

Testimony of Ambassador Joseph A. Mussomeli
Ambassador-Designate to Slovenia
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am happy to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia. I am honored by the confidence that the President and Secretary of State have expressed by this nomination. If confirmed, I will strive to live up to that trust.

Until now, my 30 years in the Foreign Service have invariably involved serving in the developing world, most recently as our Ambassador to Cambodia and Assistant Chief of Mission in Afghanistan -- dealing sometimes with nascent democracies and at other times with economies in dire need of reform. These past assignments have had a host of challenges. Slovenia, a reliable ally with an open economy and strong democratic institutions, will be a new experience. If confirmed, I look forward to working to strengthen the already strong bonds uniting the United States and Slovenia.

The United States is fortunate to have friends like Slovenia. Slovenia is a vibrant country, a champion of multilateralism and consensus building, and, because of our shared values, an important partner on many crucial issues.

Slovenia emerged from the dissolution of Yugoslavia a capable and energetic state. In a remarkably short time, its people have built a stable democracy and a prosperous economy, quickly achieving membership in NATO, the EU, and other international bodies, including, most recently, the OECD.

Slovenia is an important partner for the United States within the international community because of its unique history and perspective, as well as its commitment to cooperation and consensus. Slovenia has encouraged reform in the Balkans as the path to prosperity and is a credible model because of its success. Support for Slovenia's efforts in Southeastern Europe amplifies our efforts in the region.

Slovenia is a committed member of NATO. Even before joining the Alliance, Slovenia contributed troops to NATO's mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since joining the Alliance, Slovenia has undertaken a wide range of obligations, deploying troops in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Much as is happening here in America, Slovenians are engaged in an open, sometimes contentious debate over Afghanistan, but the government has stood by its commitment to Afghanistan and is even now preparing to increase its presence there. Slovenia is actively engaged in forging a new NATO strategic concept and seeks niche specialization to enhance NATO capacities. The development of its Mountain Warfare School, which aspires to become a NATO Center of Excellence, is a good example. The ability of the Slovenian armed forces to seamlessly operate with units of the Colorado Army National Guard, with whom the Slovenians have trained and will deploy to Afghanistan, is a testament to Slovenia's commitment to developing interoperable forces. While Slovenia is small in size, ounce for ounce, inch for inch, it has demonstrated itself to be among our most reliable and trustworthy allies.

Slovenia and the United States have a history of partnership in de-mining, driven primarily through Congress' support of the Slovenian International Trust Fund for De-mining and Mine-Victim Assistance. The ITF is an excellent example of how U.S. support of Slovenian expertise can result in resolution of difficult challenges. Humanitarian assistance is a critical element of our diplomacy and working with countries like Slovenia expands our reach.

Our commercial and economic relationship with Slovenia has not advanced as much as our other areas of cooperation, and so represents an opportunity for growth. The Government of Slovenia is committed to working with the EU and the OECD to increase transparency and improve the business climate. As a largely untapped market and regional hub, Slovenia offers many opportunities, especially in the energy, healthcare, and technology sectors.

If confirmed, I will work with my civilian and military colleagues at our Embassy in Ljubljana to engage the Slovenian government and people in order to address U.S. priorities:

Promote stability, security, and prosperity throughout the Balkans by supporting progress towards integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Expand our partnerships with the Slovenians in global humanitarian efforts such as our outstanding cooperation in de-mining and mine-victim assistance.

Strengthen our partnership in NATO and support Slovenia's decision to help fortify Afghanistan's security, stability, and development.

Expand our trade and economic cooperation by improving the business climate for American companies considering investment in Slovenia.

Encourage continued structural reforms to promote growth and ensure long-term stability.

Build on our strong cooperation in combating terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, trafficking in persons and narcotics, and other forms of transnational crime.

Increase Slovenian awareness of American values and highlight our common perspectives.

I believe these goals can be achieved through focused effort and earnest cooperation with the Slovenians. Slovenia is a country that is both eager and prepared to do more on the international stage and we should help them do so.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I welcome any questions you may have.