

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN
EUROPE

The Honorable John Tanner
Chairman
U.S. Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

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B318 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Hasting, Co-Chairman Cardin and members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you here today. I recently led a bipartisan House delegation to NATO Parliamentary Assembly meetings in Brussels and Paris, and to additional meetings in Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia (or Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, FYROM), and Albania from February 16-24.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NPA) consists of members of parliament from the 26 NATO states, as well as members of parliament from associated states such as Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia. During NPA meetings delegates discuss and debate a range of issues of current importance to the alliance. At the February meetings enlargement of the alliance along with Afghanistan and developments in Kosovo dominated the discussions. Delegates have the opportunity to listen to presentations by specialists from NATO and on NATO affairs, and to engage in discussion of the issues raised.

Enlargement is one of the key issues before the alliance today. NATO will hold a summit in Bucharest April 2-4. Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia are candidate states, and each must receive unanimous support from all 26 allied governments in order for it to receive an invitation to join. From that point, each member state will follow its own constitutional processes to amend NATO's founding Washington Treaty to admit new states and to make a commitment to defend additional territory. There must again be unanimous support in this process for a candidate if it is to be admitted to membership. The alliance is still at an early stage, therefore, in considering the applications for membership of these three countries. Congress will hold hearings on the qualifications of the three states, and the United States and other allies will expect them to continue to work to meet NATO requirements under their Membership Action Plans (MAP).

After time in Brussels and Paris, our delegation traveled to Zagreb, Croatia, for the beginning of meetings with candidate state governments for membership in the alliance. Serbian reactions to Kosovo's independence and recognition by many governments had set the region on edge. The U.S. embassy in Belgrade, Serbia, was attacked on February 21, as were the Slovenian and Croatian embassies there. U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Robert Bradtke accompanied us during much of our stay in Croatia and kept us up to date on developments in Belgrade and on the safety of U.S. personnel at our embassy there. He also briefed us on Croatia's efforts to qualify for NATO membership.

While in Zagreb, we met with Prime Minister Sanader, President Mesič, and other senior officials. We were interested in discovering the progress that Croatia has made in military modernization and in other aspects of the program outlined for the country in the MAP. That evening Ambassador Bradtke arranged for us to meet with members of the Croatian parliament, including opposition figures and key members of the foreign policy and defense committees, as well as independent voices in Croatia. This meeting allowed us to hear a wide range of views beyond those in the government, and added to our ability to evaluate Croatia's progress in the MAP. There is a

consensus that significant progress has been made over the past several years. A key issue was the relatively low level of public support – somewhat over 50% – in the population for NATO membership, a figure that appears to be climbing. There must also continue to be progress made in the fight against corruption.

The following day we flew first to the Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), then to Albania. In Macedonia, our ambassador gave us a briefing that touched on several issues of relevance. The delegation then proceeded to meetings with Macedonian President Crvenkovski, Prime Minister Gruevski, and other senior officials, including General Stojanovski, the chief of defense forces. The internal political situation in the country remains complicated and unsettled, and issues range well beyond ethnic divisions in the country. Macedonian troops serve in NATO operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and we met several soldiers who had returned from assignments there. A key issue in NATO is the formal name of the country, and there are continuing discussions with Greece to attempt to reach a compromise under U.N.-sponsored talks. We are hopeful that Skopje and Athens can reach a settlement of this issue, and that Macedonia's candidacy for NATO can be judged solely on its qualifications under the MAP.

In Albania we met with President Topi and with Prime Minister Berisha. We also met with members of parliament from both the governing parties and the opposition. We were accompanied throughout our meetings by U.S. Ambassador Withers, who provided an overview of developments in Albania. There are conflicting views on the depth of the problem caused by organized crime and corruption in Albania, and this was one issue raised in our discussions with government officials. While laws have been passed to fight crime and corruption, it may be useful for Congress in the coming months to examine the degree to which such legislation has been implemented. It should be said that Albania, although a poor country, by all accounts has made progress in downsizing and modernizing its military.

The Serbian reaction to Kosovo's independence time and again surfaced during our meetings. In the coming months, we are likely to see a range of ideas raised for and against the possible membership of the "Adriatic 3" in the alliance. These are small countries with correspondingly small militaries; they must concentrate on niche capabilities to make a contribution to allied security, and each is making progress along this road. Given the continuing tensions in the region in part brought on by Serbia's reaction to Kosovo's independence, proponents of the three governments' candidacies are likely to argue that their developing democracies and contributions to multinational, cooperative efforts to bring stability are factors in their favor. These are issues that my delegation and other Members of Congress will be considering in the coming months.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony here today.