

Statement of Jeffrey Hovenier
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo
Submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 5, 2021

Madam Chair, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo. I'm humbled by the trust and confidence the President and Secretary of State have placed in me, and I hope to earn your trust as well. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and the Congress to advance the United States' interests and priorities in and with Kosovo.

Thank you for this opportunity to recognize my wife, Laura Hovenier, and to thank her for her love, counsel, support, and patience. She and our four children – Helen Sabin, Peter Hovenier, Megan Atkin, and Julia Hovenier – have made significant sacrifices in this rewarding but challenging life we have shared as a Foreign Service family.

If confirmed, I would be particularly honored to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo – a country that emerged from the horrors of the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the ethnic cleansing of the Milosevic regime. The United States played an essential role, together with our European partners, to protect the people of Kosovo and support them in their effort to establish a multi-ethnic, democratic country. I had the good fortune to participate in these efforts in various capacities, including as a member of the UN Team led by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari that developed the "Ahtisaari Plan" and paved the way for Kosovo's independence.

The people of Kosovo have never forgotten America's role and steadfast support over the last twenty-two years. As a result, Kosovo is one of the most pro-American countries in the world and a close partner. Following democratic elections in February, a new government has taken office with a decisive mandate, and the U.S.-Kosovo relationship remains positive and productive.

I want to particularly acknowledge the early and generous response of the people and government of Kosovo in hosting evacuees from Afghanistan. The Government of Kosovo agreed to temporarily host up to 2,000 at-risk Afghans, many of whom served the U.S. government and NATO at great personal risk.

Receiving refuge when in need is something that many Kosovans intimately remember.

If confirmed, I intend to lead a whole-of-government effort to advance the following priorities:

Continuing U.S. support for a sovereign, democratic Kosovo, as this remains essential to stability in the region and key to our long-standing strategic goal of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

Supporting the EU-facilitated Dialogue to normalize Kosovo-Serbia relations, which, to quote President Biden, “should be centered on mutual recognition.” Normalization is essential to regional stability and security and will pave the way for both countries’ integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutions. If confirmed, I will encourage Kosovo to engage constructively, flexibly, and with urgency.

Continuing to help Kosovo rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic. When Kosovo requested our help, the United States delivered. In September, the United States donated over 500,000 lifesaving Pfizer vaccine doses to Kosovo. This shipment was the largest single COVID-19 vaccine donation to Kosovo by any country or organization.

If confirmed, I will continue to support the government of Kosovo, Kosovo’s citizens, and its independent justice institutions as they work to strengthen the rule of law, improve governance, and combat corruption.

I will also work to advance human rights for all citizens of Kosovo, including ethnic and religious minorities. In 1999, our commitment to human rights led us to intervene with our NATO Allies in Kosovo, saving innocent lives, and we remain committed to this.

I will work with our partners in Kosovo to foster economic growth and an improved enabling environment to help address Kosovo’s high unemployment rate and assist Kosovo in securing a sustainable and green energy future to attract investment, create jobs, curb migration, and reduce environmental damage.

Finally, if confirmed, I will support the Kosovo Security Force’s continued gradual and transparent development to a multi-ethnic, NATO-interoperable, territorial defense force. By building on Kosovo’s first international deployment together

with U.S. forces, and its first hosting of Defender Europe 21 exercises, we can help transition Kosovo from consumer to provider of security.

Thirteen years ago, the people of Kosovo claimed their right to determine their own future and status as a sovereign and independent state. In those 13 short years, they achieved something remarkable – a capable and successful democracy with an economy that supports prosperity for all Kosovans. If confirmed, it would be the honor of my career to lead the women and men of the U.S. Mission to work with the government and people of Kosovo and our international partners on these priorities.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to take your questions.