

not because the United States or Britain or some other country says, “Oh, we’re afraid of ground forces.” It’s because we believe, A, it will work, and B, if it works, this is the method most likely to assure long-term European unity.

And so again I say, be patient with your leaders and be persistent and be determined. This will work. And it is worth paying the price of a little time, because the stakes are very high.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. I’ve got to go.

Q. —thanks a lot.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at approximately 9:23 a.m. at the air base. In his remarks, the President referred to Gen. Klaus Naumann, chairman, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Military Committee; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Special Envoy and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia; Prime Minister Massimo D’Alema of Italy; Ibrahim Rugova, leader, Democratic League of Kosovo; President Petar Stoyanov of Bulgaria. The President also referred to the European Union (EU); and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Remarks in a Discussion With Kosovar Refugees in Ingelheim, Germany May 6, 1999

The President. First of all, let me say that I realize that all of you have been through incredible times and that it must be even harder to talk about. But I want to thank Chancellor Schroeder and the people of Germany for providing a place for you to be and for their support for our united action to reverse what has happened in Kosovo, so that you can go home again and be safe and free.

Just today my wife met the first group of refugees from Kosovo coming to the United States. They will stay there, as you are staying in Germany, until we can provide the conditions that are necessary for people to go home.

Most people in the world would have a hard time believing what has happened to you and that it has, in fact, happened. So far we have been very fortunate, Chancellor Schroeder and I and all of our Allies in NATO, in having our people, by and large, support what we are doing to try to stop what happened to you and to reverse the conditions so that you can go back.

But it is very important that your stories be told. What Chancellor Schroeder said is right. In places where people who have different religions and different ethnic groups, different racial groups, where they get along together, where they work together, where they help each other, people find what has happened to you to be literally almost unbelievable. And so the world needs to know the truth of Kosovo. And

we need to make sure that we are all strong enough to stay with you and to support you until you can go home.

So again I say, I know this must be hard for you to be here talking to us and to all of us strangers here. But we appreciate it, and we would like to hear from you, to say whatever you wish to say to us about where you are now and what happened in Kosovo, any questions you wish to ask. We just want to be with you and to hear from you. And we thank you for taking the time to be with us.

[At this point, the discussion proceeded. Several of the Kosovar refugees described their experiences, and another asked what NATO was doing to help people left behind in Kosovo.]

The President. It is a very hard problem, helping the people who are left behind, because if they send planes in there to drop supplies, they could be shot out of the sky. And it’s also hard to drop the supplies and know that the Kosovar Albanians will get it, instead of having the Serb military or the paramilitary pick it up. So it’s a problem.

I can say that we have been working very hard to try to find some neutral country that we could get agreement to ship in food and medicine and tents, whatever is necessary for people to have some place safe to sleep. And we are exploring every conceivable alternative. We’re even looking at whether we can do some

airdrops, even though there may be some risk there, to try to get the food there. It is the biggest concern we have.

Mr. Schroeder and I were just talking on the way in. For the refugees that are in Albania, we need to give them more money; we need to give the Albanian Government more money. The people are welcome there, but it's a poor country, so we have to help them. For the refugees in Macedonia, we have to have more money, but also we have to help more people get out of Macedonia because of the problems within Macedonia. There's a lot of tension there. And so there's only so many refugees that the country can take without having the democratic government of Macedonia threatened. So we have to work on that.

So we have refugees coming to Germany and coming to the United States and elsewhere. But the ones that it's so hard for is the people who are still there. Now, in the last couple of days there's been a big increase again in the number of people coming out, so it may be that more people are more free to come out now. But we—I wish I could give you an easy, simple answer, but we are working very hard to get what supplies we can get into the country in way that is, A, as safe as possible for the people delivering the supplies and, B, is likely to be effective, instead of just taken over by the Serb military people on the ground there.

I would like to ask a question. I would like to ask all of you in your lives to go back before these last terrible days, before the military and the paramilitary started to run you out of your homes and turn you out, when you were living before under the tensions and the prejudice of normal—more normal existence, but you were subject to this feeling that you would never be treated fairly. I would like to know more about that period.

And when we walked in here today, I looked at all of you—there's a young woman back there with a shirt on from the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996—and I could imagine that any of you could be my neighbors in America. Or if I visited a German city and I saw you, I would not know that you weren't German citizens. And I would like to know how you proceed with the prejudice or the hatred of the Serbs toward you. Do you think they hated you because you were Albanian? Do you think they hated you because you were Muslim, overwhelmingly? Do you think that they hated you because they were

raised by their parents to hate you? Do you think they hated you because Mr. Milosevic was using that as an excuse for power? Do you believe what they really want is your land and your wealth, or do they really want the pleasure of persecuting you? How do you perceive this?

This is very important for us because we—you have to understand, we spend all of our time fighting against much smaller versions of this in our own country. So it's important that we understand how you have received this in your life. Would anybody like to talk about this? Go ahead.

[A refugee described the history of Serbian hatred of Albanians.]

The President. Would you like to say something?

Q. Mr. President, they were thinking of something else—Kosovo supplies Serbia with a lot of agricultural products. Serbia without Kosovo cannot exist. The natural resources of Kosovo are very precious, and that is the reason why they are trying to hold to Serbia, to Kosovo.

The President. You think that they have treated you this way because they want the wealth of Kosovo?

Q. Yes, of course. Naturally, yes.

The President. Well, what about the younger people, how do you feel?

[Several young refugees commented on their experiences with Serbian hatred, and the discussion continued.]

The President. The Chancellor is asking another question. In your whole life did you never have one good, positive encounter with a Serb, someone who treated you as a human being, someone who was decent to you? Has this ever happened to you?

[A refugee responded that as a young child it was possible to play with Serb children, but later it was difficult to be friends. Others then described the ordeal they had experienced in being forced to leave their country.]

The President. I would like to, first of all, say again to Chancellor Schroeder how much I appreciate Germany's leadership in this whole endeavor and making this place for you to live.

And I would like to again say to all of you, I am very grateful that you came here and said what you did today. I know it was hard. But I listened very carefully to every one of you.

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And I wish that I could hear from the small number who have not spoken yet. Even the young man here who said he couldn't talk, the way he said it spoke a lot, because we could tell when he couldn't talk.

I think it is very important in these days for us to do everything we can to find out what happened to your relatives, if you don't know what's happened to other family members. And as you can imagine, this is difficult because the camps in Albania and in Macedonia, they're growing so fast, so it's very hard to keep up with everyone and then have a register. But we will get this done. Eventually, we will have records of everyone and where they are, and then we can check on these matters for you. And I know that's hard, and we will work on that.

But I also think it's important for you to do everything you can to support each other and to give opportunities to get your feelings out, because it is easy for the spirit to be broken in an environment like this, after all you've been through. And then, even if you got to go home, you would never be the same again, and you would be giving the people who have oppressed you a victory.

And I ask you not to give them that victory. Don't let yourself be broken by this. Find a way to be glad that the Sun comes up in the morning and that you have the people around you you do. And we'll look for your students, and we'll look for your family members. But remember, you cannot give a victory to the kind of oppression you have been subject to. We cannot see these children robbed of their childhood. And the adults, the older among you, you must not let the younger people lose heart. And we will stay at it until you can go home again.

Thank you.

NOTE: The discussion began at approximately 12:24 p.m. at the Refugee Reception Center. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany and the Kosovar refugees. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to Kosovar Refugees in Ingelheim

May 6, 1999

Good afternoon. Let me begin by thanking Chancellor Schroeder, the representatives of his government who are here, and all the people of Germany for their strong, strong leadership in NATO in defense of the people of Kosovo and for making this place of refuge and shelter for people in need.

I thank Minister-President Beck and the government of Rheinland-Pfalz and the townspeople of Ingelheim for making this center available, as well, and for supporting your presence here. Most of all, I would like to express my respect to the families who are here today from Kosovo, and my very special thanks for those who met earlier with Chancellor Schroeder and me. To those of you who told us the stories of your lives—the heartbreak, the nightmare, the cruelty, the uncertainty—those who are young, those who are old, and those who are in the

middle of their lives, I listened very carefully to all of you.

I hope that as you mustered the courage to meet with us, you know that because you have done so, the world will hear your stories. It is very important that every freedom-loving person in the entire world know the story of Kosovo. It is important that people not forget that what is called ethnic cleansing is not some abstract idea; it is real people with real families and real dreams being uprooted from their homes, their schools, their work, their children, their parents, their husbands and wives. NATO has acted in Kosovo because we believe ethnic cleansing must be opposed, resisted, reversed.

We are doing all we can to bring aid to the victims of the violence. We are helping as many as we can in Albania and Macedonia. Both Germany and the United States and our other Allies