

**Testimony of Tracey Ann Jacobson
Ambassador-Designate to Kosovo
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 21, 2012**

Madam Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the third United States Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo.

I have had the privilege of serving twice as U.S. Ambassador – to Turkmenistan and Tajikistan – where my teams and I worked successfully on a range of issues including the promotion of democracy and human rights, economic development, and security cooperation. Prior to that I was Deputy Chief of Mission in Latvia, where my main focus was to support Latvia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. I believe these experiences have prepared me well to serve as Chief of Mission in Kosovo.

This Administration, as the one before it, has repeatedly made clear its commitment to Kosovo's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, and its integration into regional and international institutions. This commitment will be the guiding principle of my

Mission, if I am confirmed. After four years of independence, Kosovo has come a long way. It is now recognized by eighty-six countries and is a member of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Kosovo will likely reach a major benchmark with the end of supervised independence and the closure of the International Civilian Office this year. The International Steering Group must first determine that Kosovo has adopted the constitutional and legislative amendments to ensure that key principles of the Comprehensive Status Proposal are incorporated and preserved, and progress on this is well underway.

The goal of completing the integration of the Balkans into a Europe whole, free and at peace has been the overarching, non-partisan approach of successive U.S. administrations since the 1990s. Euro-Atlantic integration remains a top policy priority in our relationship with Kosovo, as with all its neighbors, because this will promote necessary domestic reforms and regional cooperation. Kosovo has recently made several concrete steps in its advancement towards this future. This year, Kosovo and its partners welcomed the European Commission's launch of a visa liberalization dialogue and the announcement of its intention to

launch a Feasibility Study for a Stabilization and Association Agreement. The European Union (EU) consensus decisions taken in February and last December mean that all EU members, even the five that have not recognized Kosovo's independence, believe that Kosovo's progress on a European path is good for the region and for Europe as a whole.

Kosovo's relations with its neighbors, in particular Serbia, are crucial to regional stability and integration. This is why the U.S. has fully backed the ongoing EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, which has achieved significant progress since its launch last March. The two sides have concluded several agreements that will improve the daily lives of the citizens of both countries, such as the restoration of two-way trade, mutual recognition of university diplomas, and the ability to move freely across each others' borders. The political leadership in Kosovo has shown maturity and foresight in making some tough decisions to reach these agreements, which have not been without domestic critics. I believe the political will shown by Kosovo's leadership to reach practical agreements with its neighbor is also

motivated by the understanding that Serbian progress on its European path is good for Kosovo too. The U.S. was able to support Kosovo every step along this way, as it demonstrated maturity and a forward-looking approach. If confirmed, I will ensure that the United States Government continues that support and backing for Kosovo's positive development.

In the development of its democracy, Kosovo has a daunting agenda with many pressing reform priorities. The U.S. must continue to focus on advancing Kosovo's progress as a multi-ethnic democracy, ensuring respect for the rights of all of Kosovo's communities – Kosovo Serbs, Roma, and others – and the preservation of their cultural and religious heritage. Kosovo's reform agenda also includes tackling corruption, cementing rule of law, further developing the energy sector, reducing barriers to business and investment, and strengthening public administration to improve governance.

Like other post-socialist societies, Kosovo still has much to do in developing the conditions for sustained, private sector-led expansion. It must reduce red tape, decentralize decision-making authority, and –

most importantly -- ensure an independent judiciary and efficient court system to see that investors have legal certainty and timely resolution of disputes. There are some promising signs: as annual economic growth continues, spending remains within budgetary limits and inflation is stable.

NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) remains a relevant and crucial presence in Kosovo, helping to maintain, pursuant to its mandate, a safe and secure environment throughout the country. Its role has been particularly challenging in northern Kosovo, where the tensions have run high, and hardline Serb elements deny Kosovo's authority and the full freedom of movement for the international community. On several occasions, this tension has escalated to violence, resulting in injuries to several KFOR troops, including Americans. Given this situation, KFOR will likely remain at current troop levels for the foreseeable future. A solution to the situation in the north and normalization of relations require a durable *modus vivendi* that respects Kosovo's sovereignty, takes into account the views of the citizens of the north, and allows both Kosovo and Serbia to proceed on their respective Euro-Atlantic paths.

Madam Chairman, if confirmed, I will work with you, Members of this Committee and Congress, the Government and people of Kosovo, our European allies, the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX), NATO, the OSCE and the UN, as well as regional partners to meet our shared goal of building a more stable, democratic, peaceful and prosperous Balkan region.

In my current position as the Deputy Director of the Foreign Service Institute, I have the privilege to mentor students at all levels from 47 government agencies. So I would like to emphasize, as I have during previous appearances before this Committee, that if confirmed I will be not only the President's representative to Kosovo, but also the leader of an interagency team, and I will take seriously my responsibility to ensure a positive, productive, safe environment for the people of my Mission.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.