

Week Ending Friday, November 29, 2002

Interview With TVR of Romania

November 18, 2002

Q. So, first of all, may I remark, sir, that you are the first President of the United States who grants an interview to the public television. And I thank you very much for that.

The President. Well, I'm honored. Thank you. And I'm so looking forward to coming to Romania. It's going to be an exciting trip for Laura and me.

Romania's Role in NATO

Q. To what extent, sir, Romania's candidacy has helped to implement your vision of a broad, robust NATO expansion?

The President. Well, first of all, I believe in the concept of Europe, free, whole, and at peace. And I think the fact that Romania will be a part of NATO recognizes that vision.

Secondly, Romania will be an active participant in the war against terror. And as we change the NATO strategy to reflect the true threats we face, Romania will work alongside the United States and other nations to make the world more peaceful.

Thirdly, I think it's very important for us to recognize that new countries that—admitted countries which had lived under a totalitarian state will bring a breath of fresh air, a vigor to the relationship because you remember the difference between freedom and a non-free state. You remember the difference between—you've seen the difference between good and evil. And that spirit, that strong determination for freedom is important in this Alliance.

Romanian Popular Support for NATO

Q. Sir, more than 80 percent of Romania's population supports NATO membership of my country. How important is this popular support in promoting America's policy towards a world of freedom and prosperity?

The President. Well, first of all, you got to understand some of my view on freedom. It's not American's gift to the world. See, freedom is God—is God-given. And—but we believe so strongly in freedom that we believe that when people have a taste of freedom, they will demand the institutions necessary to make sure freedom lasts.

And the Romanian people want to be free. People everywhere want to be free if they've seen the other side. And so the fact that Romania is a strong supporter of NATO really reflects more about Romania than it does reflect about us. What we want to do is we want to have an Alliance that is strong enough and capable enough to meet the true threats that we all face. And global terror is a threat. Believe me, it is a threat.

It is a threat not only to the United States, but it's a threat to any country which embraces freedom. No one is immune from global terror. And therefore—but we're more likely to succeed if we work together, which means work to cut off money, work to cut off access, work to share intelligence, and if need be, work together in the military way to defeat terror.

Romanian Economy

Q. What are the challenges facing the common people, the taxpayers, once Romania is a part of NATO?

The President. Well, the biggest problem that is going to face the taxpayers is to make sure the economy grows. But that's the problem we all face. I mean, we want to make sure people work. The most important criterion for success of any country, NATO or otherwise, is: Can people find a job? Will the economies flourish? Will open markets be able to yield the fruits of the labor for the common person? And the answer is, yes.

Romania is on its way to reform. We've got to be patient with Romania because Romania has come from a history of state-dominated—state-dominated industry, which

failed. And it failed to provide for the people. And so the reforms to the marketplace are going to take time. But the reforms will yield—will yield great prosperity, in my judgment. And it's a matter of time for that to happen.

Expectations of New NATO Members

Q. What do the United States expect from their new Allies, from Romania and the others?

The President. Well, we expect friendship. We expect that concept that says, if one of us is attacked, we're all attacked. That works both ways. If Romania is attacked, the Alliance comes to Romania's defense. If another country is attacked, we all go to that country's defense. That common defense will help make the world more peaceful.

Secondly, as we develop a new strategy as to how to face the new threats of the 21st century, a new military strategy, Romania will be called upon to do its part, as will the United States. And together, the sum of our parts will be significant in terms of keeping the peace.

President's Upcoming Visit to Romania

Q. What is going to be the message you will deliver to the Romanian people when you meet some of the inhabitants in the city of Bucharest?

The President. The message is: For a long time you struggled; you're now free. And you've got a great friend in the United States of America.

Q. Mr. President, it's been a great honor and privilege to interview you. Thank you very much for sharing your views with our public.

The President. Well, I am so looking forward to coming. It's going to be an honor to be there. I have—I'm working on my speech to the Romanian people. It's going to be a powerful moment for me and my wife, to see the people and to be in the famous square and to look at the statues of people who represent freedom. And it's going to be one of the highlights of my Presidency.

Q. You'll be most welcome, sir.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Good to meet you.

Q. Good to meet you, sir, and I hope you'll have a very good and successful trip.

The President. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:39 p.m. in the Library at the White House, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 23. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on Receiving the Order of Vytautas the Great in Vilnius, Lithuania

November 23, 2002

Mr. President, thank you very much. It's an honor to receive this award. And it's an honor to be the first United States President to come to Lithuania. Laura and I are honored to be here.

I want to thank the members of the Government who are here as well, the Prime Minister, the Speaker, other members of your Cabinet.

This is a great day for Lithuania. It shows the Lithuanians' commitment to freedom, to religious tolerance. It shows the Lithuanians' courage is being rewarded by membership in one of the greatest alliances ever formed.

The NATO Alliance will be stronger with Lithuania's presence. Not only will you help militarily, but as importantly, your presence will help lift, invigorate the spirit of the European North Atlantic Alliance. After all, Lithuania represents to me the courage of people standing in the face of tyranny and demanding freedom.

There are thousands of Americans today who rejoice at the fact that Lithuania will be joining with America in the NATO Alliance. I'm proud of your accomplishments, and my country is proud to call you friend. May God bless the people of Lithuania.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:24 a.m. at the Prezidentura. In his remarks, he referred to President Valdas Adamkus and Prime Minister Algirdas Mykolas Brazauskas of Lithuania. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.