

Statement by Nancy McEldowney  
Ambassador-designate to Bulgaria  
U.S. Department of State  
Hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
April 8, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next American Ambassador to Bulgaria. I am grateful for the confidence expressed by President Bush and Secretary Rice through this nomination. I ask today, with respect and humility, for your confidence as well. If I am confirmed, I pledge to validate your trust by advancing our nation's interests in Bulgaria and throughout the region. I also commit myself to work closely with this Committee and your Congressional colleagues in pursuing our common objectives and shared agenda.

Mr. Chairman, my appearance before this Committee today is the culmination of more than two decades of public service as an American diplomat. Patriotism and service to the nation have shaped my life and my family. My father was a member of the United States Marine Corps. My husband served 26 years as a pilot in the United States Air Force. And my younger brother, now a Lt. Colonel in the Air Force, recently concluded a tour of duty in Afghanistan.

I have spent my entire adult life working to protect and advance our country's interests as a professional diplomat. I have served overseas in Europe, the Middle East and the former Soviet Union. Here at home, I have

worked in the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and on the staff of the National Security Council. I have served as Deputy Chief of Mission in two Embassies and have frequently functioned as Acting Chief of Mission. These diverse experiences have helped prepare me for the responsibilities and challenges that I will face if confirmed for this position.

Since this Committee voted three years ago to confirm our current Ambassador, a number of important developments have taken place:

-- In April 2006, the United States and Bulgaria signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement authorizing U.S. military units to train at specified Bulgarian bases. The first exercise under this agreement took place in September 2007. This summer, approximately 1,000 U.S. and Bulgarian Land Forces will train together. Over the next twelve months, the U.S. Air Force will conduct three training events with approximately 250 U.S. service members each.

-- In January 2007, Bulgaria became a member of the European Union. This followed Bulgaria's entry into the NATO alliance in March 2004. Taken together, these represent the culmination of a process of democratization and reform that began over 19 years ago with the fall of communism and single party rule in 1989.

-- Bulgaria is a member of the coalition in Iraq and a contributor to the NATO effort in Afghanistan. Bulgarian soldiers are deployed side by side with us at Camp Ashraf in Iraq; and in ISAF operations in Kandahar, Kabul

and Herat, Afghanistan. Bulgarian soldiers also participate in NATO, EU and UN peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Liberia and Ethiopia.

-- With the support of U.S. assistance monies generously allocated by this Congress, Bulgaria has accomplished important reforms in economic development, local governance, and national institutions, including the establishment of the American University in Bulgaria and the National Institute of Justice, one of the premier Eastern European training centers for judges and prosecutors.

-- Trade and investment between the United States and Bulgaria has surged, as the Bulgarian economy has grown more than five percent annually for the past five years. In 2007, bilateral trade totaled almost one billion dollars and cumulative investment by American companies is estimated at more than 5.5 billion dollars.

These are impressive accomplishments that illustrate the vibrancy and vast potential of the bilateral partnership between our two countries. But there is still more to be done. Bulgaria still suffers from pervasive corruption and organized crime that undermines public confidence in its institutions. The Balkan region is still burdened with instability, as we have seen recently in Serbia and Kosovo. European energy supplies still lack sufficient security and diversity. And there is still more that the United States and Bulgaria can do together to advance our common strategic interests.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my top priority will be to protect the security of the United States and our citizens, including American facilities and

personnel in Bulgaria. I will work together with the talented interagency team of civilian and military professionals at our Embassy in Sofia to advance American interests in key areas:

-- We will broaden and deepen our cooperation in combating terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, trafficking in persons and narcotics, and other forms of transnational crime.

-- We will work to advance stability and security throughout the Balkans, to help this long-troubled region enjoy peace and prosperity as part of an undivided Euro-Atlantic community.

-- We will promote the security and diversity of energy supplies, building upon Bulgaria's strategic location as a key transit route across the European continent.

-- We will catalyze unfinished legal and judicial reforms, supporting the Bulgarian government's own efforts to combat corruption and organized crime, and to promote good governance, public trust, and the rule of law.

-- We will expand our trade and economic cooperation, increasing commercial opportunities for U.S. companies and stimulating sustainable growth in the Bulgarian economy.

This is an ambitious agenda but one that can be achieved through concerted effort and joint action. Bulgaria is a country that is firmly committed to the principles and practices of democracy and free market economy. It has

made significant progress in both domestic reform and international engagement, and the government is determined to continue these efforts. As a bilateral partner, a NATO ally and a genuine friend of the United States, Bulgaria is a country of importance and promise.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will do my utmost to maintain the distinguished record of service by the men and women who held this position before me. I will strive unceasingly to advance American interests and promote American values.

I thank you again for the honor of appearing before you today. I would be delighted to answer any questions that you may wish to pose.