

Statement of Christopher Hill
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Serbia
Submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Serbia. I am humbled by the trust President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me to represent the American people. I hope to earn your trust as well, and if confirmed, would work closely with you to advance U.S. interests in Serbia.

Thank you for this opportunity to recognize my wife, Julie, who shares my excitement about the prospect of this assignment. Years ago, I began my foreign service career in Belgrade. Later, I participated in the process that culminated in Peace Talks in Dayton, Ohio, that ended the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I returned to the region as U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia and took on additional responsibilities as Special Envoy to the Kosovo Crisis in 1998-1999. I believe I am well prepared to serve as Chief of Mission in Serbia and advance U.S. priorities there. I would be truly honored to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Serbia.

Serbia is a linchpin for stability and progress in the Western Balkans. The United States, together with our European partners, continues to support Serbia's development as a modern, prosperous, European country, at peace with its neighbors. Serbia's progress is integral to achieving U.S. strategic goals to revitalize our European alliances, support democracy and the rule of law, promote economic cooperation, and address global and regional challenges. The United States remains committed to deepening our bilateral relationship with Serbia through further political, economic, and security cooperation. As we celebrate 140 years of diplomatic relations, I look forward to strengthening people-to-people ties, working with youth and civil society, and sharing the American experience with Serbia.

If confirmed, I will lead a government-wide effort to advance key U.S. priorities in Serbia. The United States supports Serbia's own stated, strategic priority of EU accession. To this end, Belgrade must accelerate serious reforms to meet EU standards, and we look to the EU to recognize progress made and reaffirm that membership remains possible. With U.S. technical support, Serbia has made significant steps, particularly in economic and fiscal management.

The United States continues to support Serbia's progress in other key areas, including fighting corruption, improving the rule of law, and strengthening democratic institutions. If confirmed, I will encourage electoral transparency and fairness ahead of April 2022 elections, reinforce the importance of media freedom, and vocally support the crucial role of civil society. A diverse political landscape and a free and independent press are critical to Serbia's success as a European democracy.

Most importantly -- and a prerequisite for eventual EU accession -- Serbia must normalize its relationship with Kosovo. The United States strongly supports the EU-facilitated Dialogue as the best chance for both parties to resolve outstanding differences. As President Biden stated, the United States believes "mutual recognition" is the best way to unlock Serbia's European potential and strengthen regional stability and security. If confirmed, I will encourage Serbia to engage seriously and urgently to reach a compromise.

If confirmed, the safety and security of Americans and U.S. Mission personnel would be my top priority. I will continue the push for a full investigation into the 1999 murder of the Bytyqi brothers, three American citizens executed while in Serbian police custody. I am committed to pressing the Serbian government to ensure that those involved are brought to justice, regardless of rank or position.

I will work to invigorate Serbia's economic future by encouraging policies that bolster its international investment climate, strengthen its infrastructure, improve its energy diversity and security, and build resilience to malign external influence, including from Russia and China. Serbia has enormous potential, with an educated and talented workforce -- U.S.-based firms have invested well over \$4 billion in Serbia in the past 20 years and employ around 20,000 people. If confirmed, I will continue to support American companies exploring opportunities in Serbia.

Finally, if confirmed, I will build on the positive momentum of recent bilateral defense consultations -- the first in five years -- to expand mutually beneficial defense cooperation. Serbia is an important security partner for the United States, particularly through its 15-year State Partnership with the Ohio National Guard. While not a NATO member, Serbia is active in the Partnership for Peace program and a global security contributor as one of Europe's largest per capita troop-contributing countries to peacekeeping operations in both EU and UN missions.

It would be an honor to lead the U.S. Mission in Belgrade and work with the government and people of Serbia and our international partners on these priorities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I welcome your questions.