

Statement of James B. Foley
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Croatia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 28, 2009

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee as the next Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Clinton for the confidence they have placed in me. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to validate the Senate's trust and to advance our nation's interests and goals in Croatia.

I am proud to be accompanied today by my wife, Kate Suryan, and my brother, Kevin Foley.

I have been deeply interested in Croatia and Southeast Europe since my service at NATO in the 1990s when the Alliance helped rescue the region from a terrible war. Few could have predicted then that Croatia would so quickly become a successful democracy and itself join NATO, which it did in April of this year. But few, too, could have foreseen that Croatia would ever recover its independence, as it did only 18 years ago. These achievements are testimony to the tenacity with which the Croatian people have pursued their aspirations both to statehood and to membership in the family of Western nations.

The Euro-Atlantic community is today defined by reconciliation and the determination of all to bury the past and to build a future based on common adherence to democratic standards and the rule of law. This underscores the importance for Croatia as it pursues membership in the European Union of persevering on the path of reforms and continuing to cooperate in critical areas such as refugees and the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where significant progress has been achieved in recent years.

Certainly Croatia has come a great distance over the past decade in terms of its democratic progress and economic performance. Our bilateral relationship has never been stronger, marked as it is by close cooperation in the region, within the UN Security Council and at NATO. Indeed, the country has gone from being a security recipient to a security contributor, with troops deployed in Afghanistan, Kosovo and more than a dozen peacekeeping operations around the world.

At the same time Croatia still faces important challenges in fully establishing the rule of law and fighting organized crime and corruption against the backdrop of a worsening economy. However, the economic crisis could yet prove to be an opportunity to address systemic barriers to improved competitiveness and growth, such as inefficiencies in the public administration and the legal system. The key factor is the understanding of the Croatian leadership and people that the great reform effort needs to be sustained not because of demands from Brussels but because their country's future economic and political health depends on it.

That said, change is never easy, and many of the necessary changes that Croatia confronts are wrenching and therefore politically challenging. One thing we have learned from the past decade is that the promise of integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions has everywhere been a powerful driver of reforms. Unfortunately, this positive dynamic is at risk now that Croatia's further progress towards EU membership has been blocked due to a bilateral boundary dispute with Slovenia. The United States does not take a position on this dispute between two friends and NATO allies. As a matter of principle we believe bilateral differences should not obstruct Euro-Atlantic integration. We encourage both parties to work towards a solution. We commend the EU and particularly Enlargement Commissioner Rehn for their efforts to find a way forward. And we hope these differences can be bridged as soon as possible.

Madam Chair, I believe that my public diplomacy background and experience with NATO, the UN and multilateral institutions will enable me to articulate U.S. support for the reforms so necessary to Croatia's success. If confirmed, I will seek to forge an even closer partnership with Croatia, building on the superb work of our outgoing Ambassador, Robert Bradtke, and our country team in Zagreb.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions and, if confirmed, to working with this committee and Congress.