

as obligations, in making these kinds of investments beyond our borders.

And I think anything you can do to help that, I would appreciate it. I mean, there is this sort of general awareness in Congress that the world is becoming more interdependent. There's a much more sophisticated understanding of the economics, for example. But it's not just economics. It's the environment; it's the public health; it's all these other things where we are becoming more and more caught up with each other.

Our major military mission in the last 6 months, before the operation in Iraq, has been to send several thousand of our uniformed personnel to Central America to help them rebuild after Hurricane Mitch. It's not only the right thing to do from a humanitarian point of view, it is in our national interest. Because if those countries don't rebuild, they will become highly vulnerable to all the drug traffickers. And if they don't rebuild, then all their people will have to come here and, if they can't get here legally, they will try to become illegal immigrants. So there's all these things that we need to begin to see our relationships beyond our borders as more of an extension of our relationships with one another rather than as something totally different and apart from our relations with one another.

And anyway, I don't mean to give you a speech on that; I know you believe that. But the point I want to make is most people who run for Congress never have to think about these things unless they have a large immigrant population within their district from a particular place. So it doesn't—this kind of discussion we're having, because you understand the HIV/AIDS issue—I'm preaching to the choir here. But anything you can do to sort of just sit down

and walk through this with congressional delegations or their chiefs of staff or whoever the appropriate people are from around the country, I would really appreciate, because I think there is a lot of support. For example, you can always get good support in Congress, bipartisan, for a big increase in the Ryan White Act. And now we've finally got pretty good support in Congress, this whopping increase we had to help people purchase the drugs, the medicines. But it drops off markedly when you try to talk about the connection between what we're doing here at home and beyond our borders. And I really think you could help, because this is one example of a more general challenge the country will have to face more every year for the next 20 years, maybe forever, but certainly for the next 20 years.

*Dr. Hitt.* Mr. President, we really have made—probably hundreds of recommendations in the past few years, I mean—[laughter]. We've tried our best to narrow down—

*The President.* This is the most energetic—[laughter].

*Dr. Hitt.* But we have narrowed down a few specific initiatives we brought to your attention today. And the reason is clear, that we've talked to many administration officials and this is where we feel that there's a logjam that you can really help and get involved in and take it to heart.

*The President.* I will.

*Dr. Hitt.* And thank you again for meeting with us.

*The President.* Thank you for the dreidel, the book, the letters. I came away so well, I might have to make the room again. [Laughter] Thank you very much.

NOTE: The meeting began at 5:45 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

## United States-European Union Joint Statement on Cooperation in the Western Balkans

December 18, 1998

Political, civil, and economic instability in some areas of the Western Balkans threatens peace and prosperity in all southeastern Europe and poses serious challenges across Europe and beyond. During the past six months, we have

achieved notable successes and are agreed on further cooperative steps in the Western Balkans.

Our envoys in Kosovo, Ambassadors Chris Hill and Wolfgang Petritsch, are working as a

team to conclude successfully negotiations on an interim political settlement for Kosovo. In Kosovo, the U.S. and EU are collaborating to ensure implementation of the October 16 OSCE-FRY Agreement, notably in the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM). We are extremely concerned that recent acts of violence in Kosovo could spiral out of control, and call on all parties to preserve the cease fire and cooperate fully with KVM.

We remain committed to enhancing quickly confidence-building and to supporting civil society in Kosovo. The EU welcomes the U.S. initiative to begin quick impact efforts in Kosovo immediately. The U.S. welcomes the European Union's intention to play the leadership role in organizing the international community's response on reconstruction issues, and pledges its full support. The EU intends to organize an expert-level meeting in January 1999, following the conclusion of the ongoing damage assessment mission. Once a political agreement is in place, further concrete steps on assisting reconstruction and on democratization and civic development will be taken, including convening a donors' conference. We look to the international community to contribute substantially towards the speedy implementation of these endeavors. At present, humanitarian aid should continue, responding to the most urgent needs, in close cooperation between the U.S. and EU and under the coordination of UNHCR, which is the lead agency for humanitarian aid as well as for the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees.

We expect the Albanian, as well as the Bosnian, authorities to take primary responsibility for stabilizing their respective countries and leading them towards full democracy and economic development.

In Albania, we worked together to form the Friends of Albania, which the EU co-chairs with the OSCE; we are both making a substantial political and material commitment to stabilization, democratization and economic reform. We have taken note of the new Government's pledges at the Tirana Conference October 30 to move towards those goals. We welcome the

adoption of the new Constitution, which is a fundamental first step in that direction. We strongly urge all political parties to cooperate in the democratic process in the interest of all Albanian people.

We have furthered our cooperation in support of Dayton implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Croatia. The Bosnian national elections in September further advanced democracy and pluralism in that country. The U.S. and EU continue to provide resources to assist Dayton implementation efforts. We call on the authorities in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia to consistently support Dayton implementation efforts and contribute to the process of stabilization and national reconciliation, including by supporting the return of refugees and displaced persons to their previous homes as a matter of priority. Job creation, through self-sustaining economic development, will help stabilize the political and social situation and will enhance the return to a multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. Economic revitalization is essential for sustainable returns, especially in minority areas.

We call on all in the region to support efforts to establish security and economic stability. Without this support, resolving regional conflicts and advancing democratic, civic, and economic reform is only more difficult. We will use our political and economic resources to support those who support these efforts and, more generally, to advance an agenda of democracy, progress toward self-sustaining free market economics, and normal relations with their neighbors. We condemn steps taken by the government in Belgrade to suppress independent media and political opposition, and express strong support for emerging democracy and political pluralism in Montenegro. A Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that respects the democratic and human rights of its citizens and that upholds its international obligations is essential for regional peace and security and its own integration into Europe.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint declaration.