

Testimony of Brock Bierman
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today as President Trump's nominee to be Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia (E&E) at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). I would like to thank President Trump, Administrator Green, and Secretary Tillerson for their support, and for the confidence they have placed in me.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Acting Assistant Administrator Margot Ellis, who has led the Bureau since January, her staff, and the staff within the Legislative and Public Affairs Bureau all of whom were invaluable help as I prepared for this hearing today. Having spent more than five years working within the Europe and Eurasia Bureau from 2002-2007, it has been wonderful to reconnect with so many knowledgeable professionals, many of whom were colleagues during my first appointment. And of course, I thank my good friend Ambassador Pamela Hyde Smith for her kind introductory remarks; Ambassador Smith's work in Moldova demonstrated the importance of American leadership, and she has been a mentor ever since.

Most importantly I want to thank my family -- my wife and best friend of more than 30 years Lisa, my daughter Allison, and my son Robert. They are my most important inspiration and without their love and support, I would not be sitting here today.

I am a second-generation American on my father's side, as my grandfather came to the United States as part of the mass immigration of the late 19th early 20th century. He immigrated to this country during a turbulent time in Russian history, and came from what is now the Republic of Moldova. He came to America with the hopes and dreams to make a better life for himself and his family. And although I never knew my grandfather, my father told me that he quickly learned what made our country great. After only a few short years in America, he understood the importance of our democratic systems, and volunteered to serve his new country during World War I. Upon returning from the war and throughout his life, he served as a community leader and philanthropist.

David McCullough said it best in his recent book, The American Spirit. To quote him, "History, I like to think, is a larger way of looking at life. It is a source of strength, of inspiration. It is about who we are, and what we stand for, and it is essential to our understanding of what our role should be in our time. History, as can't be said too often,

is human. It is about people and they speak to us across the years.” In many ways, I sit here today as a direct result of who we are as a country. My grandfather exemplified the American Spirit, which I believe defines this nation, and is at the heart of what USAID does.

In 1997, while serving my second term in the Rhode Island State Legislature, I was chosen along with another colleague to participate in an exchange program with the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL), a non-partisan organization that introduces next generation leaders to the politics, governance, policy-making, and cultures of countries around the world through on-site exchanges. Knowing that my grandfather lived within the Russian Empire, I decided that this was the country and region I wanted to get to know better. Participating in the ACYPL program in Moscow and interacting with Russian legislators not only gave me a new perspective that made me a better legislator, but it was also the beginning of my passionate interest with the Europe and Eurasia region.

My understanding of the region further deepened when I returned to the region in 1999, this time to Ukraine as a volunteer trainer for the International Republican Institute, (IRI). A former U.S. Senator, John Chafee, had encouraged me to run for public office and serve in the State Legislature. Senator Chafee was a dear friend and mentor, and his influence made it possible for me to join IRI as a trainer. While traveling from Kyiv to Odessa, I enjoyed the opportunity to share my own democratic experiences and help Ukrainians of all parties learn more about our system of government.

Three years later, in 2003, I was privileged to serve as Chief of Staff for the Europe and Eurasia Bureau under Dr. Kent Hill, and spent the next five years dedicating my life to USAID’s mission. During that time, I helped Dr. Hill advance the Bureau’s top priorities, and specifically assisted with improving the Bureau’s outreach and communications. I also worked to develop a region-wide initiative that brought young people together from all of our partner countries, and from different political parties to talk about difficult problems that were facing the region and how to develop solutions they could apply from the local to regional levels. Youth programming was a top priority then, as it is again today, and, if confirmed, I look forward to deploying that experience to continue these efforts.

I was also involved with the Bureau’s Trafficking in Persons initiatives, and served as a member of the State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Task Force. Further, I am proud of my work to support capacity-building within the Bureau to create opportunities for professional development and training for our staff. If confirmed, I look forward to

supporting every member of the Europe and Eurasia Bureau through professional development, capacity building, and training.

Although some of the same overall issues remain today, the challenges in Europe and Eurasia look a lot different now than they did when I previously served at USAID. The scale of challenges that are facing Europe and Eurasia is hard to overstate. Since my previous tenure with USAID, the region has been hit with a major economic recession. Russia has violated the territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine, and continues to have a military presence in Moldova. At the same time, Russia is interfering with the internal affairs of several other countries in the region. Putin's propaganda is exploiting ethnic divisions in the Balkans, furthering democratic backsliding throughout the Balkans.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Administrator Green and the dedicated staff in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau to continue USAID's tradition of supporting U.S. national security interests, with the aim of eventually transitioning countries in the region from U.S. assistance, along a positive path that will reduce these threats.

Administrator Green has set a clear path forward for USAID, and I am excited to advance his priorities. Clearly, USAID's objective to end the need for foreign assistance should be a goal the Agency keeps in mind during its strategic planning and budgeting, and as it works with our host countries. USAID's host countries do not believe in everlasting assistance either, but look forward to the day when they can stand on their own and be respected contributing partners in the world community. Increasing USAID's investments with local organizations to build capacity is a key part of this process.

I also think that the Administrator's priority to respect the taxpayers' investment in foreign aid is critical. If confirmed, I look forward to shaping USAID's programs in Europe and Eurasia in an effective and efficient manner, by using more innovative award mechanisms, while also educating our public on how USAID's work brings stability and prosperity overseas, which in turn benefits neighborhoods across America. Finally, I look forward to spending some time listening to my colleagues both here in Washington and those in the field, and learning from their experiences. Their perspective will be vital to developing a successful course of action.

As mentioned earlier, Russia's malign influence is a serious problem throughout the region, one that has developed since my last appointment. In 2014, I saw firsthand the open cooperation between Moldovan politicians and Russian government officials during the parliamentary elections. Many countries in the region are vulnerable to Russian influence because of their weak economies, corrupt public officials, and fragile

democratic institutions. With assistance from the U.S. Government and USAID, I believe we can support countries that are committed to pursuing the Euro Atlantic path, and help them build a bright future of self-sufficiency, rather than dependence.

Since my first visit to Russia 20 years ago, I have had the opportunity to meet with many Russian citizens and talk openly about their hopes and dreams. It never ceases to amaze me how similar we all are on so many levels. I know that, on a personal level, many Russians share our vision for open democracy, fair and free elections, and a future in which all citizens have a chance for a better life. I believe we must remember that it is the Government of Vladimir Putin, rather than the people of Russia, that is trying to undermine our work with democracy and governance in the region.

In many ways, the efforts we must undertake today to counter this pervasive undercurrent will also serve to prevent the spread of violent extremism in Europe and Eurasia. We are all aware of the alarming rise of violent extremism which has led hundreds to travel to fight alongside ISIS. As Administrator Green has stated, terrorist groups often feed on frustration and despair. The American Spirit, and the ideals which this reflects, of equality, rights, and consent of the governed, is our most valuable export, and serves as a counter to this frustration and despair.

Although I touched on several of these issues earlier, I could go on about other critical issues, such as prevalent government corruption, border security, mass migration, human rights violations, energy dependence on Russia, lack of open markets and youth unemployment. I look forward to exploring those topics in greater depth today, and to answering any questions you might have.

In closing, I wish to thank the Committee again for your dedication to the American Spirit we all share. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to further our shared goals and address the critical issues facing the Europe and Eurasia region. Thank you.