

Statement of Donald Lu
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Albania
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 26, 2013

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Minority Member, and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear here today as President Obama's nominee to be the next ambassador to Albania. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Kerry for the confidence they have placed in me. I thank you for the opportunity to appear today and, if confirmed, I pledge to work closely with the Congress to advance our Nation's interests in Albania.

If you would allow me, I would like to introduce my family joining me today. My wife, Dr. Ariel Ahart, is my constant companion on our adventures overseas, but also a distinguished public health specialist, having most recently worked for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. My son Kip is a Boy Scout and an enthusiastic flag football player. And my daughter Aliya who is in the 3rd grade is the artist of our family. We are all looking forward to this next adventure.

As the son of an immigrant to America, I am particularly blessed to have had the opportunity to serve in the U.S. Foreign Service and the Peace Corps. Whether it was digging latrines in West Africa or witnessing revolution in Central Asia, I have learned the importance of American leadership in the world. For most of my 22 years in the State Department I have worked on the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Albania is one of those emerging democracies, but it is also an enduring ally and partner of the United States. Albanian soldiers are today conducting combat missions side-by-side with American troops in dangerous places like Kandahar. As one of NATO's newest members, Albania has been a steadfast supporter of peace and security with significant deployments to Afghanistan, along with deployments to U.S. and EU-led operations in Bosnia, Iraq and Chad. For a country of only three million people, Albania punches above its weight.

Since President Woodrow Wilson's defense of Albanian statehood after World War I, up to our strong endorsement of its NATO accession in 2009, the United States has played an important role in helping Albanians to shape

their country's democracy, stability and independence. And today we strongly support Albania's efforts to join the European Union. If confirmed, I will lead our embassy's ongoing efforts to advance three key priorities:

First, the further development of democratic institutions and society. Albania's June parliamentary elections were the best conducted in the country's history, leading to a peaceful transition of power from one ruling coalition to another. Of course, true democracy is more than just elections. We should encourage bold leadership to combat organized crime, human trafficking, and corruption. The U.S. must continue to support the growing voice of civil society, the protection of minority rights, and judicial independence and accountability. A key driver of these reforms is Albania's aspiration for EU membership. The United States and the EU are a community of shared values, and we endorse Albania's goal at every level. The reforms that will be accomplished on the path of EU accession will irreversibly transform the standards and opportunities for all the people of Albania.

Second, support for Albania's increasing participation in NATO, EU and U.S.-led stability missions. In preparation for Albania's participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. military worked intensively to build the skills of the Albanian military. As NATO's role in Afghanistan changes and Western Balkans countries evolve beyond their past conflicts, we must continue to develop the capacity of the Albanian Armed Forces to be an effective long-term partner in supporting stability in Europe and beyond. At the same time, we need to help Albania grapple with corruption and accountability within its military to ensure it can meet the highest standards of the NATO Alliance.

Third, the promotion of U.S.-Albanian economic ties. The Albanian economy has grown impressively over the past 20 years, but has stagnated in recent years. Two things stand the best chance of getting the Albanian economy back on its feet – pursuit of key economic reforms to create a more stable business and investment climate, and the strengthening of its economic partnerships with Europe and the United States. The growing engagement by U.S. exporters and investors in Albania is not only benefitting Americans, but also sharing our values of transparency, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Finally, if confirmed, I will take seriously my role as Chief of Mission to manage and safeguard our precious resources – our people, our

infrastructure, and the strong reputation of the United States abroad. I will work to ensure that they are protected and that American interests are advanced.

If confirmed, I will devote my energies to work for the American people to build strong bonds with the government and people of Albania. In a world of constant peril and uncertainty, the United States needs stalwart allies like Albania. Thank you.