

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Ivan Kostov of Bulgaria and an Exchange With Reporters in Sofia November 22, 1999

Prime Minister Kostov. I have just asked the President to say a few words before he goes out of the Council of Ministers. He was kind to respond, and I thank him for that.

President Clinton. Well, first, I want to say again how pleased and honored I am to be in Bulgaria and how strongly I support and admire the political, economic, and military reforms that the Government has undertaken and how grateful I am for the support that Europe and the United States received during the recent difficulties in Kosovo.

I think it is very important for the United States to support Bulgaria's aspirations for political, economic, and military integration into the West and to support the Stability Pact and the economic and political revitalization of all of southeastern Europe.

I would like to make one other point, which is that I am especially grateful for Bulgaria's policy and history of tolerance and cooperation among different groups of people within this

country. If that had been the policy of Serbia in these last 10 years, we would be living in a very different and better time.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Q. [Inaudible]

President Clinton. No, that did not come up. But we talked generally about the importance of doing things that would be economically beneficial to Bulgaria. I would remind you, my Secretary of Commerce, Mr. Daley, was here just a few weeks ago for an economic conference. And we are moving ahead with a whole set of plans, which I hope will be highly beneficial to Bulgaria economically. But we did not discuss the specific question you asked.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:50 p.m. at the Council of Ministers Building. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to the People of Bulgaria in Sofia November 22, 1999

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President Stoyanov, Prime Minister Kostov, Mayor Sofianski, the people of Bulgaria, I thank you for this wonderful, wonderful welcome. I also want to thank this young student, who must have been so nervous, Boryana Savova. If she is a representative of the young people of Bulgaria, your future is in very good hands.

I am honored tonight to be here with my daughter, three Members of the United States Congress, and a distinguished group of Americans. We thank you for this welcome. We thank all the musicians who performed, all the people who worked so hard to put this wonderful crowd together.

And I would like to say a special word of thanks to the young woman who sang so magnificently both the national anthems of Bulgaria and the United States.

I am very proud to be the first American President to visit Bulgaria—a free Bulgaria. I am proud to stand in this place where voices were silenced for too long. Here are these tens of thousands of people, exercising your freedom with dignity and pride.

We are here tonight because of what you did 10 years ago this month, when change swept through Nevsky Square. Students, never before allowed to express their opinions, demanded free elections now. Writers, imprisoned just a few weeks before, led chants of *demokratiya*. Grandparents, never allowed to worship with their children, said prayers in public, in the shadow of this great cathedral. What a wonderful moment that was. What a wonderful thing it said to the rest of the world about the heart of Bulgaria.

Even before 1989, communist rulers tried to keep you down with violence, but you struggled peacefully. They fed you lies, yet you sought the truth. They tried to smother your spirit, yet you were able to come together here and demand to be citizens, with rights and responsibilities of your own.

When the cold war ended, it took much longer for the ground here to thaw. You endured one false spring after another. Now that democracy is beginning to truly take root, some here must feel left behind, while others race ahead. I ask you to remember what you left behind: a police state, with no room for disappointment, because there was no hope for improvement; when nobody felt left behind because no one was allowed to get ahead; when there were no dreams and some Bulgarians were even robbed of their very identities, forced to change their names. The struggle for your constitutional democracy was waged not for paradise but for possibility, not for a perfect world but for the chance to build a better world.

In my own country, we have struggled now for more than 200 years to build what our Founders called "a more perfect Union," never completely perfect but always advancing the cause of freedom and responsibility, of individual opportunity and a stronger national community. In those 223 years, we have had to overcome slavery and civil war, depressions and World Wars, discrimination against women and ethnic and religious minorities. We have overcome these things through the free choices of free people. I came here to say to you, the people of Bulgaria, that through freedom you, too, shall overcome, and you will not have to wait 200 years to do it.

In just the last 10 years, from Poland to Hungary to the Baltics, those who have chosen open societies and open markets started out with sacrifice but ended up with success. The only difference between them and Bulgaria is that they had a head start. Now you, too, are on your way.

Today America and Bulgaria have reached agreements that will encourage more American companies to do business here, to create jobs for both our countries. We are taking steps to help you crack down on corruption once and for all. And let me say to people in the United States, Europe, and all over the world who will see this tonight on television: This is a wonderful

country. Come here and help Bulgaria help build the future.

And let me add this: The cold war was fought and won by free people who did not accept that there could be two Europes in the 20th century. Now we must not, we will not accept that there could be two Europes, separate and unequal, in the 21st century. If you stay the course, Bulgaria will be a place where young people can make their dreams come true, and Americans and Bulgarians together will help to build a Europe that is undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in all human history.

When that vision of the future was threatened by President Milosevic's brutal campaign in Kosovo, you stood with NATO. I know it was very hard for you to do. But I ask you to think about what would have happened if we had not stood up. This entire region would have been overwhelmed by refugees. And a message would have been sent to the rest of the world: Stay away from southeastern Europe, for here dictators still hold power by exploiting human differences and destroying human lives. I thank you for standing your ground with us against that evil and sending a very different message to the rest of the world.

And I also want to thank you for setting a very different example here in Bulgaria. You have preserved a multiethnic society. As President Stoyanov has said, you chose to stand with and for civilization 2 years ago. But you also made that choice 50 years ago when you helped Bulgaria's Jewish community to survive World War II and the Holocaust. On behalf of American Jews and Jewish people everywhere, I thank you for that. All of you know the famous line from the monk Paisii Hilendarski: "You, Bulgarians, do not hesitate to be proud." When you saved Bulgaria's Jews, it was one of the proudest moments in your history. And tonight, as you stand for freedom, it is one of the proudest moments in your history.

But now we have work to do. We must help all of southeastern Europe choose freedom and tolerance and community. We must give all the people in this region a unifying magnet that is stronger than the pull of old hatreds that has threatened to tear them apart over and over again. Your neighbor Serbia should be part of that bright and different future.

I am told that during the recent war you could actually hear some of the bombs falling

in Serbia from this square. Tonight I hope the people of Serbia can hear our voices when we say, "If you choose as Bulgaria has chosen, you will regain the rightful place in Europe Mr. Milosevic has stolen from you, and America will support you, too."

Already, we are aiding the forces of democracy in Serbia. And for all the people of this region, we strongly support the Stability Pact for southeast Europe. We encourage the expansion of the European Union to this region. And we must and will keep NATO's door open to those democratic nations here who are able to meet their obligations.

During the conflict in Kosovo, we learned something very important about Bulgaria and its democratic neighbors: Because you know how it feels to be insecure, you know what it means to sacrifice for common security; because you know how it feels to lose your freedom, you know what it takes to defend freedom. And so, even though you paid a great price and you are not yet in the heart of Europe, you have Europe and its values in your heart.

Earlier today, I had the opportunity to meet some of Boryana's classmates at the American University in Bulgaria. They were from Bulgaria and from other countries throughout this region. And they were profoundly impressive to me in their intelligence, in their compassion, in their determination to build a brighter future.

So I would like to close my remarks tonight with a word to the young people here. In America, Thomas Jefferson was only 32 years old when he wrote the Declaration of Independence, and Martin Luther King was only 26 years old when he led our crusade for civil rights for African-Americans. As I look out among you, I see a generation of Bulgarians who have come of age knowing not the unchanging conformity of communism but the constantly changing challenges of a democratic society.

I know that it may seem hard now. But some day you will look back on this time and say, "When we were young, we brought Bulgaria back to freedom. We brought Bulgaria forward to prosperity, security, and unity in Europe." And I am determined that you will also be able to say, "When we marched into the new millennium, America stood with us, and we changed the world."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 5:50 p.m. in Nevsky Square. In his remarks he referred to President Petar Stoyanov and Prime Minister Ivan Kostov of Bulgaria; Mayor Stefan Sofianski of Sofia; and 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 President Stoyanov.

Statement on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Announcement of New Board-Certified Teachers

November 22, 1999

Today the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards announced that 2,965 more teachers met the teaching profession's highest standards and achieved National Board certification. I want to congratulate them and commend all who applied for certification, for their personal commitment to high-quality education. These teachers represent all regions of the country; public and private schools; rural, urban, and suburban districts; and every grade from kindergarten through high school. Teachers who pursue these standards set a sterling example for their students and for our country.

We all know that one of the most important factors behind a child's educational success is having a caring, competent, and committed teacher. That's why my administration has strongly supported the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which has now certified nearly 5,000 of our most talented teachers. With today's announcement, we are on the way to meeting the challenge I have set: making sure we have a Board-certified teacher in every school in the Nation by 2006.