

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Petar Stoyanov of Bulgaria in Sofia
November 22, 1999

President Clinton. Good morning.

Q. How are you, Mr. President?

President Clinton. I'm fine. I'm delighted to be here, very pleased.

Situation in Chechnya

Q. Mr. President, the events in Chechnya in the last 2 days, has that raised doubts about the Russian commitment to a political dialog?

President Clinton. Well, I think they made clear that they were going to try to continue their military offensive. What we've done at the OSCE is it got them to agree that the internal affairs of Russia or any other country is a proper subject of world discussion and world opinion. We got them to agree to take the OSCE mission there. I think it's very important to do that. And I hope that we've gotten an increased amount of concern for civilian casualties. So we'll have to see, but I think it's very important we follow up on the commitments made earlier at the OSCE meeting in Istanbul.

Q. Mr. President, Bulgarian national television. Are you going to discuss with our President different ways for compensating Bulgaria for our losses during the embargo against Yugoslavia and Iraq, about \$10 billion?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, let me say I'm very grateful for the support we received, the Allies received during the conflict in Kosovo, and for the direction taken by Bulgaria under this President and this Government. And we are committed to supporting Bulgaria over the long run, economically, politically, militarily. And I think we will be doing it for many years, and I'm looking forward to that.

Situation in Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, in Kosovo tomorrow, will you urge ethnic Albanians to stop their reprisal attacks against Serbs?

President Clinton. In Kosovo tomorrow I will make a very strong statement about the impor-

tance of everybody getting over this ethnic hatred and going beyond it. And we have all made a big commitment to Kosovo as an economic and political reconstruction. But I think it's very important that Kosovo, in effect, not become the mirror image of Serbia. It's hard not to, but it's important not to. And we'll keep working on it.

But I wouldn't overreact to the stories, you know, and the facts—a lot of good things have happened there since the end of the war. And it hasn't been very long, and there is a long, long history in Kosovo and throughout Serbia, throughout the Balkans, that we're trying to get beyond.

Again, I'd say Bulgaria is a very good example of the direction we ought to take, and I hope we can have a positive impact in Kosovo. I think we can.

President Stoyanov. It's important that we, through the American people, through the eyes of the American President, the American people will realize that the Bulgarian people have embarked upon a new road and chosen a new policy, that of democracy, of respect for human rights and that, also, through its wonderful relations with all its neighbors and its excellent ethnic—the absence of ethnic problems whatsoever, Bulgaria will be an example of stability on this continent and will continue to be so.

NATO Bases in Bulgaria

Q. Will you inform us if you discuss the issue of NATO bases in this country?

President Stoyanov. We'll inform you about anything with pleasure, with the greatest of pleasure.

President Clinton. Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11 a.m. in the Anteroom at the Presidency. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.