

**Statement of Adam Sterling
Ambassador-Nominee to the Slovak Republic
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Thursday, March 10, 2016**

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee,

Appearing before you as President Obama's nominee to serve as United States Ambassador to the Slovak Republic is an honor and a privilege. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Kerry for the trust and confidence they have placed in me.

Mr. Chairman, I bring 26 years of Foreign Service experience to this position. For more than 20 of those years, my partner in all aspects of this global life has been my wife, Veerle Coigneux, a native of Belgium, whom I am pleased to introduce to you. In addition to representing her adopted country abroad with enthusiasm and finesse, Veerle works to improve global health as an expert consultant to the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Our family diplomatic team includes as well our 17-year-old daughter, Elka, and 15-year-old son, Bram. I am exceptionally proud to introduce them to you as well.

My experience includes leading two U.S. missions overseas and advancing U.S. interests across Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. I am now serving for the second time as chargé d'affaires in the Netherlands, after serving two periods as chargé d'affaires in Azerbaijan. My background with the Slovak Republic and the rest of Central Europe includes more than two years as Director for Central and Eastern European Affairs on the National Security Council staff.

Less than a quarter century after the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia, I am happy to report to you that the Slovak Republic has emerged as a trusted NATO ally and stalwart member of the transatlantic community. Located in the heart of Central Europe, a democratic and increasingly prosperous Slovakia serves as a powerful example and source of stability in this strategically important region.

The accession of Slovakia and six other Central and Eastern European countries to the NATO Alliance in 2004 strengthened our collective security. Slovak soldiers

have participated in a variety of NATO operations, including in Iraq and in Afghanistan, where they remain today as part of the Resolute Support Mission.

Slovakia has also shown a strong willingness to invest in its defense capabilities, committing to ramp up defense spending from approximately 1 percent of GDP to 1.6 percent by 2020. Last year's decision to purchase nine U.S.-made Black Hawk helicopters through the Foreign Military Sales program is tangible evidence of Slovak progress in this area. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to build upon this modernization momentum and support Slovakia's transition away from legacy military equipment to modern, NATO-interoperable systems needed to bolster their capacity to secure NATO's eastern flank.

Beyond its growing role within NATO, Slovakia has provided significant support to the people of Ukraine. By enabling reverse flows of natural gas to Ukraine starting in late 2014, Slovakia has helped Ukraine get through the winters and gain negotiating leverage with Russia over future gas supplies. Slovakia also continues to draw from its recent history to advise Ukraine on difficult, but needed reforms. If confirmed, I will seek even closer bilateral cooperation on issues affecting Ukraine, including maintaining unity on sanctions on Russia over its aggression in eastern Ukraine and attempted annexation of Crimea, providing support for Ukraine's choice to integrate with Europe, and opposing Russia's efforts to cut out Ukraine as a gas transit country.

One of the newer members of the EU and the Eurozone, Slovakia has one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. It is not surprising that our economic partnership also continues to grow, with some 140 American companies operating in Slovakia and trade between our two countries exceeding \$2.5 billion in 2015. While economic progress continues, Slovakia, like many former Warsaw Pact countries, continues to face the challenges of fighting corruption and institutionalizing rule of law. If confirmed, I will make promoting opportunities for U.S. business and improving Slovakia's investment climate one of my top priorities. This will include support for conclusion in 2016 of a deep and comprehensive trade agreement under the U.S.-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

If confirmed, I will continue our long-standing support to the government of Slovakia on judicial reform, where notable progress has been made in recent years but where significant work remains to be done. We will also continue our vigorous dialogue on human rights and advocate for the rights of minorities, for greater

inclusion of Roma, and for the human rights and dignity of all refugees and migrants, regardless of background.

People-to-people ties between our countries have strengthened with Slovakia's greater integration into the transatlantic community. If confirmed, I will look for new ways to expand and develop exchange programs that build on ties first created by the waves of Slovak immigrants who came to the United States over a century ago and helped build our country's industry and culture. Slovak-Americans remain today a vital element in the U.S. relationship with Slovakia. I will, if confirmed, pursue a strong partnership with that community.

We have several agencies represented at Embassy Bratislava. Besides the Department of State, there is the Department of Defense and the Department of Commerce, with others like the Department of Homeland Security making frequent visits from neighboring Vienna. If confirmed, I will manage the Embassy as an efficient, effective and secure operation driven by a commitment to advance America's interests.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Committee, Slovakia shares our basic democratic values, as well as our long-term goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace. If given the opportunity, I will do my utmost to further strengthen and leverage our shared aims. I would welcome you to Bratislava to see first-hand our talented Embassy staff, who work tirelessly in pursuit of American interests. I thank you again for your willingness to consider my nomination and would welcome your questions.