

Statement of George P. Kent
Nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Estonia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 29, 2022

Chairwoman Shaheen, Ranking Member Portman, distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this hearing today. It is an honor and a privilege to appear before you as the President's nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Estonia. I would like to thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to ensure the security and welfare of U.S. citizens in Estonia and the hard-working Americans and Estonians at our Mission in Tallinn. I will also work to advance regional security and NATO cooperation at a time of Russia's war in Ukraine, deepen our bilateral trade and entrepreneurship ties, particularly in the digital economy in which Estonia excels, and combat hybrid threats and transnational crime, with a particular focus on cyber.

Madam Chair, with your permission, I would like to acknowledge and introduce some family members who are here with me today. I am deeply grateful to my wife Velida for moving across three continents with me over the past 27 years, and my son Georgiy, for embracing our peripatetic life and the constant changes in schools and friends.

It has been my honor to serve our nation for the last thirty years, in Central Asia, in Central and Eastern Europe, in Southeast Asia, and now as the President's nominee to be the Ambassador to Estonia. The pursuit of a Europe whole, free, and at peace has been the generational goal of our diplomacy during my career.

This year the United States and Estonia celebrate 100 years of bilateral relations. Estonia exemplifies what it means to be a committed member of NATO, consistently investing in its armed forces with over two percent of GDP while deploying globally on security and peace missions, even as it shores up its own borders to deter Russia, which it considers an existential threat. If confirmed, I will work to ensure Estonia continues to strengthen its capabilities and ability to contribute to its own defense and operate jointly with the United States and other NATO Allies.

This will strengthen European and transatlantic deterrence and defense, improve the credibility of the collective security architecture, and dissuade increasingly assertive and dangerous activities by Russia and other adversaries. Estonia has been a leader in the region's response to Russia's unjust war in Ukraine. Estonia is the largest contributor per capita of assistance to Ukraine, contributing more than \$255 million in military aid this year, as well as hosting almost 60,000 Ukrainian refugees, five percent of Estonia's resident population.

2022 marks the 82nd anniversary of the 1940 Welles Declaration under which the United States refused to recognize the forced annexation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union. Estonia showed great strength and determination in overcoming Soviet occupation, restoring independence in 1991, making extraordinary progress to become a member of NATO

and the European Union in 2004, and emerging as an example of prosperity and transparent governance to the region and to the world. If confirmed, I am committed to working with Estonia to promote our common goals of democratic values, human rights, and the rules-based international order around the world.

The United States is also working with Estonia to deepen our trade and investment ties, build back better from the global pandemic, set the rules of the road for the 21st century economy including reliable supply chains, strengthen energy security and the transition to the green economy, and stand united against non-market and coercive economic practices. Estonia is also a world leader on digital services and cyber security. Estonia hosts the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn, which the United States joined in 2011. The United States and Estonia share a vision of a secure and open cyberspace, in which all countries behave responsibly. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing our strong cooperation on cyber issues.

Madam Chair, the relationship between the United States and Estonia is strong. Estonia has played an active role in advancing our shared security, economic, and social values. Our relationship with Estonia is as important now as it has ever been. If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to representing my country in advancing U.S. interests and in deepening our long-standing and critical cooperation with Estonia as we work together to strengthen our already productive relationship in confronting regional and global challenges and promoting transatlantic priorities worldwide.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have addressed you today and am at your disposal to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.