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European and Eurasian Affairs**

**Media Roundtable
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DAS Countryman: Thank you, and good morning.

I'm in Brussels because our coordination between the United States and the European Union on issues related to Southeast Europe is more important than ever. We say very explicitly that the path to being a 21st Century democratic state for each of the seven states that I deal with relies heavily, in fact is the same path as moving towards the European Union. The EU has shown itself to be a powerful force for social and economic progress throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and we believe it exerts the same force today for all the remaining states of the former Yugoslavia as well as for Albania.

I think there can be no more dramatic demonstration of this than the incredible progress that Croatia has shown in the last six or seven years since it made the decision to pursue diligently membership in the European Union. Last week we had the Foreign Minister of Croatia in Washington. He signed with Secretary Clinton an open skies arrangement for air travel between our countries, and both Minister Jandroković and Secretary Clinton spoke very clearly about the progress that Croatia has made.

We believe that each country in the region is capable of that kind of dramatic progress towards the European Union if the leaders of those countries will take the responsibility to make that strategic decision. If they are capable of putting the long term interests of their countries above their immediate political self-interest you can see that kind of progress at different rates of speed from every state in the region.

To help achieve that, we talk frequently with the European Union to coordinate our policy approaches, and the help that we are giving politically and economically, as much as we can.

The other comment I would make that applies to the whole region is about the area that each of these countries needs to work hardest on, and that is what we call the rule of law. Establishing credible and independent judiciary systems,

prosecutorial systems, police, and ensuring that these are not politicized and not under the control of political parties is the most essential step and the one that I think ultimately will be the hardest for most of these countries to take as they move towards the European Union, but it is where we spend a lot of our assistance money in the region and where we coordinate very closely with the European Union in doing this.

That's the overview. What else can I tell you about what's happening? I hope you'll tell me some things about what's happening.

Media: My questions are on Kosovo. The elections are over. The results are certified even if a lot of [irregularities were] confirmed, but anyway, they are there. Now there are attempts to form a government in Kosovo. Your ambassador in Pristina said that this government has to be a government of people with clean hands. Are you really optimistic that Kosovo can manage to form a government before independent anniversary, so within a week? And do you think that the government will be ready to start a dialogue with Serbia? What would be the role of the United States in the dialogue, because total respect for you, people don't trust the EU as much as they trust the United States. The Kosovar people.

DAS Countryman: The short answers are yes and yes. Yes, I believe that the parties in Kosovo -- which are not a huge number of parties; there's a limited number -- I believe that if they work hard they could form a government next week. I'm not predicting that they will, but I believe it is possible. And as Ambassador Dell has said repeatedly, a new government in Kosovo needs to be clean, capable and committed. It has to assign ministers according to their capabilities, their skills, and their readiness to work and not solely upon dividing up who gets which ministries. And I believe that such a government will be able to begin rapidly the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, that should lead to practical progress in the daily life of all the citizens of Kosovo, whatever their ethnic group, whatever their location.

The dialogue will be facilitated by the European Union. We will be available to help the parties and to help the EU to make the kind of practical decisions that they need to make. We do believe that Kosovo is capable of participating in this dialogue. They don't need the United States to speak for them or to be their advocate, but the government of Kosovo needs to

be able and prepared to talk directly to the government of Serbia.

On your last point, I think it's unfortunate that there is not more trust for the European Union within Kosovo. The EU has spent more money than the United States in the development of Kosovo and still does so today. The EU is a more complex creature -- you know this, working in Brussels -- than even the United States government is. For that reason perhaps its messages can be confusing.

But I have confidence that the government of Kosovo will appoint people to this dialogue who know how to look out for Kosovo's interests, and if they take a positive approach not only towards the EU but also towards Serbia, that there will be situations that will be winning situations for both Belgrade and Pristina.

Media: Can you clarify this last question. Kosovo declared itself an independent country. It is recognized by the United States and by most of the EU countries. But still EU is not in a position to state that the status is non-negotiable and there is no partition of Kosovo. United States has said this clearly. So can you see EU saying openly, publicly, formally, officially, that the status of Kosovo is not part of dialogue?

DAS Countryman: You'll have to ask the European Union that question. I'm satisfied that the territorial integrity and the status of sovereignty of Kosovo are not up for negotiation. As long as Kosovo delegation is clear about that, I think that the public proclamations by all sides are less important than the determination of Kosovo as it enters this dialogue.

Media: A more difficult part of the region. I'm from Croatia. Coming back to Croatia, in order to serve as a role model Croatia should enter the EU rather quickly, but are you maybe talking to your EU partners in order to facilitate that process, that no new obstacles would be put in Croatia's way, for example from Netherlands or from England. There is also a possibility that [inaudible] opposition might [inaudible] in the parliament because they need a certain majority which the government doesn't have.

DAS Countryman: I think Secretary Clinton spoke very clearly about this last week and I send you back to the words she said. This is a decision for the EU member states and not for the United States. Frequently we give our opinion, even on decisions that are for the EU to make, and in this case we've

said clearly that we're very much looking forward to Croatia getting the reward of the hard work, the reforms that it's done, and we hope that it can be accomplished this year and even in the first half of this year. I don't see publicly objections being raised from states and we're not yet at that point. There's still work on closing the chapters, as I understand it. So I think your question is a little bit early, but our orientation and our support is not in doubt.

Media: We are now a couple of months out from elections.

DAS Countryman: Four months.

Media: Now [inaudible] can see some light at end of tunnel, so how do you see the current situation and [inaudible]?

DAS Countryman: I don't have the ideal solution for how the parties in Bosnia should make their decision on forming coalitions. They've explored many possibilities. I think we share the frustration of the Bosnian people that this task has not been accomplished yet. I'm still optimistic that when a government is formed at the state level that it will be capable of making the decisions and the compromises that are necessary to move Bosnia forward to make Bosnia-Herzegovina a more functional state, not a more centralized state but a more functional state with two strong entities capable of governing at those levels.

Bosnia has the longest way to go towards membership in the European Union. The fact that the progress has been so slow in Bosnia should cause the people to demand more of their leaders to push that process forward. The EU is prepared to help, the United States is prepared to help, but it is a state where we need to see less rhetoric and more action from all of the leaders within Bosnia.

Media: [Inaudible] American [inaudible].

DAS Countryman: Do you want to hear something new? [Laughter].

Media: -- promising some kind of pact [inaudible]. You [inaudible] EU [inaudible]. Could we expect something similar from American side?

DAS Countryman: From the American side? Let's focus on getting the European Union to upgrade and strengthen its representation in Bosnia-Herzegovina which is a goal that we support.

The U.S. commitment to continue to work for the good of Bosnia-Herzegovina is not in doubt. That was the clear message from Secretary Clinton when she came to Sarajevo in October, and it stands. We were there in the toughest times, and we will continue to be there as Bosnia-Herzegovina moves forward.

Media: In relation to Bosnia, what is [your position on a third entity]?

DAS Countryman: I can't picture that making a third entity is a solution for anything. Bosnia does not need more complex government with more capabilities to prevent action. It needs more effective government with more capabilities for making decisions.

Media: Can I talk to Albania? There has been three main [inaudible] organized [inaudible]. I would like to get your opinion on the way how this [inaudible] is being organized. Of course the first one was [inaudible]. But the second and the third one, [inaudible].

DAS Countryman: That's a very open question. The violence that occurred on January 21st was a tragedy and a loss for Albania and Albanians. There is no reason four people should have been killed. There is no reason today to dishonor those four individuals with a battle in the press between two parties about how they died. It is shameless for the leaders of either party to say "I know what happened and I know who's guilty". This is a political theater that Albania does not need.

There exists in Albania a Prosecutor General who has the responsibility to determine what happened. That's how a democratic state functions, with independent institutions that are not controlled by either party. And if neither party puts their trust in the independent institutions, then they cannot function. In order to help ensure that the Albanian people get the truth that they deserve, we've supplemented the Prosecutor General with technical expertise from the United States, and we look forward to the Prosecutor General doing her job objectively and well and as rapidly as possible, and getting to the results that will help determine what happened on the 21st.

What happened the following two Fridays shows that what happened on January 21st did not need to happen. Rhetoric comparing Albania, a NATO member and an aspiring EU member to Tunisia or Egypt was not just unhelpful, it seems it was intended to cause

violence, to cause martyrs. That was unnecessary and undemocratic.

Peaceful demonstrations cannot be suppressed by anti-democratic means. Demonstrations should not be the means, and particularly violent demonstrations should not be the means, to accomplish undemocratic goals. The opposition has certain political goals which it can pursue in constitutional democratic fashion and that's how they should be pursued. If peaceful demonstrations are part of that strategy, that's acceptable, and the demonstrations should not be suppressed by undemocratic means.

Media: If I may, you already mentioned the fact that you are working [inaudible] investigation. How do you see the fact that there has been up to now at least [inaudible] police. Although the Prime Minister thinks that he's too [inaudible] in the other side of this, collaborating, and it's [inaudible] for power from General [inaudible].

DAS Countryman: Those six individuals need to be questioned. You believe they haven't been questioned, is that correct?

Media: No. They haven't been. After the [inaudible] with U.S. Ambassador and [inaudible], there has been a deal to get them questioned, but as they have been [inaudible]. It was [inaudible].

DAS Countryman: They need to be questioned. The political parties and the newspapers that are influenced by the political parties need to do less talking and more listening.

Media: Do you support the [Parliamentary investigating committee] in Albania? [Inaudible] with General [inaudible].

DAS Countryman: That's a political committee which may have a role in a democracy, but the institution that we are working with is the independent institution of the Prosecutor General which we expect to do its work non-politically.

Media: If I may just get back to the issue of Bosnia once again. You said that a third entity would not be an option. But do you see another way to upgrade the Bosnian approach from second grade to first grade before -- Because having the [Croats as second-class citizens] is not really a good basis to have a stable country.

DAS Countryman: So your assertion is that Croatians are second class citizens?

Media: Well, if it's Bosniaks who choose Croatian representative in the presidency, then they obviously are.

DAS Countryman: I think there are more things in Bosnia that are obvious to you than are obvious to me. This is a decision for the political negotiations that are going on right now. I don't think it's helpful and I don't think it's worthy of a democracy that is seeking to be a mature democracy to have the United States or the European Union or anybody else come in and endorse this party's assertion that we are second class citizens, or another party's assertion that they are not.

I think the unfortunate part is that to a great extent all the citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina are second class citizens today.

Media: On Bosnia, former Croatian Foreign Minister, a long time ago, [Piccula], had one very interesting quote. He said that Bosnia has one entity too much, not one entity too little. Do you think that the basic agreement after 15 years really has to be changed now because this was documents of the war, and we've seen [inaudible] cannot function [inaudible] and creating a different [inaudible] state. Do you see that as a possibility?

DAS Countryman: Dayton is not only what ended the war, it is the centerpiece of the agreement that has made Bosnia-Herzegovina possible until now. Like any country in the world, the constitution should evolve as time goes on. But it is not the role of the United States to say this needs to be replaced.

We support the essential concept of Dayton which is two entities with three equal constituent peoples, and if the two entities and three peoples find a way to make the constitution more effective, they'll have support from the international community.

Media: What do you expect today from the steering group of Kosovo? What is position of United States on the double hatting or triple hatting in the future or separating the office of ICR from EUSR? Because EU hasn't made its mind yet on this, what does it want in Kosovo. So what is your position? Do you think that those functions should be together, even though they are very schizophrenic because the same person at the ICR supports and provides [Kosovo] independence; EUSR cannot recognize it.

DAS Countryman: I don't know what the ISG will decide today. It's not up to the U.S. I look forward to a good discussion.

Media: But what is the U.S. position?

DAS Countryman: The U.S. position is to listen carefully to our friends and make a decision that makes sense for Kosovo, that moves Kosovo closer to the attainment of the goal that all members of the ISG share for Kosovo, which is full sovereignty and territorial integrity, and recognition by the international community and membership in international organizations. That's what we're working on. The structure is not the most crucial thing.

Media: I have one specific and one general question.

Former Slovenian President Milan Kučan [released] a report in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the way forward. Have you seen this report? Have you met him? Or will you meet him because he is in Brussels? And [inaudible] President? And if the answer is yes, what do you think about him?

The second question, [inaudible] general terms [inaudible]?

DAS Countryman: I've seen the report. I have not met Mr. Kučan. I look forward to meeting him not today, but on another trip.

The role of Slovenia is positive. What can I say?

Media: What do you think about the report?

DAS Countryman: I've seen it. I can't say I've absorbed it.

Media: You mentioned before that you are going [to Pristina, Skopje and Tirana]. What is the purpose of your visit?

DAS Countryman: All three? Obviously they're three different places. You can't make much generalization about countries that are facing unique situations.

In Pristina we'll continue as the EU is doing, talking about preparations for this Kosovo-Serbia dialogue which we hope to see begin after the formation of the government in Kosovo.

In Skopje there's always a lot to talk about. We look forward to having Prime Minister Gruevski visit the United States later

this month and we'll talk about some of the preparations for that, talk about some of our concerns about the political situation within Macedonia, our desire to see progress toward European Union standards in Macedonia, and express concern about items where the progress has been lacking recently.

Media: [Inaudible] in Skopje? There are some, there is [inaudible] between the opposition, especially from [inaudible] parties there. And [inaudible] there will not be [inaudible] until there will not be some respect from the government.

DAS Countryman: I'm sure we'll talk about that. I don't have a position about whether or not there should be early elections.

I do have a position about the boycotts. I don't know every event in Balkan history. I know a thousand years of Balkan history, but some of the last 20 years I missed here and there. I am not aware of a single instance in any of these countries where the boycott of a parliament or the boycott of an election helped to produce a more democratic outcome for the country. I could be wrong, and it's possible that we will see in Albania or in Macedonia today the first instance in which a boycott produced a useful result, but I'm skeptical.

In Tirana, I want to mention Albania as a place where the cooperation and the coordination between the United States and the European Union is extraordinarily strong, in our conversations in Brussels and in Washington and especially on the ground in Tirana. The U.S., the EU, the OSCE share the opinion that the parties need to tone down their rhetoric, begin to listen to each other, and find a way to make the next elections in Albania clean and successful. An endless cycle of arguing about election results does not serve the interests of the people of Albania.

There are a host of other challenges that Albania needs to face. I think one that is clearly on the table today is corruption. We need to be clear that corruption exists in the national government, it exists in municipal governments, it exists in the parties, and it exists in business. And in each case it is a parasite that takes money from Albanian citizens and prevents Albania from attaining either its economic potential or its European potential. It is pervasive, and nobody has a monopoly on corruption, and certainly no one has a monopoly on virtue.

Media: When you say parties in Albania, who are the parties? [It looks now] there is a Prime Minister against everybody else,

so he [inaudible] President. We have the Chief Prosecutor, we have [inaudible], Secret Service, so he is after everybody. He is --

Media: [Inaudible].

Media: Even [inaudible] comes from his party [inaudible]. Do you see the dialogue --

DAS Countryman: When I say parties I talk about two political parties.

Media: What do you think about the Prime Minister --

DAS Countryman: -- independent institutions, whether the Prosecutor General, the Intelligence Service or the President have an independent non-political job to do, and they must be allowed to do it without political interference from either of the two political parties.

Media: Don't you think the international community made a mistake in [inaudible] when they said that the elections were okay. Don't you think that's one of the reasons the situation -
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DAS Countryman: In Albania?

Media: Yeah.

DAS Countryman: As I recall, both parties said the elections were okay at the time of the elections. Later there was a decision by one of the parties that said that the elections are not okay.

Media: I don't remember [inaudible] some party [inaudible]. But the other party, small parties, including here some of the main demographic coalitions, were saying that there has been a migrating, [inaudible] procedure. Especially the counting procedure.

DAS Countryman: We've never had perfect elections in the Balkans. We do have a great organization under OSCE, ODIHR, that prepared a very good report that detailed all the problems of the elections. It is extremely disappointing that in Albania both the parties that complained about the elections and those that embraced the elections, that none of them have done a damn thing to move forward to adopt ODIHR requirements.

There's a lot of good capability to blame the other side for failing to do it, but I haven't seen anybody do something positive.

Media: On the region, a question about the [search for Mladic]. What do you think that [will ever end]? And is it correct the [Serbian authorities are] capable and willing [inaudible]?

DAS Countryman: Every never-ending story ends. Second, yes. I think the government is serious in searching for him. And serious in their cooperation with the ICTY. But it is impossible to predict when they will achieve success. It's a matter of luck as well as a matter of diligence.

Media: On the Marty report on Kosovo, do you think that the reaction by Kosovar government [inaudible]? How do you see that Kosovo can overcome the damage that is already done by this report?

DAS Countryman: First, we take the report seriously. We don't prejudge whether it is accurate or correct, but we take it seriously.

Secondly, it needs to be investigated. It needs to be investigated both to determine if there are any guilty parties or to clear Kosovo's reputation if the evidence is not there.

Third, we believe that the investigation needs to be done by EULEX, they have the jurisdiction -- not by any newly created court.

The governments of Kosovo and Albania have said clearly that they will cooperate with any investigation done by the competent authorities. We welcome that. We expect that to be honored and practiced.

Thank you.

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