



Remarks With Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu

Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs

Outside President Sejdiu's Office

Kosovo

March 7, 2008

PRESIDENT SEJDIU: Greetings. I had an extraordinary meeting with Assistant Secretary Dan Fried, a person who has long been very involved, along with the entire team of the United States of America, in supporting the independence of Kosovo. Thanks to the special help given by the United States of America and its ally, the European Union, Kosovo is independent and is building a democratic, functional state—a state for all citizens that will guarantee the rights of minority communities, as laid out in the Ahtisaari plan. Kosovo is working towards good relations with our neighbors and towards Euro-Atlantic integration. One more time I wish to thank the United States of America, President Bush, Secretary Rice, Mr. Burns, as well as Mr. Fried for all their efforts and for their support of Kosovo. We look forward to the work and cooperation ahead.



ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Thank you, Mr. President. It's a pleasure and an honor to be in Europe's newest country and the world's newest democracy: the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo has its independence. And after all these years, the good news is you are here. And the challenge is to build the state that so many Kosovars have struggled for: a state rooted in law, with strong democratic institutions, a state for all of its peoples, and a state on its way to Europe, undivided. There are many challenges ahead, but the people of Kosovo are used to those challenges. They have overcome worse, more difficult challenges in the past, values, and for the way it has handled the pressures and the tensions of the past few months. So, I first congratulate the leadership of this new country, for its patience, its commitment to common democratic. I commend the leadership of Kosovo for reaching out to the Kosovo Serbs and all the peoples of Kosovo, to its neighbors, and to the world. Much work remains to be done. But now Kosovo is free to develop its institutions, to build up its economy, to bring in investment, both small and large, and to realize its future as a European nation, in undivided Europe. For these many years, the United States has stood with the people of Kosovo. And we stand with you still, and will in the future.

As for the challenges ahead, yes, they are serious; yes, problems exist and need to be overcome. But if Kosovars approach these problems and challenges with the same spirit of cooperation and confidence, rejecting nationalism and hatred, and embracing a common future, good future will be yours. And with that, I'm happy to answer questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Fried is Mr. Bush planning a visit here in Kosovo after the NATO summit in Bucharest?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: President Bush, Secretary Rice and, my old friend of many years, Nick Burns, all devoted a great deal to Kosovo's independence. And the Government of the United States is committed to Kosovo in the future. Now, we don't have—the President doesn't have plans to visit Kosovo after the NATO Summit. I've heard that story, but we don't have plans. But, I've spoken to the President and Secretary Rice, and the commitment of the Government of the United States to Kosovo is quite real. I'm not going to make any predictions about future visits.

QUESTION: Mr. Fried, what are you going to do to avoid the conflict between the UN, EU and Kosovo's institutions about the transition process? The UN said that UNMIK will stay until the Security Council finds a solution. The EU has no clear mandate. Why do the Kosovo Institutions believe the transition process began on the 17th of February? Zoti President, ...dje ka nise dhe ka filluar procesi i tranzicionit por na nuk po shohim qe po behet pranimi dhe dorezimi i (inaudible) .te kosoves

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: There's going to be a period where the international institutions of the EU and its Rule of Law mission, the International Civilian Office, and UNMIK work out their relationships to the period ahead. This is going to be a complicated period. I wouldn't worry about it terribly much. I think that Kosovo's job is to build up its own institutions, and make it as functional and as efficient as quickly as possible. I wouldn't worry about the international community sorting itself out. KFOR is doing its job well. The civilian missions will do their job. And if Kosovo does its job, things will sort themselves out. But Kosovo's responsibility as an independent country is to itself and its institutions.

PRESIDENT SEJDIU: I simply want to say that the U.S. and Kosovo have very good cooperation. This success took a lot of preparation. I believe that with this cooperation, Kosovo institutions will do their best. I want to add that Kosovo's institutions have good cooperation with the international community here. Last week I had a very good meeting with Mr. Ruecker, Mr. Feith, and General DeMarnac, where we analyzed the road ahead. I believe that with this cooperation we will fulfill the promises made in Kosovo's Declaration of Independence.

QUESTION: Matt Robinson from Reuters. Mr. Fried, (inaudible) would insist that Kosovo's declaration of independence has led to a partition. When you look what Serbia is doing on the ground at the moment do you think it is right?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: No.

QUESTION: Why?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: We don't believe in partition. After all, the more you think about it, the less sense it makes. More than half of Kosovo's Serb population lives south of the Ibar River. The Russians, formally and officially rejected partition, as part of the Contact Group. So these are words, this isn't reality. There are obviously issues in the North. There are problems. There are problems that need to be resolved. This will take time. But I would not focus too much on some of the words of Ambassador Churkin or others. I would focus on the reality, which is Kosovo is establishing its institutions as an independent nation. Independence is a fact. This is reality. History is only going to move forward.

QUESTION: What about the actions of Serbia?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, obviously, some of the actions of Serbia have been deeply disturbing. The riots in Belgrade, the attacks on a number of Embassies were outrageous and unacceptable. This is a terrible thing. There have been various provocations in North. This sort of thing was to be expected. I think the Kosovar leadership has responded to these provocations with, frankly, a maturity which vindicates the decision of the United States and two thirds of the European Union members to recognize it. And I think with time, and as Kosovo develops, these problems will work out slowly, but I think they will.

QUESTION: Mr. Fried, getting back to the international mission. In the meantime UNMIK is still exercising its powers. Do you know how exactly and when exactly will UNMIK cease executing these powers in Kosovo?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: No. Exact, you ask—whether I knew exactly when. No, I don't. I do know that UNMIK, under 1244, will remain in some capacity. I

know that the EU Rule of Law Mission is ramping up, which is a good thing. The EULEX mission, this is important, it's the EU's most ambitious mission of this sort. The EU is committed to this. The International Civilian Office is ramping up. And KFOR has done a magnificent job. They are not the police but they are the backup and ultimate guarantors of security. They've done a good job.

QUESTION: When you say UNMIK will remain in same capacity, does that mean that it will not be terminated?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: well...

QUESTION: The mission?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Utterly terminated? No, that was never an option, but there will be some transition as the EU Rule of Law Mission ramps up. But under 1244, and since the Russians blocked a new Security Council Resolution, UNMIK will remain in some capacity. But your question—the logical follow up question would be, well, how will they sort themselves out? And who will do what? And that's something that we'll see as we gain, the internationals gain experience and start working with each other. But for Kosovars, the main point is: they're independent, and their institutions are going to function. Let the internationals, let us sort ourselves out. And if Kosovo does its job, things will work out well.

QUESTION: Nebi Qena, Associated Press. Do you worry that Serbia will not sort itself out because of Kosovo's independence? We've seen they're risking their European future.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Serbia deserves a European future. And most Serbs—all polling data demonstrates and the last, the presidential elections demonstrate – want a European future. Now, it's up to Serbs what their future is. But Serbia's European path and European road is not going to be blocked by any country. The only barriers between Serbia and its European future will be those it places for itself. They can block their own road; no one will block the road for them.

QUESTION: Can this move of partition, the problems with the North and the reactions of Serbia serve still as an excuse for the Kosovo leadership not to be able to address real issues like education? And I want to know how the international supervision will be dealing with these issues.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Actually, your first question is a very good one and I'm happy to say, frankly, that I'm delighted, by—if you forgive me—by what the President told me. I know that the Kosovo leadership knows very well that its job is to build the state, help the nation, increase prosperity, and not be raddled by provocative speeches or occasional provocations in the North. Kosovo is independent, that's a fact. Kosovo now has responsibilities as independent nation, which is a second fact. And the third fact is that the leadership of Kosovo seems intent on fulfilling its obligations. So, I'm very pleased. I just got here, of course, but I'm very pleased by what the President told me in terms of his commitment to do the right thing, and not worry about responding to provocations.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: OK. Thank you.

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