

Statement of Eric George Nelson
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 4, 2018

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Murphy, it is an honor to appear before the Committee today as the President's nominee to serve as Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am grateful for the confidence the President and the Secretary of State have placed in me and I hope to earn your trust as well. I am accompanied today by my partner, Filippo Tattoni, who like many other Foreign Service spouses, has sacrificed much to support me in my career and I wish to recognize that.

I am proud that my nomination is an example of how much the United States values diversity. America's diversity is fundamental to our freedoms and makes us the innovative and dynamic nation we are. Bosnia and Herzegovina shares this essential characteristic with a centuries-long history of religious coexistence. I have been privileged to pursue a career in public service, beginning 35 years ago as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Liberia and continuing in the Foreign Service across Europe, Latin America, and Pakistan. My grandparents' humble examples of service continue to inspire me. My Slovak grandparents ministered to Lutheran congregations across Pennsylvania and Ohio. And my Swedish and Danish grandparents survived the Great Depression tirelessly serving customers in their diner in New Jersey. If confirmed, I will proudly lead a dedicated and successful interagency team in Bosnia. I will look for every opportunity to shine a spotlight on their excellence in service to America.

The United States is safer and more prosperous when Europe is indeed stable and prosperous. When 100,000 Bosnians died and two million fled the Bosnian War of 1992-95, the United States intervened with force and diplomacy to end the war. As a guarantor of the Dayton Peace Accords, the United States remains firmly committed to Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Twenty-three years of relative peace has been a great achievement, but we cannot take this for granted. The surest path to securing a promising future is integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Unfortunately, too many politicians continue to put zero-sum ethnic nationalism and their personal enrichment ahead of critical reforms.

If confirmed, I will focus the work of the Embassy on several priority areas:

Firstly, expanding prosperity.

A weak economy and endemic corruption undermine stability. Reforms are critical to reduce labor taxes, improve the ease of opening a business, and privatize bloated state enterprises. If confirmed, I will press for standards that ensure Bosnia and Herzegovina can be an attractive destination for U.S. exports and direct investment.

Secondly, if confirmed I will promote effective government and rule of law.

Sadly, Transparency International ranks Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the most corrupt countries in Europe. I will continue our Embassy's strong efforts to improve transparency and accountability. When local institutions fail to act, or if peace and stability are threatened, targeted sanctions can be an effective response.

Our third priority will be improving security.

The United States will continue our efforts to counter malign foreign influence and violent extremism, strengthen law enforcement, and increase border security. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a committed partner on counterterrorism and deploys with Allied troops in Afghanistan. The United States supports Bosnia's continued progress towards NATO membership and Western democratic values.

Fourth, if confirmed I will press the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to further human rights.

President Trump said in Warsaw last year, "Above all, we value the dignity of every human life, we protect the rights of every person, and we share the hope of every soul to live in freedom."

The United States will advance democracy by promoting media freedom, religious liberty, and education reform. If confirmed, I will advocate for accountability for past atrocities and equal treatment before the law of all Bosnia's citizens. We need strong partnerships to help Bosnia and Herzegovina achieve peace with progress. If confirmed, I will combine forces with civil society, private sector, and our European partners. I will be eager to work with all leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina who share our goals and are ready to tackle corruption and implement reform.

Mr. Chairman, I thank this Committee and other members of Congress for their steadfast interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.