

Statement of Dr. Karen E. Donfried
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 20, 2021

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I have long valued my bipartisan collaboration with this Committee, dating back to 1991, when I began a decade of work on Europe at the Congressional Research Service. If confirmed, it would be a pleasure to work with you from the State Department on issues I care passionately about and on which the United States is and shall remain a force for good.

It is an honor to be nominated by President Biden to serve under Secretary Blinken as the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR). If confirmed, I will work enthusiastically to serve the American people and advance the interests of the United States, to reinvigorate our alliances and partnerships, to strengthen democracy in Europe and Eurasia, and to address the challenges we face around the world.

My greatest support, if confirmed for this position, will come from my husband, Alan Untereiner, our daughter, Hannah, and our son, Michael. They are an endless source of love and inspiration. Although born in New York City, I spent my early childhood in Heidelberg, where my father, a theologian, did his doctoral work and my mother worked as a nurse at U.S. Army Headquarters. That experience gave me the gift of speaking German fluently, which, in turn, allowed me, two decades later, to complete a Masters degree in Munich, where I met Alan, a fellow American studying abroad. Transatlantic relations have been an integral part of my life story.

Professionally, I served in the George W. Bush Administration as a Member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff and in the Obama Administration both as the National Intelligence Officer for Europe and as the Senior Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council. For the past seven years, I have led the German Marshall Fund of the United States .

If confirmed, I will have the responsibility – and the honor and joy – of leading EUR, covering 50 countries, with 79 posts and 12,000 hard-working, dedicated public servants. I will treat each and every one of them with the care and respect they deserve, as well as work energetically to recruit and develop more diverse talent for the bureau.

President Biden defines his number one job as ensuring that America's foreign policy benefits the American people and the American middle class. I am eager to support him in achieving this goal, including by revitalizing our alliances and partnerships. The strength of America's alliances is one of our greatest assets. Whether we are confronting the COVID-19 pandemic, economic or social inequality, climate change, corruption, threats to energy security, an aggressive Russia, an increasingly assertive China, cyber threats, or technological competition, the United States is most effective when we cooperate with our allies.

Europe is home to many of our closest allies and partners. Together, we must stand firm against Russia's broad range of destabilizing actions while recognizing there are areas of mutual interest on which we might cooperate. Allies and partners must work together to blunt the Kremlin's attempts to undermine democracies and democratic institutions. We must confront Russian aggression against its neighbors by standing with the people of Ukraine, Georgia, and Belarus. And we must stand up for universal human rights, including in Russia; the Kremlin's persecution of political opponents, such as Aleksey Navalny, remains deeply disturbing. Additionally, we must work with our allies to counter an assertive China in the political, diplomatic, economic, military, and technological domains. How we manage our relationship with China is the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century.

Most importantly, we must work to preserve the free and open rules-based order we built together with our allies seven decades ago in the wake of World War II. The Marshall Plan remains one of the most compelling examples of the United States exercising enlightened leadership. But 2021 is not 1947. We must modernize our alliances to meet new challenges. Secretary Blinken has made clear that while we applaud the significant progress many NATO allies have made in improving defense investments, we need to do more. The common threats we face demand it.

Allies share values and interests, but we will not always agree. To manage those differences requires trust. If confirmed, I will work to deepen the trust our partners in Europe have in the United States so we can achieve policy successes that advance U.S. interests.

If confirmed, I will seek to deepen cooperation between EUR and this Committee to ensure that our diplomacy delivers for the American people. I look forward to your questions and thank you for your consideration.