

Testimony of Nancy Pettit
Nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Latvia
May 20, 2015
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Latvia. I am deeply grateful to President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the confidence and trust they have placed in me in this nomination. If confirmed by the Senate, I pledge to devote my time, energy, and expertise to advancing America's interests in Latvia and strengthening the relations between our two countries. I also commit myself to working closely with the Committee, your staffs, and your Congressional colleagues to build on our shared interest in a strong and vibrant U.S.-Latvian partnership.

I have spent the bulk of my thirty-three-year career as a public servant working on issues related to Europe and trans-Atlantic relations. From my early days as a desk officer in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs to my most recent position as Director of the Office of Western European Affairs, I have devoted a considerable amount of my life to advancing our shared vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. I believe these experiences have prepared me well to lead our Mission in Riga and – if confirmed – continue our work with the Republic of Latvia on a forward-looking and ambitious global agenda.

The United States and Latvia share a long history of unbroken friendship and cooperation. From the darkest days of the Soviet occupation through the end of the Cold War, the United States' commitment to the Latvian people never wavered. Following the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991, Latvia embarked on an ambitious path toward euro-Atlantic integration: joining NATO and the EU in 2004; adopting the euro in 2014; and setting a powerful example for other countries aspiring to be free.

Today, Latvia is one of our most reliable and valued partners. As Allies, U.S. and Latvian troops have fought together and died together in Iraq and Afghanistan. Through our cooperation in Afghanistan, Latvia has become one of only seven countries that are certified as Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC), providing essential targeting expertise for NATO combat missions. With U.S. support, Latvia has also increased its development assistance to countries around the world. For example, through the State Department's Emerging Donors Challenge Fund, the United States and Latvia are co-financing a project in Uzbekistan to enhance export control and border security capabilities. Whether it is contributing humanitarian assistance to fight the spread of Ebola or supporting international efforts to combat ISIL, Latvia has always stepped up to the plate. In short, Latvia is a global partner of first resort.

Without a doubt, Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine has challenged the vision I referenced earlier of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, threatening the security of Latvia and all of our allies in the region. This is why the United States has deployed company-sized units to Poland and the three Baltic States since April 2014 under Operation Atlantic Resolve. Through President Obama's \$1 billion European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), we will sustain this persistent, rotational presence for as long as necessary. ERI will also fund military infrastructure improvement projects, including at Latvia's Lielvarde airbase and Adazi training grounds. These efforts embody the United States' commitment to Latvia's security under NATO's Article 5. Meanwhile, Latvia has enacted legislation to meet its NATO defense spending commitment of 2 percent of GDP by 2020 and is using its role as the current rotating EU Presidency country to maintain international pressure on Russia, while also offering Moscow a diplomatic off-ramp should it choose peace over further escalation.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed by the Senate, I will continue to grow our partnership with Latvia to the benefit of our shared security and prosperity. Latvia has made advancing the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) a top priority of its EU Presidency. If confirmed, I will work hand-in-hand with my Latvian counterparts to build Latvian support for a comprehensive T-TIP agreement that boosts economic growth, creates jobs, and sets the global gold

standard for trade that reflects our shared values. In 2014, bilateral trade in goods between the United States and Latvia totaled \$702 million. While significant, I think there is a tremendous potential to further cultivate our economic ties. If confirmed, I will work to increase our bilateral trade and investment. While Latvia has made great strides over the past twenty years implementing democratic reforms and rule of law, I believe more work needs to be done in the areas of combating corruption, addressing Holocaust-era legacies such as Jewish communal property restitution, and taking advantage of Latvia's rich cultural diversity.

Almost 25 years ago, Latvia reemerged from captivity seeking the democracy, prosperity, and security that we in the transatlantic community have enjoyed for almost seven decades. Through sheer determination, sacrifice, and an enduring commitment to the principles of freedom, the Latvian people persevered and succeeded in building a vibrant, flourishing democracy. If confirmed, I promise to further enrich the bonds between our countries and to continue confronting global challenges together, as close partners and NATO Allies. Thank you again for the privilege of appearing before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

