

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
NATO Enlargement: Albania and Croatia
September 10, 2008

Today the committee meets to hear testimony from the Administration on the Protocols of Accession to the Washington Treaty, the treaty that established the NATO Alliance. I am pleased to welcome a good friend, Assistant Secretary of State, Dan Fried, who has lent his expertise to the Committee on many occasions. I also welcome Deputy Assistant Secretary Dan Fata, who will share the views of the Defense Department.

I strongly support the Alliance's decision to invite Albania and Croatia to join NATO. Both countries have clearly stated their desire to join and are working hard to meet the specified requirements for membership.

The governments in Tirana and Zagreb have been preparing for membership for more than eight years. Each of them is undergoing a process of democratic and free market transformation. They have made important progress toward establishing civilian control of their militaries and toward demonstrating their ability to operate with the military forces of NATO nations at Alliance standards. Albania and Croatia continue to contribute to the United Nations-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operating under NATO leadership to assist the Government of Afghanistan. In addition, the candidates have improved their democratic processes; strengthened toleration of ethnic diversity; broadened respect for human rights; worked toward free market economies; and promoted good regional relations.

On February 18, 2008, the United States and many of our European allies diplomatically recognized the independence of Kosovo. This was an important step in putting the bloody history of the Balkans in the past, but our work in the region is not done. In my view, lasting stability and security in Southeastern Europe requires that the emerging democracies there be integrated into the military, economic, and political structures of Europe.

Albania and Croatia occupy critical geostrategic locations and are well situated to help deter efforts to destabilize the region through violence. NATO membership for these countries would extend the zone of peace and security into a region that ignited a world war and numerous regional conflicts that have cost the lives of hundreds of thousands.

If NATO is to continue to be the preeminent security Alliance and serve the defense interests of its membership, it must evolve and that evolution must include enlargement. Potential NATO membership motivates emerging democracies to make advances in areas such as the rule of law and civil society. A closer relationship with NATO will promote achievement of these goals in Albania and Croatia and contribute to our mutual security.

Unfortunately the summit at Bucharest failed to extend a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine. This decision sent the wrong signal to Moscow and the international community. Last month, I traveled to both Georgia and Ukraine. During my visit in Georgia, President Saakashvili reiterated his hopes for a MAP, arguing that this would be a powerful symbol of the West's support for an independent Georgia. In Ukraine, President Yushchenko, Prime Minister Tymoshenko, and the Speaker of the Parliament have signed a letter to the NATO Secretary General signifying the unity of purpose behind their MAP request. Ukrainian political unity is critical to its success, and recent reports out of Kyiv are not promising in this regard. I am hopeful that unity can still be achieved in the near term.

Five years ago, the United States Senate unanimously voted to invite seven countries to join NATO. Today, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia are making important contributions to NATO and are among our closest allies in the global war on terrorism. It is time again for the United States to take the lead in urging its allies to support the membership aspirations of Albania and Croatia. At the same time, the U.S. must continue to lead the effort to ensure that Georgia and Ukraine receive Membership Action Plans.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been evolving to meet the new security needs of the 21st century. In this era, the threats to NATO members are transnational. NATO's viability as an effective security alliance depends on flexible and creative leadership, as well as the willingness of members to improve capabilities and address common threats. Moving forward with the membership of Albanian and Croatia is an important element in this process and will ensure that NATO continues to serve the national security interests of its members.

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