

Testimony of Julieta Valls Noyes
Nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia
May 20, 2015
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia. I am honored by the confidence placed in me by the President and Secretary Kerry. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and the Congress in advancing U.S. interests in Croatia.

I am a first generation American, the daughter of Cuban refugees who built a new home in the United States, and I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to repay that debt with service to our great country. It is a personal pleasure to be accompanied today by my husband, Nick, a recently retired Foreign Service officer, and our children Alexandra, Nicholas, and Matthew. As a Foreign Service family of thirty years we treasure many happy memories from our time living in Italy, Panama, Spain, Guatemala, and Mexico, as well as here at home.

For the last two years, I have managed U.S. relations with the European Union and have worked on trade, energy, security, and other issues in the EU. I also have overseen the work of 12 U.S. embassies and 19 consulates, covering 15 Western European countries, managing a broad range of political, economic,

security, and consular issues, and carrying out outreach to publics and governments. My work with nine NATO members on security issues, defense sales, and participation in the Pentagon's review of force realignment in Europe has provided me useful lessons for directing the mission in Croatia. As Deputy Chief of Mission at our Embassy to the Holy See, I learned how to engage the Catholic leadership, which is important in Croatia. In all my assignments, I have worked hard to develop and empower my teams, and to foster high performance and strong morale; I would do the same in Zagreb.

Our bilateral relationship with Croatia is strong and productive. Just last week, Assistant Secretary Victoria Nuland met with Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic to discuss how our partnership can advance our many common interests. In April, the United States Embassy and private sector partners hosted the fifth Brown Forum in Croatia, a regional conference convened to focus on how to spur entrepreneurship and increase trade and investment between the United States, Croatia, and the region.

Croatia has come a long way since its hard-won independence, becoming a NATO member in 2009 and the European Union's 28th and newest member in 2013. The citizens of Croatia deserve warm congratulations for all they have accomplished. And Croatia has generously shared the lessons it has learned, assisting its western Balkan neighbors in their aspirations for Euro-Atlantic

integration. The United States supports the strides Croatia has made towards nurturing regional cooperation. We encourage the Croatian government to continue to press forward and, in so doing, help address the remaining bilateral and regional legacies of the Balkans conflict.

Croatia is an active and committed EU member. A Croatian Commissioner leads the EU's important work on international cooperation and development. Croatian members of the European Parliament participate on the critical Budget, Economic, Foreign Affairs and other committees. Croatia's leaders have endorsed a U.S.-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or T-TIP.

As a reliable NATO ally, Croatia makes valued contributions to global security. We appreciate its commitment to the former International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and now in the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, and in the Kosovo Force (KFOR), where Croatia provides vital helicopter lift support. Croatia is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. It was among the first countries to send OSCE observers into Crimea, and continues to provide monitors for eastern Ukraine. Brave Croatian men and women are participating in 11 peacekeeping missions around the world.

Croatia now enjoys a mature democratic society, yet there is more to be done. It continues to be challenged by sluggish growth and far-too-high unemployment. The Croatian government has recognized the urgent need for

reforms to welcome business investment, eradicate excessive red tape, and increase transparency and predictability for businesses. The United States will support Croatian reforms that lead to sustainable economic growth and prosperity. We want to strengthen the foundation for mutual economic expansion and trade relations.

If confirmed, I will seek to further solidify our partnership with Croatia, building on the exemplary work of our outgoing ambassador and my good friend, Ken Merten, and our country team in Zagreb. As ambassador, I will promote several interconnected priorities in Croatia: championing economic growth and prosperity, helping Croatia realize its potential to become a regional energy hub, strengthening the capabilities of a willing security partner, and fostering regional stability. My experience working directly with the European Union and its western European members has afforded me insights into our highest objectives with Europe. If confirmed, I will foster Croatia's contributions to U.S.-EU relations in pivotal areas such as the transatlantic trade deal, energy security, and collaboration between our countries in the digital sphere. I will also actively uphold our strategic alliance in NATO, the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, the Counter-ISIL Coalition, the State Partnership Program with the Minnesota National Guard, and more.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I welcome any questions you may have.