

**Testimony of Michael D. Kirby
Ambassador-Designate to Serbia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 18, 2012**

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Barrasso, and Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Serbia. I am honored by the confidence placed in me by both President Obama and Secretary Clinton. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and the Congress in advancing U.S. interests in Serbia.

I am pleased to have my wife, Sara Powelson Kirby, here with me today. Foreign Service families are unsung heroes and true diplomats themselves: my wife and daughters Katherine and Elizabeth – neither of whom could be with me today – have been living, working, and going to school overseas for most of their lives, serving as examples of American values to their friends and colleagues. I would also like to note the presence of my mother, Dolores Kirby. She has been a great help to my siblings and me. She also contributed greatly to my father's more than thirty-year Foreign Service Career.

I have had the privilege of serving for the past four years as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Consular Affairs Bureau of the State Department. Prior to this, as U.S. Ambassador to Moldova, I worked with my

team to manage a range of issues, including the frozen conflict in Transnistria, improving the climate for multi-party democracy, furthering U.S. business interests, and trying to reduce corruption. I believe these experiences have prepared me well to serve as Chief of Mission in Serbia.

The Serbia-U.S. relationship is 130 years old – in fact, we marked its anniversary on July 5. Our cooperation, friendship, and close commercial ties are anchored by a vibrant Serbian diaspora community here in the United States. While our ties were strained in the 1990s, for the past 12 years we have worked with successive Serbian governments to overcome challenges and build a new, strong partnership with a country that we see as critical to regional stability.

Over the past four years, the United States has worked closely with the outgoing government to help Serbia realize its goal of attaining candidate status in the European Union. We now look forward to helping Serbia meet the standards the European Union has set out in order to obtain a start date for accession negotiations, the next step in the process leading to EU membership. Serbia has made significant progress by undertaking democratic reforms and strengthening institutions to solidify the rule of law. In addition, the military services have undergone fundamental restructuring with the goal of building a modern, civilian-directed force that can play a positive, stabilizing role in the region. Serbia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace with our support, and its military has established a

robust cooperation with ours. Its partnership with the Ohio National Guard serves as a model for the region and has helped to encourage civilian partnerships between Serbia and the state of Ohio. I take great pride in the Ohio roots of my parents – both native Clevelanders – and will seek to deepen the Ohio-Serbia bonds. Together, the United States and Serbia have made significant strides in recent years to rejuvenate our relationship, and if confirmed I look forward to working with President Nikolic and the new government, once constituted, to build on this strong foundation and continue to deepen our partnership.

Our economic ties also continue to grow. An economically prosperous Serbia can serve as an engine for the region. Like many countries around the world, Serbia is suffering from the consequences of the global recession. But Serbia has enormous economic potential, including a well-educated and talented workforce, which make it a potentially attractive source for foreign direct investment by U.S. as well as European companies. Over the past several years, with assistance from the EU and the United States, Serbia has undertaken real economic reforms designed to demonstrate its commitment to long-term economic growth and harmonization with EU norms. There is still much work left to be done, however, to streamline the process of doing business, reduce bureaucratic impediments, and combat the corrosive consequences of corruption. The United States has worked closely with the Serbian government to aid this effort,

particularly in supporting the implementation of the government's anti-corruption strategy and action plan. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing this work.

While much progress has been made in Serbia, Kosovo remains a significant challenge to our bilateral engagement. When Vice President Biden visited Belgrade in May 2009, he emphasized that the United States wanted to move beyond the recriminations of the past and looked toward the future, to a fully European-integrated Serbia partnering with us in the pursuit of common interests in the region. We understand that, for now, Serbia will not recognize the Republic of Kosovo. However, we have also made clear that Serbia must begin to come to terms with today's realities and move towards normalizing its relations with Kosovo. As long as there is instability in the region, Serbia and all the other countries of the region are held back from realizing their full potential. As the European Union stated in its Council decisions in December 2011 and subsequently confirmed, Serbia's path into the EU passes through normalization of its relationship with Kosovo. This is in Serbia's interest, as it is the only way to ensure the Kosovo issue does not continue to interfere with Serbia's relations with its neighbors, the EU, or the United States. And it is in the interest of Kosovo Serbs, as it will improve the daily lives of citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, on both sides of the border. Serbia needs to understand that Kosovo's status and border are decided and that partition is off the table. At the same time, we have

assured Serbia that the United States, in partnership with the EU, will remain vigilant in working with the Kosovo government to ensure that the far-reaching rights of Kosovo Serbs are fully protected under Kosovo's constitution and laws.

If confirmed, I will also seek to bring to resolution two important challenges to our bilateral relationship. The murderers of the three Bytyqi brothers, New York residents who were executed by Serbian Ministry of Interior personnel in 1999, have never been prosecuted. The U.S. government cannot accept that the murderers of three of its citizens go unpunished. Likewise, those who authorized the attacks on the U.S. and other western embassies in February 2008 have never been brought to justice. While we welcome the recent indictments of twelve of the perpetrators who participated in the attack on our Embassy in Belgrade, we also expect Serbia to complete a thorough investigation and ensure that all who were involved are brought to justice, regardless of their rank or position.

This is a challenging agenda, but it is also achievable. If confirmed, I am committed to working to make this vision a reality: a Serbia at peace with all of its neighbors, firmly set on a path of European integration.

Thank you once again for granting me the opportunity to appear before this committee today. I look forward to your questions.