

Senate Foreign Relations Committee
NATO Expansion: Examining the Accession of North Macedonia
June 12, 2019
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Introduction

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the critical role NATO plays in our security and North Macedonia's place in the Alliance. This is my first appearance before this committee since I was asked by the Secretary and former Assistant Secretary Wess Mitchell to assume this position. I look forward to continuing to uphold the excellent standards set by A/S Mitchell and the European bureau, and this includes working with the Members of this Committee and being responsive to your questions and concerns.

I welcome this opportunity to explain why the Administration strongly and unequivocally supports North Macedonia's membership in NATO. We firmly believe that North Macedonia's membership in the Alliance benefits the national security of the United States.

As you may know, I have a personal connection to North Macedonia – as the former Embassy Spokesperson, and later Ambassador – I have seen North Macedonia develop into the strong partner and, with the Senate's blessing, NATO Ally we need in the Western Balkans. I was also in Skopje after the Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008. I can tell to you that the people of North Macedonia have yearned for – and earned -- this moment: a moment to reflect on the long and sometimes hard path they had to travel, but one that ultimately led to an enduring commitment to peace, democracy, and prosperity for North Macedonia.

NATO

Let me begin by reaffirming the role of NATO. As President Trump has said, the Alliance has been the bulwark of international peace and security for 70 years, and it will remain so. NATO's accomplishments are many. From deterring the former Soviet Union during the Cold War, to contributing to international security in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, to confronting emerging security challenges, and throughout it all welcoming new members into this critical Alliance.

To be sure, we face complicated security challenges. As outlined by the **National Security Strategy**, the return of great-power competition is the defining geopolitical fact of our time, and the need to systematically prepare for this competition is the central task of U.S. foreign policy, and indeed, of the Transatlantic alliance. The most immediate threat to Transatlantic security continues to be Russia, which is engaged in wide-ranging, nefarious efforts to undermine the peace and prosperity the West has built over the last 70 years. Putin seeks to weaken the cohesion among NATO Allies and to subvert and destabilize our democratic institutions and processes. We also face increasing threats from China, which is seeking a strategic foothold in

Europe by employing so-called "gray zone" tactics, including investments in sensitive technologies, critical infrastructure, and natural resources.

The NATO Alliance is evolving to meet these challenges by enhancing its readiness, mobility, command structure, and its ability to face hybrid and cyber threats. Through efforts like the NATO Readiness Initiative and additional coordination on hybrid and cyber threats, we will be even stronger and more prepared to face down emerging challenges.

North Macedonia's NATO Path

Let me turn to North Macedonia and the benefits it will bring to the Alliance when it becomes the 30th Ally.

In recognition of its progress and potential, and with the understanding that North Macedonia and Greece would reach an agreement on the name issue, Allies unanimously agreed in July 2018 to invite North Macedonia to begin accession talks. In February of this year, Allies signed the accession protocol for North Macedonia. Two days later, in a historic moment fulfilling the promises made in Prespa, Greece became the first country to ratify North Macedonia's NATO accession protocol. To date, in total 16 Allies have completed the parliamentary requirements for ratification. They are: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Of those Allies, 11 nations have deposited their instruments of ratification of the Accession Protocol. The implementation of the historic Prespa Agreement and the resolution of the name dispute with Greece underscore that North Macedonia is willing to make sacrifices needed for peace and stability.

North Macedonia has contributed to international operations since 2002, deploying almost 4,000 soldiers. Soldiers from the U.S. and North Macedonia courageously fought alongside each other in Iraq, and they still do so today in Afghanistan. Last week, over 1,000 U.S. troops participated in exercises alongside soldiers from North Macedonia and other Allied countries at the Krivolak Training Area, a resource North Macedonia has made available for NATO exercises.

Adding North Macedonia to the Alliance will make NATO stronger and enhance regional security and stability in what is historically one of the least stable places in Europe. North Macedonia takes its burden sharing seriously and has a clear and credible plan in place to reach the 2 percent-20 percent Wales commitment by 2024. It is already spending 18 percent of its defense budget on modernization with plans to reach NATO's goal of 20 percent next year, which puts them in the upper half of current NATO members when it comes to meeting this key threshold. North Macedonia has also made great strides to meet NATO standards by implementing deep reforms in the defense, intelligence, and security sectors, and by taking to heart the mentorship provided by the United States and our Allies.

Of course, North Macedonia also has its challenges. We have made clear that we expect reforms to continue and to hold. But given its progress and clear commitment to assuming the responsibilities of NATO membership, the Administration sees a historic opportunity to advance U.S. and Allied interests in the region by welcoming North Macedonia into the Alliance, with the hope that it will expand its participation in the transatlantic community even further.

North Macedonia is an example, not just to other countries in the Balkans, but also to other NATO aspirants. Its soldiers have fought side by side with U.S. and NATO forces against shared threats. Its leaders have demonstrated their commitment to carrying their share of the burden and doing their part to secure peace, democracy, rule of law, and common defense. Over decades, the promise of NATO membership has advanced democratic values, respect for the rule of law, and the pursuit of security and defense policies in line with U.S. and NATO standards and objectives. It has also incentivized countries to pursue difficult but critical political and military reforms over a sustained period. This policy has yielded clear dividends. The rules have not changed: the Open Door policy is strong, and NATO membership remains open to all European nations who qualify and demonstrate the ability to contribute to Alliance security.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished Members of this Committee, I urge the Senate to continue our cooperation on NATO enlargement, and at the earliest opportunity to provide its advice and consent to U.S. ratification of the Accession Protocol for North Macedonia.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.