 31 of this year.

Mr. Speaker, the report we received was entitled: "The Economic Impact of Turkish/Armenian Border Closure and Diplomatic Contacts with Both Parties on This Issue." I have included a copy of this report for the RECORD, Mr. Speaker. This report was only three pages long, Mr. Speaker; but it made clear some of the administration's views on the Turkish blockade. It stated: "The United States has long pressed for the opening of the border and the free flow of trade in the region." The report also listed various attempts that the United States has pressed Turkey on this issue and it stated: "Most recently the issue was raised with Turkish officials during Secretary Powell's April 2 visit to Ankara, Turkey."

Mr. Speaker, although members of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues are encouraged by Secretary Powell's helpful comments during a very tense time in the Middle East, we also encourage a greater commitment

by the administration to pressing Turkey to discontinue its incredibly damaging blockade.

The second report that I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, was coordinated with a conference sponsored by the European Parliament and the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council, and it included members of the European Parliament and business community of both Turkey and Armenia. The title of the conference was: "Still an Iron Curtain: Armenia-Turkey relations, 10 years after the border was closed."

This conference, Mr. Speaker, highlighted not only the economic numbers that justify the lifting of the blockade but also the real Armenian and Turkish citizens that want the decade-old interruption of their normal life and commerce to end. The TABDC estimates that 30 to 40 percent of Armenia's GNP is lost each year solely to the border closure. Every year the Armenian Caucus pushes for a robust level of U.S. aid for Armenia, but these efforts to help revive the economy and civil society are hamstrung by Turkey's insistence in joining ranks with its belligerent brother, Azerbaijan. The State Department report also included a 2001 World Bank report entitled: "Trade, Transport and Telecommunications in the South Caucasus: Current Obstacles to Regional Cooperation." This report repeats what is already common knowledge, that closed borders retard trade and development.

Mr. Speaker, it has been far too long for Armenia to suffer under the yoke of Turkey. This is the only situation in the world where one member of the WTO is blockaded by another. We have known for years about Turkey's illegal blockades; but since Armenia's accession to the WTO, Turkey's actions are egregious even more. There can be no excuse for Turkey to continue the blockade of Armenia and still hold itself up as a democracy, purportedly respecting the rights of all its citizens and neighbors.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I call on the Bush administration to continue to press Turkey hard to drop the 10 years of blockade against its sovereign neighbor. It is crucial for the United States to be seen in the international community as a peaceful arbitrator between enemies. The release of this burden on the peoples of Armenia and eastern Turkey would help the region recover from the market disruption after the fall of the Soviet Union. For peace to prosper, for democracy to truly take hold and for the economies of all the countries of the South Caucasus to move forward into the 21st century, relations must be normalized throughout the region. This region was mired in war and genocide before the rise of the Soviet Union. It should be an imperative of the Bush administration not to let this region slip back further economically.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, DC, April 7, 2003.

Hon. FRANK PALLONE, JR.,
House of Representatives.

DEAR MR. PALLONE: As promised in Deputy Secretary Armitage's letter dated September 20, 2002, regarding the Turkey/Armenia border issue, enclosed is the State Department Report, Economic Impact of Turkish/Armenian Border Closure and on Diplomatic Contacts with Both Parties on This Issue. Also enclosed for your information is the 2002 World Bank Report entitled Trade, Transport and Telecommunications in the South Caucasus: Current Obstacles to Regional Cooperation.

I am pleased to note that the Administration's efforts on Armenia's accession to the WTO were successful and that Armenia became a member in December 2002.

We hope this information is useful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

PAUL V. KELLY,

Assistant Secretary Legislative Affairs.

Enclosures: As stated.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TURKISH/ARMENIAN BORDER CLOSURE AND DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS WITH BOTH PARTIES ON THIS ISSUE

Citing Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan during the hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Government of Turkey closed its border with Armenia in March 1993. Turkey took this action following the Armenian seizure of Kelbajar, an Azerbaijani province outside Nagorno-Karabakh. Prior to that time, the border was open for one train a week between Kars in Turkey and Gyumri in Armenia. The United States has long pressed for the opening of the border and the free flow of trade in the region.

Azerbaijan, too, severed all economic relations with Armenia and has refused to allow any direct trade. The trains between the two countries had already ceased operating owing to harassment of crews and torn-up tracks on both sides. As a result, trade between land-locked Armenia and neighboring markets has been distorted and Azerbaijan and Turkey have cost the most direct transportation corridor between their countries and the Mediterranean and Caspian Seas. Although there has been a cease-fire and an ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh peace process since 1994, the governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey say they will only open their borders with Armenia only when there is a settlement to the conflict.

The full extent of these trade distortions will ultimately be eliminated only with the opening of both borders. However, assuming only the Turkish/Armenian border were reopened, one would expect: a reduction in transportation costs to and from Armenia, an increase in Turkish-Armenian trade, and an improved overall economic environment in Armenia and eastern Turkey. Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanian has stated that the border closures were among the major hindrances to increasing export volumes and attraction of foreign investments to Armenia. And it is true today that transportation costs and customs duties can increase the prices of Armenian imports and exports by as much as 100 percent and in some cases even more due to the need to ship goods via Georgia or Iran. If the Turkish-Armenian border were to open, some economic observers estimate that overall transportation costs to and from Armenia might fall by 50 percent or more.

Assuming that these savings lead to lower prices, one would expect overall trade between Turkey and Armenia, as well as transit traffic between Armenia and Western Europe via Turkey, to increase in real terms as

well. Regional trade has been declining as a result of the border closure in recent years and unofficial reports indicate that a reopening of the Turkey-Armenia border would lead to enhanced trade and enable Turkey to provide a larger portion of the nearly \$1 billion worth of goods that Armenia imports each year. Also, existing transportation routes preclude trade in certain products, including building stone, produce, flowers, and meats. Opening the border would open the possibility to a profitable trade in such goods. Placing a voltage adjuster near the border would allow the transfer of excess electricity generated in Armenia to the energy-poor regions of eastern Turkey.

This increased economic activity and the improved access to local markets would have a positive impact on the economic environment throughout the region, especially in Armenia and eastern Turkey. The full economic potential of the region is unlikely to be achieved until there is a normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well. The opening of that border would enable the reopening of the railroads from Armenia to Azerbaijan and the creation of an uninterrupted railroad link between Istanbul and Baku and the Mediterranean and Caspian Seas. This would lead to enhanced trade between Turkey and the Caspian and Central Asian regions.

The internal conditions in Armenia and throughout the region must be prepared to take full advantage of an open border. As stated in the World Bank's Trade, Transport and Telecommunications in the South Caucasus: Current Obstacles to Regional Cooperation, (attached) "In the long run a peace settlement will only generate widespread and sustainable benefits, if the institutional and physical milieu is sufficiently supportive. The realization of these potential benefits appears highly unlikely, at present, as the current institutional and physical milieu is anything but supportive and offers few incentives for new development." The World Bank report makes a very rough estimate of regional trade normalization, and therefore open borders with both Turkey and Azerbaijan. The report found that open borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan could result in significant increases in Armenia's exports (\$269-342 million) and GDP likely would rise up to 30-38 percent on a one-time basis. The percentage impact on Turkey's overall trade figures would be much less, but likely beneficial as well. It also bases its estimate on older trade figures (1999 or earlier).

The U.S. Government has budgeted approximately \$1.336 billion to fund assistance programs in Armenia, plus \$218 million in surplus Department of Defense and privately donated humanitarian commodities since Fiscal Year 1992. In Fiscal Year 2002, all U.S. Government agencies budgeted \$103 million for assistance programs in Armenia.

The Governments of Armenia and Turkey have stated that they are willing to pursue improved relations. The U.S. Government continues to press the Government of Turkey at every appropriate opportunity to open the border with Armenia. Most recently the issue was raised with Turkish officials during Secretary Powell's April 2 visit to Ankara. The U.S. Government also urges the Government of Armenia to continue to raise these issues with the Turkish government. U.S. officials brought up the subject during Foreign Minister Oskanian's visit to Washington in February. In its role as Co-Chairman of the OSCE's Minsk Group, the U.S. is actively engaged in the search for a peaceful, mutually-acceptable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including the normalization of regional trade relations, which would stabilize the situation in the region and provide the basis for greater eco-

nomical growth in Armenia, Azerbaijan and eastern Turkey.

On the diplomatic front, in 2002 the Armenian Government increased diplomatic contact with the Government of Turkey. It encouraged working-, mid-, and senior-level diplomatic contacts with Turkey and accepted a Turkish proposal for trilateral ministerial consultations. Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanian held three rounds of discussions with Turkish Foreign Minister Cem, including one that also included Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Guliev. Following the change in government in Turkey last summer, the Armenian Foreign Minister also met once with the Foreign Minister of the interim Turkish Government. The Government of Turkey altered its stance on Armenia's WTO accession last year, helping to pave the way for Armenia's accession in December 2002. Turkish President Sezer sent President Kocharian a letter congratulating him on his March 5 re-election.

Drafted: CG Istanbul, Jonathan Henick; EUR/CACEN: Margaret Pawlick; Embassy Yerevan David Gehrenbeck.

Approved: The Deputy Secretary.

□ 1930

CALIFORNIA AUTISM REPORT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHOCOLA). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, for some time I have been coming to the floor on a regular basis talking about the problem of the epidemic of autism. Just a few short years ago, 1 in 10,000 children were autistic. Today it is closer to 1 in 200. Think about that. We have had a 50-fold increase in the number of children who are autistic, and yet we have not had any real attention paid to the problem.

I wrote a letter to President Bush and to his administration, asking that there be a national conference called with leading scientists and experts from around the country and around the world to get together to try to find out why we are having such a terrible problem with this epidemic of autism, and this epidemic is one that is going to be with us for many, many, many years. These children who become autistic are going to grow up, live to be 65, 70 years old, but they are not going to be able in many cases to take care of themselves; so they are going to be dependent upon the taxpayers, upon society to take care of them, and so it is extremely important that we address this situation right now.

I have on this lectern beside me pictures of children from across the country who are autistic, and I and the parents of these children believe that many of them, maybe most of them, became autistic because of mercury that was in vaccines put in by the pharmaceutical companies under the title of thimerosal. Thimerosal is a preservative that was put in children's vaccines and other vaccines for a long time, since the 1940s, and now that we give children 25 to 30 vaccines before they start kindergarten, the cumu-

lative effect of all that mercury going into their system and into their brain is an epidemic of autism, and yet nothing is being done about it.

We passed a Vaccine Injury Compensation Fund that was supposed to provide a nonadversarial approach to helping solve these problems of these autistic children and their families because of the huge amount of money that they have to lay out to take care of their children, and yet it has not worked. We have been trying to correct that, but we have not received the kind of cooperation from the other body that we need to get that job done.

Today we have got a new report from California, the Department of Developmental Services, and it says that in the past 4 years the amount of autistic children that have been found has doubled, in 4 years. That is in the State of California alone, and this has been going on all across the country. In some parts of the country, the number of children that are born and becoming autistic is much greater than 1 in 200. It is down to 150 in parts of New Jersey and Georgia and elsewhere in this country, and we must pay attention to it. We must get to the bottom of it, and we must provide a mechanism for these parents and these children to be taken care of before it is too late.

As I said before, it was 1 in 10,000 children were autistic. Now it is 1 in about 200. There has been almost a 300 percent increase in autism in 11 years, from 1987 to 1998, and in California they said that their report has led to numerous subsequent epidemiological studies in autism throughout the United States as well as the global health community, and yet we have not as a Nation addressed this problem.

It has been said in this study that in just a short period of time in California, autism will be more prevalent than cancer in children, than diabetes in children, Down Syndrome in children, and within 3 to 4 years will surpass in total number of cases both cerebral palsy and epilepsy in California. That is just California alone.

This is a silent epidemic, and most people in America who are not conversant with what autism is do not even realize it, and many of my colleagues unfortunately do not understand the gravity of this situation. So tonight and every night I am going to be coming down here. Tonight I am talking about the study that was done in California, but I am going to be coming down here reading letters from autistic families, from parents of autistic children who have noplacement to turn and nowhere to go, because when they go to the Vaccine Injury Compensation Fund for support and help, they are turned down without any review of their situation. We are trying to open that up.

There is about \$2 billion in that fund right now, and we need to make it non-adversarial. If children are damaged by vaccines, if they are damaged by the mercury in vaccines, then those parents ought to be having access to that