



The Croatia Summit

Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs

Interview with Callin Neascu, AFP
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QUESTION: I am Callin Neascu of the Agence France Presse. Thank you for your time. I will try to be brief because I know that the conference will start soon. Is there a particular message that Washington wants to send to Croatia, Macedonia and Albania during this summit ahead of the Bucharest NATO Summit?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: There is an overall message to the entire region, which is basically that South Eastern Europe has the potential to move rapidly to join the Euro-Atlantic world, just like Central Europe did in the 1990s. South East Europe can do what Central Europe did, and that already is happening.

And Croatia is a good example of this success. Even more than Slovenia because Croatia was involved in the Yugoslav wars, and yet, look at it now. There is no barrier between Croatia and Europe, and Croatia and NATO. So, it's a larger message, which is - this part of the world can succeed, and an implicit message that the great barrier that remains for the region is the resolution of the Kosovo issue, which has to be resolved not just for the sake of Kosovo, but also for the sake of Serbia. And by that I mean that until Kosovo is resolved, Serbia is going to be trapped in a kind of nationalist political cycle. But Serbia needs to have a European future.



QUESTION: But is Serbia ready to accept the fact that it will lose Kosovo, in one way or another?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I think that most Serbs understand that Kosovo is gone. Most Serbs don't like that, but most Serbs also want to join Europe. That's a general characterization, and it depends on who you are talking to in Serbia. But I think that Serbs who bother to think about and understand reality, but they also need to be given confidence that Europe will accept them.

It would be a terrible thing if you say to the Serbs, you are going to lose, you've already...Milosevic lost Kosovo, and you can't gain Europe. That's the wrong message, that's not the message. The message is, you may have, Milosevic may have destroyed Yugoslavia, and Kosovo may be gone, but Europe is yours. And the irony is, if you step back, that the only way for all Serbs to live in one political entity was Yugoslavia. Well, and then Serbian nationalists destroyed it. The second way for all Serbs to live in one political community is for everyone to join the EU. And the only way for that to happen is for Kosovo status to be resolved. So, the irony is, to get what they want, they have to give up what they've already lost. You see?

QUESTION: I understand.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: And it's tragic.

QUESTION: But are the leaders ready to accept it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: It depends on which leaders. No Serbian leader will ever affirmatively agree, nor would the international community force it upon them, but I think they understand this; it's just one of these cases of people knowing the truth and not being able to articulate it. But look, the point is that Serbia...Serbia's leaders can bring Serbia into Europe. That's available, and the question for Serbia is whether they try to keep hold of Kosovo, because Milosevic lost that. The question is whether they take Europe. That's the question. And the answer, from us, is you are welcome, we want you. We are all better off with you.

QUESTION: And in this situation, is there any sign that they are starting to understand?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: That's a fair question, and I think the leaders, at least the leaders seem stuck and unable to do that, but I think underneath that there is a pretty clear understanding of reality. But, you think, nobody admits it out loud, or very few people. And I think the Europeans are very clear on this point. They are uncomfortable, as we all are, with the difficulty in the choices. It's not easy. Nor is it particularly pleasant. Nobody is pleased that we have to do what we have to do. But, in 1999, Europe and America were forced to stop Milosevic's armies, and what we are dealing with now is the consequence of, this is sort of the second act of that drama. And, you've got to conclude that you can't keep people in limbo forever.

And the UN, and don't listen just to me, read the UN report on Kosovo, which basically said two things. It was in the *New York Times* today, I imagine in other places in the European press. One, the Kosovo government has made a lot of progress, and, secondly, the status quo will not hold, we've got to move forward. This isn't the Americans who said it; it's the UN that everybody says we have to listen to. OK, let's listen to them.

QUESTION: What possibly should the formula be to get to the solution, without having Serbs and Moscow blocking the process?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, we still are working at the Security Council. We haven't given up on that process; it is in all ways preferable, if we move to the Security Council. There is no advantage to doing it outside, there are only disadvantages. So, we hope, that some way can be found, because, if the UN Security Council is paralyzed, if they are unable to act, then the choices all become harder. And they were paralyzed in 1999. And then we had to act anyway. That's a fact. That's not a policy statement, that's a historical fact. And it would be better for all if we found a way forward and were to come into (inaudible) working with (inaudible).

Now, President Sarkozy, you are Agence France Presse, I should say that President Sarkozy's proposal struck us, at the G-8, struck us as sound, that is give more time for negotiations, but if at the end of that process if there is no solution, move ahead and implement Ahtisaari. He said six months. OK. You know, four months or six months, but, you know, a kind of clarity, there needs to be clarity, not ambiguity about the process. And that was Sarkozy's plan, which struck us as sound. We didn't make it up, we were surprised at the G-8, but some surprises are good ones, it was a good idea.

QUESTION: But, do you think you can convince the Kosovo Albanians to be patient?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: That's a fair question. I think the Kosovo Albanians heard President Bush in Albania, and they heard him in Bulgaria. He was very clear. Independence for Kosovo is going to be the outcome, and we have to get moving.

QUESTION: So, they should rather be patient, because everyone is fearing...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Everyone is fearing; and I'm concerned too. I think the Kosovars will be patient if they sense that the international community, if they are confident that the international community is determined to see this through. And, they heard President Bush. And I know that they were concerned about a misunderstanding of what Sarkozy was proposing, but Sarkozy's plan was not endless delay; it was a way to get this done in the Security Council. It's a sound proposal. We are determined to get this done.

QUESTION: Coming back to the summit here in Croatia, do you think there is going to be any message for Croatia, Albania and Macedonia, that they will join NATO?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, the United States doesn't make that decision, it's got to be made by all members of the alliance, all 26. We certainly think that NATO enlargement has been a success; we think all of these countries have made progress, and we hope that the consensus develops, but it's also up to them to show that they are ready.

QUESTION: Do you think it's going to be a triple entry?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I don't know. Look, each country has to qualify on its own, countries aren't linked. But it would be, obviously we want to see as many countries qualify as possible. OK?

QUESTION: OK, one last question, a short one. Russian Vice Foreign Minister Denisov today reiterated Russia's position against NATO enlargement, namely to Ukraine and Georgia.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, Ukraine has not decided whether it wants to join NATO; NATO's door is open, and the first thing is not what Russia wants, but what Ukraine wants. Right now they are not decided. Georgia knows what it wants. Georgia wants to join NATO, and it's got some work to do, to consolidate its reforms, and this will take some time, but nobody gets to veto NATO's decisions. But this will take some time, and hard work on the part of the Georgians. OK?

QUESTION: Thank you.

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