

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Sali Berisha of Albania in Tirana, Albania

June 10, 2007

Prime Minister Berisha. Honorable Mr. President Bush, honorable close collaborators of Mr. President Bush, ladies and gentlemen: Today is a beautiful day. Today is a great day, historic for all Albanians. Among us is the greatest and most distinguished guest we have ever had in all times: the President of the United States—*[inaudible]*—George W. Bush; his lady, Mrs. Laura Bush; and their close aides. For me, it's a great honor and a special pleasure to thank them with gratitude and extend the most heartfelt welcome in this historic visit, the first visit ever of a United States President in Albania.

Thank you heartily, Mr. President, from the bottom of our hearts, fulfilling ardent and long-awaited wish of all Albanians to have a special guest in their home. *Tungjatjeta*, an Albanian word, means "May you have a long life." This is a most traditional greeting of Albanians that I chose to greet you on their behalf, on behalf of Albanians. Welcome to Albania, President Bush.

Mr. President, you are today an honorable guest and friend of a nation whose gratefulness and friendship towards your great Nation and your country have been deeply embodied in the historic memory and in the conscience of its citizens. No other nation in the region or in Europe has ever gone through so much suffering, ethnic cleansing, racism, partitions, occupations, and severe dictatorships as we Albanians have. History was unjust and very severe to us.

We have been blessed, however. We have won in all our efforts to defend our identity in Western-oriented national vocation to emerge from the age of oppression to the age of dignity, from the age of darkness to the age of freedom. We have won because our just cause has always had the

powerful support of the U.S.A., the greatest and the most precious friend of Albanian nation. God bless your great Nation.

At the beginning of last century, President Wilson did not allow the partition of the newly proclaimed Albanian independent state. The U.S.A. recognized Albania 85 years ago. Your visit on this anniversary is its most beautiful crown, is the climax of excellent, friendly relations between our two countries.

Afterwards, President Truman made big efforts to free Albanians from their Orwellian dictatorship. At the outset of the nineties, President George Herbert Bush and his administration provided an exceptional contribution to the fall of Berlin Wall, but the fall of this wall in Tirana as well, opening the doors of freedom for Albanians.

President Bill Clinton led the North Atlantic Alliance in the fight for Kosovo liberation from the barbarian occupation. And today, Kosovo citizens find in you and your administration, Mr. President, the greatest hope and support for their project of a free, independent, and integrated state in Europe.

Centuries ago, until our present days, hundreds and thousands of Albanians migrated to your great country. They are loyal and honorable citizens of the United States who have always loved and still love the nation and the country of origin. They have—*[inaudible]*—a lot; they have kept a life of hope and freedom for Albanians always on.

In your presence, I'd like today to extend the most cordial greetings and my deepest gratitude. The friendly feelings towards the—your Nation and your great country, the proud Americanism of Albanians are indeed a matter of their national pride. Albanians are very proud about the friendship with the U.S.A. and the cooperation they

have with your nation in the war against international terrorism, of their presence on your side in Iraq, Afghanistan. I assure you that they will be on your side wherever their modest, but resolute contribution is needed against international terrorism, this most dangerous enemy of free people.

Above all, Albanians feel proud of their friendship with your nation because we share the values and the principles of freedom and market-oriented democracy. In this road, they have received an exceptional overall political, economic, financial, and technical assistance provided—military—provided by the U.S. and the EU countries and other friendly countries, for which we remain truly, always grateful.

Sixteen years ago, Secretary James Baker brought to Albanians the message from the country of freedom, “Freedom works.” Today, after 16 years, I can say that despite the hardships of our country, experienced by our country, freedom for Albanians has worked more than any other nation. Albania, a country of denied freedoms and human rights, banned the Constitution, a country of hypercollectivization and true human slavery and the most extreme isolation, today is the country of political, economic, consolidated pluralism, of excellent religious tolerance, of functioning, working democracy. It is the country with a fast economic growth, with the private sector accounting for 80 percent of GDP. And the income per capita have increased 20 times more.

Albania is the country that signed and is implementing successfully their stabilization association agreement with the EU and received the message from Riga summit on the possibility of receiving an invitation for NATO membership. It is a country that welcomes today the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush. God bless Albanians.

Ladies and gentlemen, in our talks with President Bush, we have discussed our excellent, friendly bilateral relations and their further development. I informed him of

other reforms launched by my Government and their results in strengthening the rule of law, the zero-tolerance fight against organized crime, the valuable assistance that law enforcement agencies from the United States and other friendly countries are providing to this end. We talked about the fight against corruption and the much-expected assistance that a series of projects funded by the Millennium Challenge Account related to e-taxes, e-procurement, and one-stop shop offer in this regard and other reforms in the judicial system, police, education, et cetera.

I briefed President Bush on the significant reforms that we are undertaking in the view of turning Albania into a very attractive country for U.S.A. and the foreign investors—other foreign investors. We hope that this visit will encourage others.

A special place was the question of Albania’s membership into NATO as the main priority of Albania. In this regard, we have decided to increase our defense budget to 2 percent of GDP, to triple our presence in Afghanistan, and implement with seriousness the requirements of the ninth MAP cycle. In addition, let me mention that 90 percent of Albanians support Albania’s membership to NATO. The support of President Bush and his administration is of a vital importance to Albania for membership into NATO as the most secure future.

We discussed about the situation in the region. After this press conference, we’ll continue the discussion in the framework of Adriatic Charter, A-3, with the very good friends of Albania, the Prime Minister of Croatia, Ivo Sanader, and Prime Minister of Macedonia, Nikola Gruevski.

Special attention in our discussion was given to solution of the final status of Kosovo in compliance with the proposal of President Ahtisaari for its independence as a—gradual independence as a precondition for stability and peace in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, in December 1990, students and citizens in Tirana took

to the streets and the squares with—shouting, “U.S.A., long live President Bush.” We want Albania like the rest of Europe. President Bush visit Albania in 1994—2004 and 2006, and Mr. Jimmy Carter before. And after this visit, Mr. President, our country will be visited by other Presidents of the United States. But in their memory of Albanian citizens, the great honor that you made to them with your first visit of a United States President in office in Albania.

Thank you very much, Mr. President Bush, great friend of Albanian nation, of my nation.

President Bush. Miredita. [Laughter] Thank you for having me. Prime Minister, thank you for your hospitality. I thank the President for his hospitality as well.

I am proud to be the first American sitting President to visit Albania. It’s a great honor to represent my country here. I’ve really been looking forward to this trip, and so has my wife Laura. The reason being is that I love to come to countries that are working hard to establish the institutions necessary for a democracy to survive. I’m particularly pleased to be here in Albania, in a country that has casted off the shackles of a very repressive society and is now showing the world what’s possible. And I congratulate the people of Albania, and I thank you for the warm welcome we received on your streets.

We had a very good discussion. I learned a lot about your country. I learned the fact that this is a country that embraces the markets, is willing to do necessary reforms to make sure that the small-business person survives, that the entrepreneur is strong, that the tax code is fair. I’m impressed with the desire of the government to fight corruption, to make it clear that the government is of the people, that the government can be trusted by the people, by routing out those who would use their exalted positions to steal from the taxpayers. I appreciate that kind of commitment, Mr. Prime Minister.

I appreciate the fact that Albania is a model of religious tolerance. And I appreciate the fact that Albania is a trusted friend and a strong ally. And this visit today, hopefully, will send the signal to the people of Albania: You can count on America, just like America can count on you, to do hard work necessary to spread freedom and, therefore, peace.

We discussed a lot of issues. We discussed Iraq and Afghanistan. I thank the Prime Minister and his Government for putting troops in harm’s way. Albanians know the horror of tyranny, and so they’re working to bring the hope of freedom to people who haven’t known it. And that’s a noble effort and a sacrifice, and I appreciate your sacrifice.

Albania now has 120 of its elite commandos stationed in Iraq. I had the privilege of meeting some of the Albanian soldiers. Here’s what I told them, I said, “First of all, you are respected by our military.” Your soldiers are good at what they do. They’re well trained; they’re disciplined; they’re courageous. I told them that the United States appreciates their contribution; so do the Iraqi citizens. And also told them, when they went home, to make sure that they told their wives and their children, “thanks,” on behalf of the United States of America as well. The families are just as much a part of a soldier’s life as the soldier himself.

And so, Mr. Prime Minister, we thank you very much for your commitment to freedom in Iraq as well as Afghanistan. The Prime Minister has announced that Albania will deploy 120 additional troops to Afghanistan this summer. These are two vital fronts on the war on terror, and the United States has a strong friend in Albania in this war. And I thank you.

We also talked about NATO and Albania’s aspirations to join the NATO alliance. I commended the Prime Minister for the progress that Albania has made in defense reform. In other words, part of becoming a member of NATO requires a reformation

of the defense forces. And Albania is working hard to do that, as well as to meet performance-based standards for membership. In other words, you're just not accepted into membership; you just can't say, I want to join. There are certain standards that are expected to be met.

And so I talked to the Prime Minister, first of all, about my deep desire for Albania to join NATO. I support it. I also told him that there needs to be additional political and military reforms, progress against organized crime and corruption. And he understands that. He said, "We're committed." That's what the Prime Minister said—Albania is committed to meeting those standards. And I said: "We're committed to help you."

And it's very important for the political figures here in this country to understand what's at stake. The politicians have got to work together now to meet the standards. They've got to set aside political differences and focus on what's right for Albania. If the Albanian people want to join NATO, then the politicians have got to work to meet the standards.

And so I call upon all in the Government and the opposition to do what is necessary to join NATO, and we'll support you and help you. I think it's best that Albania be a NATO ally. I look forward to welcoming you someday into NATO.

We also talked about Kosovo. I'm a strong supporter of the Ahtisaari plan. I said yesterday in Rome, the time is now. A fellow asked me a question: "Well, when does this end? When does the process end?" I said, "The time is now." In other words, I put a sense of—I made it clear that—two things: One, that we need to get moving; and two, that the end result is independence. And we spent a lot of time talking about this issue here. The Prime Minister was anxious to hear my views. He wanted to make sure that what I said was clear for everybody, and what I said was, independence is the result, let's get the process moving.

Now, we want to make sure that Serbia hears that the United States supports their aspirations for closer integration with the West. That means working with the United States in a bilateral fashion. It also means potential membership of NATO, for example. I urged the Prime Minister to work with the leaders in Kosovo to maintain calm during these final stages of Kosovo final status process. He assured me he would. He's got good contacts there, and Kosovars look to the Prime Minister of Albania and the President for Albania for leadership, and they're willing to provide it.

And so we discussed a lot of issues, and, I must say, I was very impressed by the conversations; impressed with the vision; and want to help. The United States wants to be a good ally and friend.

And again, I thank you all for the hospitality, and I know you're proud of the historic progress that you have made. May God bless the people of Albania and, of course, the people of the United States.

Thank you, sir.

Prime Minister Berisha. Thank you.

President Bush. A couple of questions here. He's calling on you.

International Support for Kosovo

Q. You guaranteed President Bush that you will talk with the Kosovo leaders concerning the proposal of President Sarkozy that may lead to the loss of patience of the Kosovars, that they may self-proclaim independence. And what would the attitude of Albania be in this case? And did you touch this factor, this opposition with President Bush?

Prime Minister Berisha. We discussed at large about Kosovo with President Bush. What I may publicly transmit to the leadership and the citizens of Kosovo is that their project has the full understanding, good understanding and support, full support, of President Bush. And in this context, as before—now, as well—I don't expect and I don't advise any movement. On the contrary, I suggest persistence and calmness,

coolbloodedness. This is in the heart of—Kosovo is in the heart of President Bush.

President Bush. What's important is for the people of Kosovo to know that the United States and Albania strongly supports independence, as did most of the people in the G-8.

President Sarkozy's recommendation was to try to provide some time for people to possibly work out differences. However, what would be acceptable to the United States and, I think, most people in the G-8 was that at the end of any process, there be certain independence. That's what's important to know.

And that's—the issue is whether independence or not. We strongly believe in independence. And then the question is, the diplomatic moves necessary to achieve that. I happen to believe it's important to push the process along. The time is now. And by that I meant that Secretary Rice will be moving hard to see if we can't reach an agreement. And if not, we're going to have to move because independence is the goal, and that's what the people of Kosovo need to know.

Thank you for your question.

Toby [Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters].

Kosovo/Missile Defense System

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Yesterday you called for a deadline for U.N. action on Kosovo. When would you like that deadline set? And are you at all concerned that taking that type of a stance is going to further inflame U.S. relations with Russia?

And is there any chance that you're going to sign on to the Russian missile defense proposal?

President Bush. No, thanks. A couple of points on that. First of all, I don't think I called for a deadline. I thought I said, time; I did? What exactly did I say? I said, "deadline?" Okay, yes, then I meant what I said. [Laughter] The question is whether or not there is going to be endless dialog on a subject that we have made up our

mind about. We believe Kosovo ought to be independent.

The G-8 discussions were all aimed at determining whether or not there is a way to make this acceptable to Russia. The ideal would be for Russia to say: "Okay, we understand, and we accept this conclusion as well." And obviously, they're not there yet. And therefore, the reason why I said there needs to be movement is that there just cannot be continued drift, because I'm worried about expectations not being met in Kosovo. That's what I meant. And therefore, we'll push the process.

President Putin made an interesting proposal on missile defense for Europe. I suggested—and I've made an interesting proposal for missile defense in Europe, by the way, all aimed at protecting Europe, not aimed at Russia. The reason I did is because the true threats we'll be facing will be from rogue nations that may end up with a deliverable weapon. So, I thought it was in the interest of peace that we have the capacity to intercept such a missile, and, therefore, need to proceed.

And President Putin said, "Well, I think I've got an idea that makes sense." And this is the joint use of radar in Azerbaijan. I said, "Well, why don't we look at it?" But during the discussions, it became apparent that he also had doubts about the proposal I made, as to its effectiveness or necessity. And I said: "Well, you put out an idea, and I put an idea. Why don't we both get a group together to discuss our relative ideas in a transparent fashion; so put—get people from your Foreign Ministry, and we'll get people from the State Department and our respective defense departments and militaries to sit at the table and to share different ideas, to share ideas about technologies on how to intercept a missile and radar positioning to make sure that there's effective coverage?"

I thought his statement was an important statement to make. In other words, he recognized that there's an opportunity to work together. That's what friends do, by the

way. Russia is not our enemy. As I said repeatedly, the cold war is over, and now we're dealing with threats in the 21st century. And I appreciated his recognition that there could be an opportunity to work together to deal with those threats. I viewed it as a very positive gesture, and looking forward to continuing discussions on this very subject in July when he comes to Maine.

Prime Minister Berisha. I would like to add for the citizens of Kosovo and its leadership, in my discussions, I found out consciousness and awareness of President Bush for the consequences of prolongation on—unacceptable prolongation around justifiable—prolongation of the process. And in this context, they should be clear that the President is aware of these consequences and is not willing them to be.

Albania's NATO Membership Bid

Q. In your meeting with President Bush, what important place was occupied by NATO membership—Albania being made a member of NATO? Do you assure us that you have won the support of President Bush for quick integration of membership into NATO? And further, do you observe differences in speed of Adriatic 3 countries, A-3 countries?

Prime Minister Berisha. I can assure you totally that President Bush and his administration support powerfully Albania's project for full membership into NATO. In this framework, I would say that this help and support has been of extraordinary importance in all reforms of democratic institutions, of the armed forces, and in cooperation in the framework of NATO during these years.

Of course, the invitation is defined to be given on the basis of performance. We are determined to take any decision, adopt any law, undertake any reform that would make Albania suitable to receive the invitation.

I think that the cooperation with Adriatic Charter, A-3, was fruitful—and very fruitful

and very successful. Our three countries have common things in specifics. If we take the level where—from which Albania started and it's progress, it is one of the most evaluated, appreciated.

Second, Albania has a loyal cooperation with NATO for 15 years. I have to stress, one moment, that in '99, when Milosevic cleansed 1 million Albanians from their homes, thousands of the area's homes, the friendly countries built camps to receive the refugees. But about 500,000 Albanian families turned their houses into tents of welcome for NATO. You may say, they did it for Albanians. Absolutely, yes. But no one can prove that Albanians wouldn't do that for every citizen of another ethnicity who would be in need, like the Kosovo people were at that time. Ninety-three percent of Albanians support membership into NATO. We have our own advantages.

International Support for Kosovo

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You've said that it's time to move the Kosovo—the Ahtisaari plan forward. What specifically are you going to do to accomplish that? And at what point do you say, it's not working? And then what?

President Bush. What you do is, you get your diplomats working with Russian diplomats, as well as EU diplomats, to see if there is not common ground. In other words, there has to be an effort to see if we can't find a way for everybody to say, well, it's a good idea. And if you end up being in a position where you don't, at some point in time, sooner rather than later, you've got to say enough is enough; Kosovo is independent, and that's the position we've taken.

The people of Kosovo need to know that it is a solid, firm position. And even though there's diplomacy and talks, hopefully, trying to find a way forward to accommodate Russia and Serbia and the EU—by the way, most people in the EU are very much in favor. The EU position is for the Ahtisaari plan. They just hope that there is some

way that we can reach an accommodation with a variety of interests so that the transition to independence will be as smooth and easy as possible. But if that becomes—is apparent that that's not going to happen in a relatively quick period of time, in my judgment, we need to put forward the resolution. Hence, deadline.

Thank you all for your attention. Mr. Prime Minister, it was a great press conference. Proud to be the first American sitting President to actually hold a press conference on Albanian soil as well. Thank you very much.

Prime Minister Berisha. Thank you, President.

President Bush. Thank you all.

Prime Minister Berisha. Thank you.

President Bush. Good job. Thank you.

Prime Minister Berisha. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:40 p.m. in the Courtyard at the Council of Ministers. In his remarks, he referred to President Alfred Moisiu of Albania; President Nicolas Sarkozy of France; and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. Prime Minister Berisha referred to former President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland, United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Future Status Process of Kosovo. Prime Minister Berisha and some reporters spoke in Albanian, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Luncheon Hosted by Prime Minister Sali Berisha of Albania in Tirana

June 10, 2007

Mr. Prime Minister, if I might offer a toast. Thank you for your hospitality. I'm honored to be in the presence of the leaders of three important allies and friends of the United States: Croatia, Macedonia, and of course, our host, Albania.

We thank you for your strong leadership. We join you in your aspirations to join Euro-Atlantic institutions. We appreciate you working for peace. Thank you for the

Adriatic Charter. May God bless your nations. May God bless you all.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:54 p.m. at the Prime Minister's villa. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ivo Sanader of Croatia; and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski of Macedonia.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Small-Business Owners in Fushe-Kruje, Albania

June 10, 2007

One of the exciting moments for our trip to Albania is to meet with small-business owners. Laura and I thank the mayor. We thank the owner of the restaurant, and we thank these entrepreneurs for joining us to talk about your story, about your dreams,

and about the opportunities a microloan program, provided by the taxpayers of the United States, is giving you to create jobs.

And so we're excited to be here. Thank you for coming. And we're looking forward to hearing your stories.