

Statement of Nathalie Rayes
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 26, 2023

Madam Chair Duckworth, Ranking Member Hagerty, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am grateful for the privilege of speaking with you today as the President's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia. Thank you, Chairman Menendez and Senator Padilla, for your kind words of support.

I am thankful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in my ability to serve in this role and represent the interests of the American people. If confirmed, serving as Ambassador would be a great honor, and I pledge to work with this committee and Congress to advance U.S. interests and priorities in Croatia.

I am here today due to the love and support of my family. My husband, Tarek Samad, devotes his time to family and to finding cures for brain diseases. We are blessed with two boys here with me today, Julian and Alexander. Both are kind and respectful, and I am proud to be their mother. I also have my mother and my wise older sister here today and my father watching from above. I am also thankful to my friends who are here and those that are watching from home.

I have dedicated my career to international relations, cultural exchange, and civic engagement, in public, private and nonprofit spheres. I have come full circle from a young fellow at the United States Embassy in Cairo, where I was first exposed to the world of diplomacy to have proudly served for over six years on the board of the Woodrow Wilson Center and, as of 2022, on the Senate-confirmed board of the United States Institute of Peace.

I embody the American dream, having followed in the footsteps of my immigrant parents. From them, I learned discipline, dedication, hard work, and the endless possibilities of our United States of America.

I began my career in Los Angeles, the world's 20th largest economy, where one of the biggest Croatian diasporas has flourished in San Pedro since the late 1800s. I created Los Angeles's first Office of Immigrant Affairs, managed intergovernmental relations, trade, and protocol and championed civic partnerships by establishing international alliances and Sister Cities with San Salvador, Ischia, Beirut, and Yerevan.

I also created powerful coalitions in the private sector that improved civil society and strengthened the bridges between the United States and Mexico. I am very proud of spearheading several initiatives to promote open and nonpartisan dialogue between the United States and Mexico.

My nonprofit sector experience has cemented my belief that transparency, accountability, and representation safeguard a stable democracy, which we are fortunate to have in our great nation. Most importantly, I have learned the power to convene, and that success is reached by building trustworthy partnerships. If confirmed, I will use these skills to advance United States interests and values in Croatia.

Croatia and the United States have strong security, economic, and cultural ties. Croatia embraces transatlantic cooperation and shares our commitment to safeguarding democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. As a close NATO Ally, Croatia is a strong advocate on many joint issues, and if confirmed, I will work to deepen our defense and security cooperation and continue to build a bilateral relationship based on our common values.

If confirmed, my number one priority will be the safety and security of Americans in Croatia. Second, I will work with Croatia to strengthen transatlantic security, counter Russia's war against Ukraine, and combat malign activities and corrosive investment in the region. Third, as Croatia is poised to be an energy exporter, I will work with Croatia to expand its role in advancing energy security and diversification. Fourth, I will leverage our strong partnership to advance EU accession for all Western Balkan countries, which includes promoting respect for democracy and human

rights and increasing U.S. trade and investment. Fifth, I will deepen the connection between our two nations by increasing cultural exchanges, youth-focused initiatives, and cooperation between academic institutions to engage scholars, students, and teachers.

In July 2013, Croatia became the latest member of the European Union, and at the beginning of this year, Croatia adopted the euro and became a member of the border-free Schengen Area. If confirmed, my goal is to inform the American private sector that Croatia is open for U.S. business. I will work with Croatia to help advance joint U.S.-EU priorities and encourage Croatia to help its neighbors pursue their own EU accession aspirations. I believe that accession reforms are as much an economic incentive as a democracy-building project, driving prosperity and trade.

If confirmed, I will proudly serve the United States with empathy, humility, and integrity.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer your questions.