

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for European Ambassadorial Nomination Hearing
June 19, 2008

Today we are joined by a talented group of U.S. diplomats who have been nominated to serve in important posts. U.S. Ambassadors play critical roles around the world. Not only are they the main conduits between their host governments and Washington, but they serve as advocates for democracy, human rights, and diplomatic solutions to crises. U.S. national security interests are not well served by delays in confirming qualified Ambassadors.

I would like to note the personal experiences I have had with two of our nominees. John Beyerle has been nominated to be U.S. Ambassador to Russia to succeed Bill Burns. It has been my privilege to work closely with John during his time as Deputy Chief of Mission in Russia and as our Ambassador to Bulgaria. He is a gifted diplomat who will continue a strong tradition of outstanding U.S. ambassadorial leadership in Moscow. His experience, commitment, and work ethic make him an excellent selection for this important post at a delicate moment in U.S.-Russian relations.

Maria Yovanavich, the nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, is a talented and experienced diplomat. I have enjoyed working closely with Maria and remember our policy discussions on bus trips to missile and strategic bomber dismantlement sites in Ukraine. She will bring patient diplomacy to the challenges in Armenia. Her task will be made more difficult because the U.S. has not had an Ambassador in Yerevan for three years and this has been detrimental to both U.S. and Armenian interests.

In addition, we will hear testimony from accomplished nominees to Macedonia, the European Union, the Netherlands, Moldova, Kosovo, and Austria. The challenges that would confront Mr. Reeker in Macedonia are particularly sensitive. Ongoing negotiations between Macedonia and Greece have been inconclusive, and Skopje's NATO aspirations were put on hold. The contention between the two capitals has endangered the lives of innocent tourists and complicated U.S. national security interests in the region. The situation is made more difficult by the problems encountered during the recent Macedonian elections. The U.S. needs strong diplomatic representation to work closely with the United Nations Special Envoy to address the name issue and to assist Macedonia in ensuring a free and fair democratic political system.

Irrespective of the November election in the United States, the important business of our government goes on. This is especially true of the State Department, which we expect to defend U.S. diplomatic, economic, and security interests in every corner of the globe. With only seven months remaining in this Administration, it is essential that the Foreign Relations Committee move with dispatch to confirm qualified nominees so that they can provide leadership as soon as possible.

I thank the Chair and look forward to our discussion with these eight impressive nominees.

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