

Testimony of Tina Kaidanow
Ambassador-Designate to Kosovo
June 19, 2008
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is a privilege to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the first United States Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo. I am honored by the trust placed in me by President Bush and Secretary Rice at this decisive moment for the people of Kosovo. Success in achieving our goals in Kosovo and the region will depend on close consultation with this Committee and with others in Congress. If I may, I would like to say a special thanks to my parents, who are here today. Both of them came to the United States many years ago as immigrants, and they could not be prouder to see their daughter serve the country they love so much.

Kosovo's historic declaration of independence on February 17 marked the end of Yugoslavia's non-consensual collapse, one of the most tragic chapters of European history since World War II. During this period, U.S. policy in southeast Europe has been consistent. President George H.W. Bush, President Clinton and President George W. Bush have had a single vision for Europe since the fall of communism in 1989: a continent whole, free and at peace. To implement this vision in Southeast Europe, we have acted to end wars, build multi-ethnic tolerance and bring the entire region closer to the Euro-Atlantic family of democracies.

For the last fourteen years, many of my assignments in the Foreign Service have dealt with the conflicts and problems caused by the break up of the former Yugoslavia. In Serbia, Bosnia and now in Kosovo as Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, I have witnessed the trauma of war and the power of U.S. involvement in bringing peace to the region and sustaining that peace. I traveled to Kosovo repeatedly during the conflict years of the late 1990s, and I later participated in the 1999 Rambouillet peace conference, as the international community tried to find a way out of the crisis and obtain Belgrade's agreement to end its destructive and abusive policies in Kosovo. Kosovo's recent history – and the key U.S. role in it – is in many ways personal for me.

As you recall, Mr. Chairman, it took a NATO military intervention in 1999 to compel the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic to withdraw his security forces from Kosovo. In the aftermath, the UN Security Council decided to remove Kosovo from Belgrade's governance and the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo was established to help govern and

develop it. Under UN guidance, Kosovo gradually recovered from war and built its own institutions of democratic self-government.

The United States supported UN-facilitated efforts that began in 2005 to determine the political status of Kosovo. After months of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari produced a set of recommendations for Kosovo's future. These proposals – the “Ahtisaari Plan” – provided a comprehensive blueprint for Kosovo’s development into a stable, multi-ethnic society on its way to integration in the Euro-Atlantic community. Special Envoy Ahtisaari also recommended that Kosovo become independent, subject to a period of international supervision. The United States supported these recommendations, which offered Kosovo and its Southeast European neighbors the best opportunity to move beyond the conflicts of the past. As Chief of Mission of the U.S. Office in Pristina, I helped explain to the Kosovo leadership the benefits this package could offer their people, but also urged them to pronounce clearly their commitment to the substantial rights afforded by the plan to the Serb community and other minority communities in Kosovo.

On the day after Kosovo declared its independence in line with the Ahtisaari Plan, President Bush recognized Kosovo as an independent state and agreed to establish diplomatic relations. Since February 43 countries have recognized Kosovo, including more than two-thirds of European Union and NATO members and several significant countries from every region of the world. Beyond the question of recognition of Kosovo’s independence, the new state enjoys broad international support. Many countries that have yet to recognize Pristina formally are nevertheless providing personnel, technical assistance and political backing for efforts in-country to build up Kosovo society.

Although independence marked a significant step forward, Kosovo has serious problems. Economic development is slow, political institutions are weak, and inter-ethnic tensions remain. I believe, however, it is a good sign that Kosovo’s minority Serbs have stayed in Kosovo after independence and that the atmosphere between the two communities has remained calm and peaceful overall despite serious provocations from Belgrade and hardline Serbs in Kosovo’s north.

In its first four months of independence, Kosovo has made significant progress in implementing the Ahtisaari protections for its minorities. Prime Minister Thaci, President Sejdiu, and other key institutional leaders have

reaffirmed their commitment to all aspects of the Ahtisaari Plan and have sent consistent messages of inclusion to Kosovo's ethnic minorities. The Kosovo Assembly has already adopted 40 new laws needed to implement the Ahtisaari Plan, including legislation on the decentralization of local government, protection of minority rights and cultural heritage safeguards. The Assembly also approved a new constitution that meets the highest democratic standards. Kosovo is working to deepen relations with its neighbors and has moved forward collaboratively with Macedonia to demarcate their mutual border in accordance with the Ahtisaari Plan.

There are still, of course, many challenges ahead. Belgrade's opposition to independence, as well as its overt policy of promoting ethnic separation in Kosovo, has created threats to stability, and it appears that Russia will act to block Kosovo's entry into those international organizations where Russia or its supporters have a veto. There is much work ahead in managing Kosovo's transition from UN administration to supervised independence, a journey unique to Kosovo given the unusual circumstances of its recent history. Nevertheless, we believe strongly that the resolution of Kosovo's status has opened the door for Kosovo to assume responsibility for its future and for the well-being of its people.

To do this, Kosovo needs help. The European Union has rightly stepped up to provide the bulk of assistance and guidance to the new state. The EU will head up two new international presences in Kosovo, one responsible for rule of law and one responsible for supervising full implementation of the Ahtisaari plan. We will encourage Europe to continue to play this leading role. Active U.S. engagement, however, will remain essential to the stabilization of Kosovo and the region.

Nearly 1,500 U.S. Army National Guardsmen of a total force numbering approximately 16,000 currently serve in KFOR, the NATO-led stabilization force in Kosovo. Although U.S. troops can and have operated throughout Kosovo, they primarily help maintain a safe and secure environment in eastern Kosovo, where a majority of Kosovo Serbs live. They are universally respected by Albanians and Serbs alike for their professionalism and effectiveness in dealing with a mixed-ethnic civilian population. The United States supports ongoing NATO efforts to carry out certain Ahtisaari tasks, such as the establishment of a small Kosovo Security Force, which will allow Kosovo – over time – to contribute to its own security and permit the drawdown of international forces.

For many years, over 200 U.S. civilian police officers have participated in the current UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). As UNMIK hands over justice functions to local authorities and to the EU, the United States will provide a reduced number of police, prosecutors and judges to the EU's new rule of law mission, known as EULEX. The United States is also helping to strengthen Kosovo's economy, promote democratic governance, and bolster civil society, with a special emphasis on programs that benefit Kosovo's ethnic minorities. While Europe remains firmly in the lead in material assistance and provides the ultimate incentive of closer association with the EU, our resources will help Kosovo pay off its share of debt from the former Yugoslavia and accomplish a host of other important goals.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps the single greatest U.S. priority in Kosovo is to foster a stable, multi-ethnic society in which the rights, security and culture of Kosovo's ethnic minorities are firmly protected. The U.S. Embassy in Pristina has been and will continue to be engaged on a daily basis with the Kosovo government and with Kosovo's ethnic communities to promote this objective.

Although Kosovo Serbs opposed U.S. recognition of Kosovo's independence, many of them recognize that the United States is actively committed to their community's welfare. Our efforts to reach out directly to the Serb community and support its needs have had a tangible payoff in enhancing communication and trust. In the last few years, the U.S. government has supplemented Kosovo's inadequate resources by building schools, roads and other infrastructure in Serb communities; we have advocated on behalf of Serb concerns directly to the Kosovo central government and to local authorities; we have helped resolve property disputes for Serbs who wish to return to Kosovo; and we have supported the growth of a nascent Serb media in Kosovo that can articulate the ideas of that community without filtering from Belgrade. We have encouraged Kosovo's government – which has already spent more than \$77 million to build homes and provide support for returning Serbs – to expand those resources even further and provide political backing for sustainable returns.

Protecting the holy sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as its rights as an institution, has also been a major goal for us. In addition to possessing churches and monasteries of global architectural and historic significance, the Serbian Orthodox Church plays an important role in the everyday lives of Kosovo Serbs. Kosovo's government has spent close to \$10 million to reconstruct and preserve those churches that were damaged in

the tragic March 2004 riots. This is an effort we have supported vigorously over the past two years. We have also worked successfully with local governments to modify development plans that might affect the Church's holy sites, and we have facilitated understanding between religious leaders and local populations when Orthodox authorities have sought permission for construction that affects the wider community.

Mr. Chairman, the success of Kosovo is in the U.S. interest. The circumstances of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia posed – and in some ways continue to pose – a fundamental challenge to stability in southeast Europe, and history has shown that broken societies attract the great scourges of our age, including transnational crime, ethnic conflict, trafficking in persons, and terrorism.

To counter the impact of these forces, a strong and focused U.S. approach, in tandem with our European partners, remains absolutely essential. I believe our efforts in Kosovo and the region make a meaningful difference each and every day, and our continued involvement will promote long-term stability in this part of Europe. If confirmed, I will work closely with our allies and with you to help Kosovo take those steps necessary to become a productive member of the Euro-Atlantic family of democratic nations. We and the people of Kosovo have everything to gain from this collaboration.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to appear before this committee today. I look forward to answering your questions.