

**Testimony of Brent Hartley  
Ambassador-Designate to Slovenia  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
July 15, 2014**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

I am honored to be here before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the eighth Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Slovenia.

I am deeply grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Kerry have placed in me. If confirmed by the Senate, I will do my utmost to justify their faith in my ability to further enhance the strong U.S.-Slovenia relationship.

My 33-year Foreign Service career has been largely dedicated to advancing our relations with European Allies and Partners. If confirmed, I will work with the excellent Country Team at Embassy Ljubljana to promote our strategic, economic and political interests with Slovenia.

In its twenty-three years of independence, Slovenia has built a laudable record of international engagement and commitment. This year, Slovenia is celebrating its ten-year anniversary of NATO and EU membership. Slovenian soldiers have served side-by-side with U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan since 2003. Slovenians have served in international peacekeeping missions in hot spots around the world, from Lebanon to Kosovo, from Syria to Mali. Slovenia has also been a close U.S. partner in the United Nations and other international venues to defend human rights, combat human trafficking, and safeguard religious freedom around the globe. In particular, Slovenia has raised the profile of the critical challenge of protecting civilian populations during conflict.

In this regard, Slovenia has placed a high priority on promoting stability and development in the Balkans by encouraging the integration of Balkan states in Euro-Atlantic structures such as NATO and the EU. From an operational standpoint, Slovenian soldiers deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR) in 1997, and they continue to reinforce Bosnian stability by contributing to the EU's successor mission, ALTHEA. Slovenia has been a major KFOR contributor in Kosovo from

the very beginning and still maintains a strong presence of over 300 soldiers. Slovenia also remains dedicated to addressing the safety of civilians and twin challenge of demining and conventional weapon destruction through ITF Enhancing Human Security initiative.

Our security relationship is only getting broader. We welcome Slovenia's continued strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and its implementation of international sanctions in the face of Russia's occupation of Crimea. We are working together to address the urgent humanitarian challenges in Syria, respond to Iran's nuclear program, and to promote Libya's stability and prosperity. And we are working with Slovenia and throughout the EU on energy security issues, including the need to diversify energy sources to mitigate dependence on Russian gas.

Slovenia's relationships with the U.S. European Command and the Colorado National Guard through the State Partnership Program are excellent. In the context of the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) and NATO, Slovenia hosts several top-tier training exercises annually. The Slovenian Armed Forces' 21-year relationship with the Guardsmen of Colorado has resulted in hundreds of military exchanges, six co-deployments in support of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, and a rich foundation for future cooperation.

Unfortunately, severe defense budget cuts resulting from the last several years of economic difficulties have left Slovenia well below the NATO goal of spending two percent of GDP on defense.

If confirmed, I will work with the Country Team to encourage the Slovenian government to reverse this worrying trend in defense budget cuts and to address the structural economic challenges exposed by the country's economic downturn since 2009.

Outgoing Prime Minister Bratusek's government and the Slovenian Central Bank took a positive step in 2013 to recapitalize Slovenia's banking sector and restore market confidence. Yet many challenges remain. The United States and the European Union agree that Slovenia needs to reduce the public sector's role in the economy and repair significant fiscal imbalances.

Although the Eurozone recovery has brought some economic relief, the country's next leaders must take urgent action to stabilize the banking sector, rationalize public finances, and follow through on commitments to

privatize state-owned enterprises. We are looking forward to working with the new government, once it is formed following the July 13 elections, on these challenges.

These vital economic reforms will help ensure a level playing field for U.S. business, a high priority for any Chief of Mission. If confirmed, I will seize every opportunity to build Slovenian support for the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and to open doors for U.S. trade and investment in an EU market with real untapped potential for U.S. companies. Approximately sixty U.S. companies already operate in Slovenia – including for example a significant Goodyear production facility. Through continued intensive commercial diplomacy, I am confident that Slovenia will become more open to American investments and a more attractive destination for American exports.

Even as Slovenia works to recognize its economic potential, it has only recently begun to deal with a complex and painful historical legacy – concerning different narratives of violence during and after World War II – that profoundly affects contemporary political, social, and even economic life. Some Slovenian leaders, most notably President Pahor, have stepped forward to urge dialogue and reconciliation. Embassy Ljubljana supports this effort because it is in both U.S. and Slovenian interests: open dialogue regarding these events can help create a political environment more conducive to addressing, for example, Slovenia's difficult economic circumstances. Slovenia will be a stronger Ally and trade partner as it finds a way to deal with its past.

Finally, if confirmed, my Embassy team and I will continue to engage the Slovenian public on all levels to realize these goals. In addition to continuing joint cultural initiatives that have proven popular with Slovenians, we will work to promote our top policy priorities through exchange and educational programs that encourage entrepreneurship, innovation, and greater regional and international cooperation. We will advocate accurate reporting on the United States to media that are often overly skeptical of U.S. foreign policy. And we will go directly to the people to talk about U.S. policy and values through our ever-expanding toolkit of social media products. Ultimately, it's the people-to-people outreach and diplomacy that can provide the foundation for us to achieve our policy objectives.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.