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1101 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW • Suite 600 • Washington, DC 20004 • T +1 202.756.4544 • F +1 202.756.7553  
info@azerbaijanamericaalliance.org • www.azerbaijanamericaalliance.org

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## State Department energy official nominated as Azerbaijan ambassador



**Washington, D.C— July 8, 2014---** President Barack Obama has nominated a senior State Department energy official to be the U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan, the former Soviet nation that is seeking to ship its vast reserves of offshore natural gas to Europe.

Robert Francis Cekuta has been principal deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Energy Resources at the State Department since 2011. He previously served a year as deputy assistant secretary for Energy, Sanctions, and Commodities in the department's Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs.

His nomination comes as Azerbaijan's government has been asking the Obama administration to be more vocal in pushing for completion of the \$45 billion Southern Corridor pipeline project that would bypass Russia and send Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea natural gas to Europe via Italy. The relevance of the pipeline project has been particularly acute during the skirmish between Russia and Ukraine.

Cekuta has a long career in foreign services stretching across multiple administrations, including as a senior economic official at the U.S. embassies in Kabul, Afghanistan, Tokyo and Berlin.

*The Working Group of the U.S. Congress on Azerbaijan which has operated since 2004, plays a special role in the development of relations between Azerbaijan and the United States. For more information, please visit the Alliance website at [www.azerbaijanamericaalliance.org](http://www.azerbaijanamericaalliance.org)*

###Contact:  
Algirde Pipikaite  
[Info@azerbaijanamericaalliance.com](mailto:Info@azerbaijanamericaalliance.com)  
+1 (202) 756-4546