

Testimony of Robert S. Gilchrist
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic Of Lithuania
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 29, 2019

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the Committee:

It is a privilege to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Lithuania.

I am grateful to President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo for the confidence they have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee, your staffs, and your Congressional colleagues to build on the strong and vibrant partnership between the United States and Lithuania.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to acknowledge some family members who are here today. I am deeply grateful to my two brothers, David and Donald, for their continued support and consistently honest opinions. They are here with my sister-in-law Lynne, niece Amelia, and nephews Duncan and Liam. My parents are no longer with us, but I like to think they are somewhere watching, as none were prouder of my foreign service career. They gave me a sense of adventure and curiosity about the world that I have carried with me wherever I have served.

For 29 years I have cherished the privilege of serving my country as a career diplomat in Europe, the Middle East, and South America. I served in Romania as that country acceded to NATO and the EU. I served in Iraq during one of its most violent periods, as we worked to lay the foundation for eventual stability. And I served for nine years in leadership positions focused on the Nordic and Baltic region, while Russia increased its aggressive activities and the region's economies recovered from the 2008 financial crisis.

The relationship between the United States and Lithuania runs long and deep. It is a relationship built on more than 100 years of unbroken diplomatic engagement between two republics, including during Lithuania's half-century of forced incorporation into the Soviet Union. It is a relationship nurtured by the transatlantic ties of the many American citizens of Lithuanian ancestry, and it is strengthened through the partnership of the United States with Lithuania in addressing today's threats to freedom and security worldwide.

Since Lithuania proclaimed the restoration of its independence in 1990, it has energetically embraced democracy and free market principles. It joined NATO and the EU in 2004, and chaired the Community of Democracies and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010-2011. In 2013, Lithuania held the Presidency of the European Union and used its position to champion democratic principles in countries of the former Soviet Union. During Lithuania's 2014-2015 tenure on the UN Security Council, it actively partnered with the United States to combat terrorism and advance human rights. During the past five years Lithuania has emerged as a leader in advancing energy security in the Baltic region, including through the establishment of the U.S.-Baltic Energy Dialogue in 2019.

Lithuania has been a particularly staunch supporter of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, providing generous assistance, including in the form of advisors and development aid. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the Lithuanian government has worked with us to maintain a strong sanctions regime on Russia and press for full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Increased Russian aggression over the past decade has elevated security concerns along NATO's eastern flank. A proponent of burden sharing, Lithuania's budget has met the NATO target of dedicating two percent of GDP to defense spending since 2018. The funds, supplemented by U.S. military assistance, are used to modernize Lithuania's armed forces and training facilities while enhancing NATO interoperability. Next summer Defender 2020, a joint multi-national U.S. Army-led exercise, will test the effectiveness of this investment. The United States also works with the Lithuanian government to counter Russian-sponsored disinformation campaigns and cyber hacking.

Beyond Europe, Lithuania is a committed ally as well. It is a partner in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and actively contributes to counterterrorism operations. This includes deploying trainers to U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq, redeploying its special operation forces to Afghanistan as part of the Resolute Support Mission, and providing financial support for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. If confirmed, I will work to continue our close cooperation in addressing global challenges to the security of the United States and our allies.

Lithuania further enhances its security by building the resilience of its economy. After a nearly 17 percent drop in GDP in 2009, Lithuania's economy rebounded to become one of the fastest growing in the EU. Since 2017, the growth of its GDP has averaged between 3.5 and 3.9 percent. Lithuania joined the Eurozone in 2015 and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2018. To reverse an emigration trend, the government has created a financial and regulatory environment favorable to innovation, start-ups, and foreign direct investment. The United States is Lithuania's 15th largest investor, with 13,000 Lithuanian residents employed by U.S. companies. In support of government efforts to bring economic growth to less developed regions in Lithuania, our embassy has developed programs that encourage entrepreneurship and public-private partnerships at the local level.

Lithuania has also moved expeditiously to diversify its energy sources and routes, substantially increasing its energy security. In 2014, Lithuania completed the unbundling of its gas and electricity sectors. The break-up of Gazprom's monopoly paved the way for Lithuania to open an LNG (liquefied natural gas) import terminal in 2015, providing the first means for a non-Russian supply of natural gas to the Baltic states. Lithuania can now purchase gas at competitive market rates, and in 2017, Lithuania received its first two shipments of U.S. LNG. Through the U.S.-EU Energy Council and bilateral engagement with the Departments of State and Energy, we have helped advance projects creating new gas and electricity links between Lithuania, as well as Estonia and Latvia, and their EU neighbors. If confirmed, I will continue to support this strategy to further enhance Lithuania's energy security as well as that of the entire Baltic region.

Lithuania is a partner and Ally on whom we can rely. And that partnership is due in large part to the ties of friendship between Lithuanians and Americans. If confirmed, I will prioritize public

engagement throughout the country and across the Atlantic, to multiply those ties through increased business, educational, professional, and cultural exchanges.

In sum, if confirmed, I will seek to advance U.S. interests and enhance the resiliency of our Lithuanian ally by strengthening bilateral defense and economic ties, and promoting the democratic values we share.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.