

Statement of Kate Marie Byrnes
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of North Macedonia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
April 11, 2019

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of North Macedonia. I deeply appreciate the trust and confidence the President and the Secretary of State have placed in me to represent the American people, and I hope to earn your trust as well. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with you to advance our nation's interests in North Macedonia.

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce my husband, retired U.S. Navy Captain Scott Gage, who is here today, and to recognize him for his love and partnership. I would also like to thank all my family beginning with my parents, Paul and Hope Byrnes. My father, a retired Foreign Service officer, with my mother's support, introduced my brothers Paul Jr., Sean and me to the challenges and rewards of this path of service. Their support continues to inspire my commitment.

Over my 26-year career, I have worked in Washington and in Europe to build strong partners for the United States. As the Deputy Chief of Mission in Athens, I supported U.S.-Greece efforts to deepen regional stability and cooperation, and encouraged Greece's leadership in its engagement with the Western Balkans, including North Macedonia.

North Macedonia is on its chosen path to NATO and the European Union. Through the Prespa Agreement, the political leaders of North Macedonia and Greece overcame difficult historical issues by focusing on a future of progress. The United States supported the leaders on both sides who drove this process. Full implementation of the agreement is crucial to the region. External actors with malign intent are working against this progress in an effort to undermine the country and the confidence the people of North Macedonia have in their future.

If confirmed, I will focus the work of the Embassy on three priorities:

First, we will promote stability through strong institutions.

North Macedonia has made significant progress on updating its laws to advance reforms, including in the areas of judicial independence, rule of law, and accountability. Its political leaders need to ensure these laws are thoroughly implemented, making real change to meet the standards of membership in both NATO and the EU, as well as the expectations of its citizens.

Congress has made a lasting impact on North Macedonia's democratic reforms and economic development. If confirmed, I will ensure this U.S. Government collaboration continues and that U.S. resources are spent effectively in support of U.S. goals and priorities.

Second, we will enhance security through partnership.

As a future NATO ally, North Macedonia must meet its commitments. If confirmed, I will work with members of this committee to ensure that North Macedonia continues to be a strong and steadfast contributor to the security of the North Atlantic area.

North Macedonia has contributed to international operations since 2002, deploying almost 4,000 soldiers. As our strong partner in the Coalition to Defeat ISIS, it set an important example for all members of the Coalition in repatriating, prosecuting and sentencing Foreign Terrorist Fighters. Our soldiers also courageously fought alongside each other in Iraq, and still do so today in Afghanistan. This year, over 1,000 U.S. troops will participate in exercises alongside North Macedonia's troops at the Krivolak Training Area. If confirmed, I will look to expand our partnership efforts in order to counter threats from terrorism as well as malign actors who seek to disrupt and destabilize democratic systems.

Third, we will foster prosperity through positive influence.

North Macedonia will prosper by advancing human rights, diversity, inclusion, free media, and open markets. The United States will partner in building new opportunities for future generations through our Peace Corps, USAID and other assistance programs, and through robust public diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges. There are prospects for U.S. firms to partner with North Macedonia. If confirmed, I will commit the U.S. Embassy in Skopje to help make these deals happen.

Expanding ties between the United States and North Macedonia will foster a positive vision of a more prosperous and secure future and is our strongest weapon against global competitors.

The outstanding Embassy team in Skopje is dedicated to helping North Macedonia secure a positive future. I am eager to join them, if confirmed, to lead their efforts moving forward.

I pledge to the committee that I will protect American interests, ensure the fair treatment of American citizens, and promote American values with every engagement I have with the government of North Macedonia and its people.

Thank you for your time today. I would be pleased to take your questions.