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Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Ivo Sanader of Croatia in Zagreb, Croatia

April 5, 2008

[*Prime Minister Sanader spoke in Croatian, and no translation was provided.*]

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. It's really good to be with you again. I remember very fondly our visit to the Oval Office.

[*The interpreter began to translate President Bush's remarks.*]

Prime Minister Sanader. No, there is no need.

President Bush. Even though you did a brilliant job. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Sanader. They understand; they understand.

President Bush. I understand. But, anyway, I—you suggested I come to your country then, and I'm really glad we came. Thanks. It's good news. And the fact that Croatia has been invited to join NATO is a historic moment. And I hope the people of your country are as proud as I am to be here to welcome you into NATO.

The—my only regret is I didn't get to see the coast. But I suspect when more Americans learn of the beauty of your coast, they'll want to come. And that's why the Open Skies agreement that we negotiated is going to be important to open up travel and trade. We will take you up on your request to have a trade mission come. I appreciate the fact that you have an open government, an honest government, a transparent government, which will help attract foreign capital—well-educated, hard-working people that will help attract foreign capital as well.

We talked about the neighborhood, and I appreciate the Prime Minister's advice and counsel on how the United States can help continue to promote stability and freedom. And I want to thank you very much for that.

We talked about an issue that I know is on the minds of the people of Croatia, and that is the visa waiver policy. I fully understand, Mr. Prime Minister, that some in your country wonder why our visa waiver policy is for you—different for you than it is for other people, perhaps, in Europe. After all, you've—you're sacrificing in Afghanistan alongside U.S. troops. And they wonder why they can't go see their relatives in America in an easier way.

I think they should be able to. Congress has passed a law that we now must live with. And we'll work with your Government to facilitate the new law in such a way, hopefully, that people will be able to realize their dreams of going to America to see relatives and loved ones. There's a lot of people in America that have fond memories of their homeland, and they want to be able to see their relatives in an easier fashion.

So we'll work government-to-government to meet our laws and, at the same time, hopefully facilitate travel. I don't want to create false expectations. On the other hand, people should know that we have committed to working to see to it that the policy is implemented in a way that hopefully will ease travel quickly.

All in all, it's been an honor to be with you. I'm so grateful for your Government and for the people of your country for welcoming me and Laura. And I look forward to future visits.

Thank you.

Prime Minister Sanader. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. at the Banski Dvori.

Remarks in Zagreb

April 5, 2008

The President. *Dobro jutro*. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you very much. I'm honored

to be here with the leaders from Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia. The United States appreciates the leadership you have shown in the cause of freedom. We're pleased Albania and Croatia have been invited to join NATO, and we look forward to Macedonia taking its place very soon in this great alliance for freedom.

Laura, who has joined me today, and I are proud to stand on the soil of an independent Croatia. Our countries are separated by thousands of miles, but we're united by a deep belief in God and the blessings of liberty He gave us. And today on the edge of a great Adriatic, we stand together as one free people.

Croatia is a very different place than it was just a decade ago. The Croatian people have overcome war and hardship to build peaceful relations with your neighbors and to build a maturing democracy in one of the most beautiful countries on the face of the Earth. Americans admire your courage and admire your persistence. And we look forward to welcoming you as a partner in NATO.

The invitation to join NATO that Croatia and Albania received this week is a vote of confidence that you will continue to make necessary reforms and become strong contributors to our great alliance. Henceforth, should any danger threaten your people, America and the NATO alliance will stand with you, and no one will be able to take your freedom away.

I regret that NATO did not extend an invitation to Macedonia at this week's summit. Macedonia has made difficult reforms at home and is making major contributions to NATO missions abroad. Unfortunately, Macedonia's invitation was delayed because of a dispute over its name. In Bucharest, NATO allies declared that as soon as this issue is resolved, Macedonia will be extended an invitation to join the alliance. America's position is clear: Macedonia should take its place in NATO as soon as possible.

The NATO alliance is open to all countries in the region. We welcome the decisions of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro to take the next steps toward membership called intensive dialog. And we hope that soon a free and prosperous Serbia will find its rightful place in the family of Europe and live at peace with its neighbors.

With the changes underway in this region, Europe stands on the threshold of a new and hopeful history. The ancient and costly rivalries that led to two World Wars have fallen away. We've seen the burning desire for freedom melt even the Iron Curtain. We've witnessed the rise of strong and vibrant democracies and free and open markets. And today, the people of Europe are closer than ever before to a dream shared by millions: a Europe that is whole, a Europe that is at peace, and a Europe that is free.

The people of this region know what the gift of liberty means. You know the death and destruction that can be caused by the followers of radical ideologies. You know that in the long run, the only way to defeat a hateful ideology is to promote the hopeful alternative of human freedom. And that is what our nations are doing today in the Middle East. The lack of freedom and opportunity in that region has given aid and comfort to the lies and ambitions of violent extremists. Resentments that began on the streets of the Middle East have resulted in the killing innocent people across the world. A great danger clouds the future of all free men and women, and this danger sits at the doorstep of Europe.

Together the people of this region are helping to confront this danger. Today, soldiers from Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia are serving bravely in Afghanistan, helping the Afghan people defeat the terrorists and secure their future of liberty. Forces from Albania and Macedonia are serving in Iraq, where they're helping the Iraqi people build a society that rejects terror and lives in freedom. It's only a matter of time before freedom takes root across that troubled region. And when it does, millions will remember the people of your nation stood with them in their hour of need.

At this great moment in history, you have a vital role. There are many people who don't appear to understand why it takes so long to build a democracy. You can tell them how hard it is to put in place a new and complex system of government for the first time. There are those who actually wonder if people were better off under their old tyranny.

You can tell them that freedom is the only real path to prosperity and security and peace. And there are those who ask whether the pain and sacrifices for freedom are worth the costs. And they should come to Croatia, and you can show them that freedom is worth fighting for.

The great church in this square has stood since the Middle Ages. Over the centuries, it has seen long, dark winters of occupation and tyranny and war. But the spring is here at last. This is an era in history that generations of Croatians have prayed for. It is an era that Pope John Paul II envisioned when he came to this land and prayed with the Croatian people and asked for "a culture of peace." Today in this square, before this great church, we can now proudly say those prayers have been answered.

Interpreter. [*Inaudible*]

The President. They can't hear you. Don't worry about it.

May you always remember the joy of this moment in your history. And may the hopeful story of a peaceful Croatia find its way to those in the world who live as slaves and still await a joyful spring.

May God bless Croatia. And thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:49 a.m. in St. Mark's Square. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ivo Sanader of Croatia. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Sanader.

The President's Radio Address

April 5, 2008

Good morning. I'm speaking to you from Europe, where I attended the NATO summit and witnessed the hopeful progress of the continent's youngest democracies.

The summit was held in Romania, one of the 10 liberated nations that have joined the ranks of NATO since the end of the cold war. After decades of tyranny and oppression, today, Romania is an important member of an international alliance dedicated to liberty, and it is setting a bold example for other former Communist nations that desire to live in peace and freedom.

One of those nations is Croatia, which I'm also visiting on my trip. Croatia is a very different place than it was just a decade ago. Since they attained their independence, the Croatian people have shown the world the potential of human freedom. They've overcome war and hardship to build peaceful relations with their neighbors, and they have built a maturing democracy on the rubble of a dictatorship.

This week NATO invited Croatia, as well as the nation of Albania, to join the NATO alliance. These countries have made extraordinary progress on the road to freedom, prosperity, and peace. The invitation to join NATO represents the alliance's confidence that they will continue to make necessary reforms and that they will become strong contributors to NATO's mission of collective defense.

I regret that NATO was not able to extend an invitation to a third nation, Macedonia, at this week's summit. Like Croatia and Albania, Macedonia has met all the criteria for NATO membership. Unfortunately, its invitation was delayed because of a dispute over its name. I made clear that the name issue should be resolved quickly, that NATO should intensify its engagement with Macedonia, and that we look forward to the day when this young democracy takes its place among the members of the NATO alliance.

After a century when the great wars of Europe threatened destruction throughout the world, the continent has now entered into a promising new era. Less than two decades ago, Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia suffered under the yoke of Communist oppression. The people in these countries know what the gift of liberty means, because they know what it is like to have their liberty denied. They know the death and destruction that can be caused by the followers of radical ideologies who kill the innocent in pursuit of political power. And these lessons have led them to work alongside America in the war on terror.

Today, soldiers from Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia are serving bravely in Afghanistan, helping the Afghan people defeat terrorists and secure a future of liberty. And forces from Albania and Macedonia are also serving in Iraq, where they're helping the