

The Deputy Secretary's Trip to the Balkans

Press Availability with Prime Minister Pahor, Ljubljana, Slovenia

April 6, 2010, 11:00 a.m.

[Introduction by Prime Minister Pahor]

Deputy Security Steinberg: Well, thank you, Prime Minister for those generous words; it's a great pleasure to be here in Ljubljana. It's a true measure of a great ally that we have a partner who is not just a consumer of security, but a provider to others. The model of leadership that Slovenia has represented over the years as a prosperous, democratic society and great partner to the United States gives us a lot of support in the big challenges that we face together. And I think that there's no greater evidence of that strong support and vision than the leadership that the Prime Minister has shown on working on those problems with our neighbors here in the Balkans. The Brdo process is something that we strongly support. We think this is an enormous challenge that Slovenia is taking on, bringing together countries of the region in a pragmatic way, to look for solutions in an inclusive way that represents the kind of ideals that we all share. The United States stands ready to support this in every way, and I feel very grateful to the Prime Minister to be able to gain his assessment of the issues and the challenges, particularly in Bosnia, as I continue on to Sarajevo for my fourth visit to Sarajevo since becoming Deputy Secretary. I know that the wisdom and insight that you've shared with us will help make this very difficult challenge a little bit easier, and I applaud this effort and stand ready to work with you as you continue on this very important path.

We also see this in many other efforts that Slovenia has undertaken and the Prime Minister has undertaken. With the border arbitration agreement with Croatia -- a strong sign of commitment. The work with neighbors to support the further integration of the Western Balkans is a sign of leadership that is something that we admire very much. And we also see this beyond the borders with Europe, that you support NATO efforts in Afghanistan, for which we're enormously grateful. We know what a challenge that represents -- it is also a challenge for leadership -- and we understand that the security challenge we face in Afghanistan is one that we all share and one that affects the security of all of our citizens. That common effort and shared responsibility that goes with membership to NATO and partnership is something that is truly admirable and so we're enormously grateful for your commitment, and work together in that partnership. I know the President is looking forward to seeing you in Prague as part of his efforts to moving forward on a very ambitious agenda, the President's commitment to reduce the role and numbers of nuclear weapons. We'll have a chance both at the signing of the START agreement in Prague followed by the security summit in Washington, as well as at the announcement later today of our nuclear posture, of you all representing that commitment.

Once again, thank you for your hospitality and wisdom and insight.

Question #1: From AFP: If I may, can you discuss the recent problems Slovenia had in getting the Serbian President to join with our [inaudible] with you, what's your stand on the position Serbia is having with Kosovo and the whole region?

Deputy Secretary Steinberg: Well first, as I said, I really admire the efforts of the Prime Minister to try to find a path to bring all countries of the region together. We recognize that there are differences, but the whole point of a dialogue is to have an opportunity to discuss these differences, and diplomacy is about being creative and finding creative ways to bring people together when they have differences. And I know that he and the Foreign Minister have worked hard at that and I am encouraged by what he told me this morning about future meetings in connection with the Brdo process, which offers the opportunity to bring all the countries of the region around the table in a very pragmatic way to discuss those differences. Following my visit to Sarajevo I will be in Belgrade, and am looking forward to meeting President Tadic. President Tadic has taken some very important steps to advance his country's aspirations to join Europe and to be fully integrated into Europe, and we want to discuss how best to do that and how to work together in a pragmatic way to deal with the issues between Serbia and Kosovo. Following Belgrade I will go to Pristina, and as I said, while there clearly are differences, I think we all need to remember the importance of maintaining an approach that offers the possibility of pragmatic cooperation as we work through these difficult issues and raise the benefit of security and prosperity to all of the people in the region.

Question #2: From STA: Regarding the visit to Prague, can you tell us about the message that President Obama will be sending to the Central European leaders, and do you have any more information about the dinner with Pres. Obama?

Deputy Secretary Steinberg: As I think you know, the President will be traveling to Prague to sign the START agreement with Pres. Medvedev. This is an important achievement for the President. It represents the fulfillment of his own commitment a year ago in Prague to begin reducing our own dependence upon nuclear weapons, to reduce the number of nuclear weapons. And it's also a reflection, I think, of the improved relationship between the U.S. and Russia; if we can work together on issues which are not only of concern to our people but to the world as a whole, and to contribute to a secure, and more safe world. At the same time the President has made clear, as he will make clear in the Nuclear Posture Review, that as we reduce the numbers and our dependence upon nuclear weapons, it in no way reflects or lessens our commitment to our allies' security, and that we are very firmly committed to our treaty obligations and to our partners in the region. And so this meeting will be an opportunity for the President to explain how we're moving forward on our goals with respect to nuclear weapons, and also our strong and remaining commitment to our partners in Europe and particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. So it's a good opportunity for him to get together with them again. He met with them the last time he was in Prague; it's a part of our own deep commitment and partnership with all of the countries of Europe. The U.S. places enormous importance on our partnership with Europe. You're our key allies, with challenges ranging from Afghanistan to Iran to the global economic crisis. This is just one more chance to reaffirm that strong commitment we have for our partnership with Europe and with countries in this region.

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