

**THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**“NATO IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:  
ALBANIAN AND MACEDONIAN PERSPECTIVES”**

**FEBRUARY 1, 2007**

**FEATURING:**

**HIS EXCELLENCY FATMIR MEDIU,  
DEFENSE MINISTER OF ALBANIA**

**HIS EXCELLENCY LAZAR ELENOVSKI,  
DEFENSE MINISTER OF MACEDONIA**

**THE HONORABLE GORDON ENGLAND,  
UNITED STATES DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**DR. JOHN HAMRE, CSIS PRESIDENT AND CEO**

*Transcript by:  
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Washington, D.C.*

JOHN HAMRE: Thank you all very much for coming. I am very pleased that you are here. This is a kind of an interesting and tough day because of both the combination of the weather and will all the other issues going around in town.

Let me say thank you to our two ministers for coming. And I always do this because, you know for being such a sophisticated country, you know, we tend to get overly preoccupied with only one issue at a time. It's like we can't handle anything more than one, you know, at a time. And right now, everything is Iraq; Iraq, Iraq, Iraq and the rest of the world is out there. And they're so many structural – important structural things we need to be working on and yet we don't have the attention span in this town to do that unless we have prominent visitors that come to help us. And so, I sincerely thank you. You're doing us a favor by coming to Washington and helping us focus on this subject.

I have to say a hearty welcome to Gordon England. Gordon is, of course, the deputy secretary of Defense. Before that, he was the secretary of the Navy. He took a little breather to be the deputy secretary of Homeland Security. He's been in – and he was the secretary of the Navy before that. And for a man who has earned a full right to a private life, he still continues serving his country and I'm so grateful that you're doing that, Gordon. Thank you and thank you for coming today. I think your presence today indicates the importance of this – of the topic and what we want to discuss today.

Colleagues, our two ministers are here in significant measure in order to advance the ideas and the dreams that Albania and Macedonia have for wider membership in the European Community and especially in NATO. And this is a very important issue for all of us. And I mean this by us Americans. It's in our interest for us to explore these issues with them together.

I will say, you are seeing evidence of a great bipartisanship because, of course, His Excellency Mediu is the head of the Republican Party and Mr. Elenovski is the head of the Democratic Party and so we're seeing bipartisanship – of course, quite different –

MR. GORDON ENGLAND: And I'm caught in the middle.

MR. HAMRE: And you're caught in the middle? (Laughter.)

And Gordon is the – in the middle like he is in every congressional hearing, so I think this is a familiar posture for the deputy secretary of Defense.

But I must say I've come to that state in life where I no longer resent the fact that the world leaders are younger than I am. (Laughter.) You know, I mean, it's something that I used to resent, but I no longer do.

What we're going to do today – we're going to start first with the Albanian minister of defense, Fatmir Mediu. He is one of the young rising stars – head of the Republican Party. He has grown into this large position in such a short time, which tells you the measure of the content of his character and his ability. And so we will begin, I think. And I've asked each of our colleagues to take about 10 minutes to offer some comments. We'll first begin with Albania and then we'll hear from Minister Elenovski and then we will take a few minutes with Gordon and then we want you all to be the real center of this because it's your questions that are going to make the quality of this session.

And so let me without any further delay – and I again want to say thank you. These are opportunities that we seek and you're going to help us here in the United States. And I'm very proud to be able to introduce to you now His Excellency, the Honorable Fatmir Mediu, the defense minister of Albania. Please, Minister. Why don't you please come up here?

FATMIR MEDIU: Thank you very much, Dr. Hamre. You said too fast in the position. I've been waiting with my wife eight years in opposition to get this seat, but fighting a lot. And thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to speak in this distinguished audience and putting some of my thoughts on the topics of importance for all of us and especially for our countries need to in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Albania, Macedonia, Croatia.

We are two here, but I believe we are three. Minister Roncevic wanted to be with us. We had a discussion in December, an A3 meeting in Toronto, to be all together in Washington, but because of certain other engagement of Minister Roncevic is not present. But I think we share the same thing, the same ideas, the same approach on these issues. And we learn a lot from one another, especially learning from Croatian experience is something great.

We had a great pleasure to be together in December so we decided to come here together with Minister Elenovski, to get a chance to meet with people. Yesterday, we had a chance to meet – have a meeting with Secretary England and Secretary Gates and then having a chance to be in White House, even shortly meeting with the secretary, Condoleezza Rice and meeting a lot of senators and members of the House. And we saw great support, great deal of support for Albanian, for Macedonia, for Croatia.

But this gives a lot of responsibility on our shoulder, to find this support and doing the right things because the time is short. We need prioritize our goals and also to find out the action plan that we can work in order to meet all the so-called NATO standards in order to receive the invitation for NATO membership by 2008.

And I came here from a visit in ACT Command – Allied Command for Transformation – with a lesson learned – three D: diplomacy, development, defense. And I think this works not just for the NATO, but works for each of our countries. And I

think we have to focus and trying to work with all the institutions in the country to meet the necessary request to receive this invitation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe we all share the same opinion that world today is quite different from the world of the past. New global threats are emerging and the old ones are disappearing. The new threats needs new means and joint efforts to be faced. One thing is for sure, that no county can provide for its security in isolation. In this context, NATO remains a political-military alliance of democratic nations who share common values, ideals and responsibilities of security. And this is very, very important for our countries. These values have not changed. Democracy and freedom, liberty and justice are all the challenges every day.

We have witnessed the fact that in last years new countries have joined NATO. NATO's ongoing enlargement process has been an historic success in advancing stability, peace and cooperation in Europe and as President Bush vision for a Europe all free and at peace. The Riga Summit Declaration was a clear message in recognizing the efforts of the A3 countries – Croatia, Albania, Macedonia – in preparing themselves for the responsibilities and obligations of membership, the increasing contributions to international peacekeeping and security operation as well as the common efforts to advance regional cooperation.

I take this opportunity to once again express our thanks and appreciation to the United States of America, President Bush and to all other NATO members. A special thanks goes to you, Secretary England, for the great support you have given to us and especially for the great friendship. Thank you very much. I really appreciate that.

For Albania, this declaration is of great importance because, first, Albania is recognized as a serious NATO candidate. This means recognition of our efforts and progress in meeting the criteria for membership. In fact, Albania has been acting, so I do believe, as de facto ally on all the NATO actions. And second, the declaration reaffirms that neither size of a country or nor its geographical location will be an obstacle to eventually enter to NATO. Third, a date has been set for the next summit. This means that in 2008 NATO members will have to consider limitation for future enlargement.

What brought us to this moment? First: reforms. For us NATO membership is not only a matter of open doors and good will. We don't want to get anything for granted. It is a coordinated national effort for meeting practical membership requirements and standards. We have been strengthening and consolidating our democratic system and undertaking far reach reforms. And especially thanks to the support that, in the defense reform we have got from United States and from DOD especially, I think we are progressing in the right direction: the development and consolidation of the democratic state on which foundation stands the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, restoration of the rule of law so that the laws are fully and equally enforced for everyone and uprooting of the system of corruption, a rapid balance and sustainable draw of economic and numerous sources. Clearly the successful implementation of reforms I believe has put Albania on a solid footing.

Second: stability. Improvement in the stability of the region that provides a contrast to the violence of some years. Still, the region is very fragile. We consider NATO enlargement as a process characterized by the development of strong cooperation partnership with neighboring countries. Albania has been – and it is a factor of stability in western Balkans – contributing along with the other countries in the area for the creation of community in our part of the Balkans where good neighborly relations can be developed. In this context, we welcome with open heart and support the new Partnership for Peace countries from the region.

Riga Summit has another great achievement: inviting for the Partnership for Peace Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. And we tried to move in this direction as well. In September we had SEDM meeting in Toronto. I was honored to host Secretary Rumsfeld and other ministers of defense and we decided in this meeting to give the observer status to SEDM, which is Southeast Defense Ministerial, to Serbia, Montenegro and also to Bosnia-Herzegovina. So it looks that all the region now is included on the process. And I hope with a solution of Kosovo we are not going to have any black holes anymore in the region.

The Albanian government believes that solution of the final steps of Kosovo will bring much more security and stability to the region. The final status must assure full respect for the rights and freedoms of Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo, especially insuring their religion and historical heritage.

In my opinion, the independence based on such rules and procedures is the solution. The Adriatic Charter has already shown to be a very intensive regional cooperation aimed to achieving our common goals: NATO membership and the lasting peace, security and stability and prosperity of the region. Thanks to this, we are actively participating in peace operation of Afghanistan with a joint medical team from the A3 countries, a mission we are committed to continue. We are committed to continue also with the presence of our troops in Iraq and also planning to extend our presence there.

SEDM was a success story. Deploying SIBRIG (ph) headquarter command in Afghanistan was a success story. And after the SEDM meeting, we also considered the redeployment, also the sizing of deployment, getting of lesson learned where there some caveats or shortages were and I think we are all on the same focus now to go again in Afghanistan.

Thanks to Riga, we are one step closer to father enlargement. Now it is up to us to make sure that we are ready for it, for membership in NATO, which we all are working and that's the goal of our people.

At the political level, I am happy to mention and say that NATO integration enjoys the full support and consensus of all political parties. I am happy to be here today with two distinguished members of the parliament: the chairman of national security committee, Mr. Demi, which belongs to the ruling party and also with Mr. Mali (ph), the

former minister of Finance, which belongs to the opposition, which are here to support. I don't want to forget that I have my daughter here, Sevina (sp), which also giving her support to me, as well, on this work.

We are working hard to meet the requirements of the membership action plan, a process that involves the participation of both executive, legislative branches of government as well as all political parties and wider civil society. The Albanian government is working hard to strengthening the state democratic institution, advancing the rule of law and achieve better results in the fight against organized crime, corruption and illicit trafficking.

The law – nothing but the law – in service of the citizens has been driving force for our government and results have already been achieved. So far, many criminal organizations and several other smuggling criminal groups have been destroyed and their bosses handed over to justice. The policy of zero tolerance against organized crime and corruption is and will remain the motto of our government, is continuous effort.

This is true also for corruption. New ethical standards have been established in the Albanian administration. There has been a dramatic fall in the perception of government's corruption which has fallen from about 77, 80 percent to 22, 23 percent. There has been an increase of income from taxes and duties which testifies the fiscal evasion and smuggling have received a significant blow. We are also working and trying to work hard on having good budget will serve to the interest of the country in building strong economy.

On the other side, the institution I am directly responsible, the defense, is now engaged in a transformation process, a transformation based not just on the change of military structures, but primarily on the change of mentality and the mindset to build a NATO-oriented force with the right capabilities and values for meeting the requirements needed for membership. Special focus has been given to the operation capabilities. Therefore, we are working to put in the practice one of the key decision made by Riga Summit to develop eight percent of land component deployment simultaneous and 40 percent of the total for NATO-led operation with rotation.

Our planning is working hard, reaching objectives to develop, especially, niche capabilities that NATO needs the most. What we have identified and NATO is in need are specialized niche capabilities such as those of special forces, commando, EOD, military police, SIMIC (ph), et cetera. In addition to that, Albania will provide a full NATO-certified battalion of the rapid reaction brigade for NATO-led missions out of area in 2007.

NATO strategy concept is the basic document for the transformation of the force. Interoperability with the NATO forces is another priority of the reform of the armed forces. Our goal is to have a smaller, a fully professional force by 2010; well-trained and motivated force. Special focus has been given to the training, readiness and sustainability

of the force. Albania has participated in several joint exercises as well as hosted many such activities on its own territory.

We are also aware that military strength and cohesion of the alliance are based on a fair sharing of cost and responsibilities. In this respect, the financial burden we are taking in order to modernize the Albanian armed forces in full support of our commitment. The Albanian government is strongly committed to meet the cost related to the NATO integration; to reach the NATO accepted two percent of the GDP for defense budget by 2008. It was planned for 2010. Right now we are 1.84 percent and maintaining the same level of commitment till 2020 through a long term modernization plan.

Another respect of our commitment to shoulder and share responsibilities in order contribute trans-Atlantic security is our active and growing participation in international peace operation, especially those NATO-led and global coalition against terror. Our soldiers are already deployed in the Althea operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the NATO ISAF operation in Afghanistan, in Iraqi Freedom operation of the international coalition against terrorism and we committed to stay there as far as and as long the Americans will be there.

Recently, we are considering extension of participation in NATO-led operation in Afghanistan. We are having some discussions about Iraq and also the participation in UN-led mission in Lebanon. I take this opportunity to express once again our gratitude for the precious support NATO, its member countries and especially the United States provided to the Albanian armed forces. And I'm confident that the continued support for our country will provide in the future full support for the membership.

Ladies and gentlemen, our motivation to join NATO remains unchanged. We wish to join an organization on the shared values of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law as well as to be part of regional stability and security, which only NATO can guarantee. Membership, therefore, represents the strategic objectives of our defense and security policy. Albanian considers the invitation to join NATO a serious indication of trust and full understand and the obligation it is accepting in this context.

We believe that every country, no matter what its size or economic resources, can contribute substantially the fight against threats and also to international security. And Albania's committed to continuing the ongoing reforms to its national defense system. We are ready to further develop and improve our military capabilities in the years to come. Collective security and defense means collective responsibility and burden sharing.

And based on this responsibilities and based on this working to fulfill the goals of the Albanian citizens, but also the people in the Balkan region, we are here today and will be here again with Minister Elenovski and Minister Roncevic in next week in Estonia and we are going to be also in Germany together. I am forgetting that I'm having elections in my country going on so, thank you very much. I really appreciate.

MR. HAMRE: Thank you very much, Minister Mediu, and we we're delighted that your daughter Sevina can be here. Thank you, glad you could come.

I forgot to say, ladies and gentlemen, that we've given you little cards. The way we're going to handle the questioning period here is I'd ask you write them out on cards and then I'm going to – because we're going to have a lot of different people with different questions and we need to best advantage of the efficiency.

So, please write out your questions. Hand them the cards. We've got some very capable young people here. Just hold it up in the air and we'll pick up from you and then I'll go through and introduce the question.

Let me now turn and introduce to His Excellency, Minister Elenovski. He is an economist by training and has been a businessman leading the public transport in Skopje and came to politics with an idealism, an idealism that I find so invigorating. Too much cynicism in a lot of developed countries, especially here, and to find the idealism in your words today, it's just quite thrilling.

Minister Elenovski came to this with a passion of a man who wanted to bring the best ideals of trans-Atlantic cooperation to his own country and he's pioneered that through his meteoric rise in politics in Macedonia. So we're delighted to have him here today. We'll to you next to offer your remarks. Thank you for coming.

(Applause.)

LAZAR ELENOVSKI: Thank you, mister chairman, Dr. Hamre, Secretary England, dear colleagues and friends, Fatmir, ladies and gentlemen. I would also like to salute some of the people that I know and especially I would like to salute my dear friend and teacher throughout the years when I was in the Atlantic movement, Bob Hunter. Please Bob, hi. It's a former U.S. ambassador to NATO and really one special pillar in our Atlantic world movement.

I had my speech here, but I wanted to share some emotions with you today. I was first time with a national prayer breakfast. It was tremendous that more than 100 people from 160 countries in the world gathered in the Hilton Washington with the one idea. Idea was very well shared from all other speakers and especially by the president, Bush. It reminds me on the words of the president Woodrow Wilson, who once said that people sometimes call me idealist, but it is the way how I know the term American. And he ended with that America is only idealistic country in the world. So he was right in that time. Once century after it, we can see that there are many other countries that are idealistic.

Especially in the Eastern Europe, we started on our path to independence as Macedonia. First time in the history, we got independence in 1991 followed immediately the process of the Euro-Atlantic integration. It was very hard because it was a brotherhood blood shed on the north on the ex-Yugoslavia territories. We didn't enter in this war. We've had some smaller conflict in 2001, but we entered and finished this with biggest reform in our society called Ohrid Framework Agreement. And from then, our

democracy flourished and we are very happy to see that many citizens in the country are happy. They have their human rights. They deserved it. And especially with democratic economic reforms we are going to brought (?) the space for democracy because there is no end of this process, as we say about the transformation on the military size.

And of course, from 1991 until now – in 2004 also, on the fourth of November when the Republic of Macedonia was recognized by the U.S., we were supported heartily by the idealistic America. We were supported and we know and we learned the same values and the beliefs that we need to share with our allies. We are trying still to learn. We are on the good path – on the good road, as Fatmir said.

We are very optimistic that in 2008, one strategic goal will be proved for Macedonia, for Croatia, for Albania and this is the NATO membership. NATO membership doesn't mean – I'm always saying that only getting some political goal, but for my people and for my country, and I believe for the whole people in the region, it means a civilizational achievement because we will enter in the family of common values. We are learning those values. That's why we are together in Iraq and in Afghanistan. We are a small country but we are contributing very committedly, and we know why we're here with the big allies, especially our strategic and even more strategic partner, the United States of America.

So we entered from the military side in very deep reforms. We are at the end of, as we say, strategic defense review, which ended on 2007, but when we speak about a transformation of force structure, we are about 90 percent – we have this year to finish it. We have fully improved our force structure. Also, we have implemented full professionalism, so we abolished the conscript system in Macedonia, so from October last year we are fully professional. We are also very much committed for having in mind that we are a multi-ethnic society. I'm always saying that's how the army of Macedonia should also be.

So we have introduced many measures and programs in – (unintelligible) – presentation of the many other community center (?) in Macedonia society and army. And of course we entered with all those new – very new processes in the military, and especially when you speak about deployed forces, which is our main target because I am always saying, today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are two options for one modern soldier: to stay in the barracks or to go into missions with his alliance to fight for the various of the modern democratic world.

We have deployed our troops in three missions: in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in Bosnia. And we are learning – this is our very important learning process for all of us and for our military, but is not only learning process from the military side; is very much political, but that wall is starting and finishing it's very civilizational side. Because I'm very glad that after five or six years, after Taliban regime, we can say that then if it were only 2,000 schools in Afghanistan, we are speaking now today about 10,000 schools, which is tremendous progress. And we are believing and we are very happy when we see these kind of successes, and of course it's very much a saying for us that we should stay

on the line together with allies until we don't succeed there, especially in Afghanistan as a NATO priority mission.

We are also, from the beginning, in Iraq, together with the U.S. troops. Maybe we're the first nation that entered in June 2003 in Iraq, and we are committing our contribution there with the special forces. And of course in Bosnia we are committing the contribution with a helicopter unit and the medical team. But of course, as Fatmir mentioned, it's very important for us because we want to split and share the spirit of the new realities of the regional cooperation in the Balkans, that with this example that Fatmir also mentioned, that together with Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, we are in the medical team within the Greek hospital. And all those years, especially after the assignment of the Adriatic-U.S. – the Adriatic Charter, we are seeing intensive, extraordinary general cooperation between our three countries, but also it means that we should also involve the other countries because the final goal and the final ideal for the Balkans is not that Macedonia or Croatia or Albania will enter in NATO in Europe, but that the whole region will be integrated in the civilizational Atlantic structure.

So we are very much committed for the regional cooperation because we know not only that we all small countries, but we know that we should have excellent relations with our neighbors because you cannot have good relations with your neighbor and want to have integration into bigger systems. So this is how we are improving also our capacities, that we are daily, day by day, more and more equal partners in the alliance, and we are – that's why I want to have and to see – (unintelligible) – the success that all those meetings in the Washington here – those, that I saw strong support from the American side. We are quite aware that we need to finish our, as we say, our homework about the domestic reforms, but it's quite clear that the support from the United States of American is available for us and it's some kind of spiritual leadership for us.

And that's why it is not – I will call now at the end – after I hold this, we will have some – also some more concrete questions to just spread the debate. I will end on the words of President Kennedy, and paraphrase him, that it's not that NATO can do for Macedonia, but what can Macedonia do for its alliance?

Thank you.

(Technical difficulties.)

GORDON ENGLAND: Okay. It is delightful to be here. And, Mr. Ministers, it's hard to call you ministers because, Fatmir, you've been a longtime friend here and it's always wonderful to be with you and Lazar, a new friend, and I appreciate the opportunity to be with you both today. I also want to thank you embassies. I also want to thank the people in Albania and Macedonia because our friendships between our nations has been growing ever stronger. A lot of that is because of representatives here in Washington, but also because of the feeling between our people in each of our countries.

I'd like to compliment the comments that were made by my colleagues here today with a few of my own perspectives and about how our common efforts can best address the larger security context that we all face together. First, as you know, this is indeed a critical time in world history, and it is a time going forward where no single nation, including the United States of America, can go it alone. Partnership – partnership is the cornerstone of our strategy as we go forward. And as Alexander the Great said, “Remember, upon the conduct of each depends the fate of all,” and that could not apply any more today than it certainly did in the past because we were truly in this together.

In the security area, Albania and Macedonia, two former security assistance what I would call consumers, have transformed themselves in an extraordinarily short period of time into direct contributors to global security, including our common efforts in this war on terror. And this includes making some very tough and difficult decisions at home, like freezing the assets of suspected terrorists, moving to downsize and reorient their militaries that were built for a different era. And it includes the tough but the important choice to devote scarce resources to defense. And they actually, I believe, set the marker for most countries and NATO. Albania has committed to raising defense spending to 2 percent by 2008, and Macedonia is already well above that threshold, and there are not – and that is the threshold for NATO. There's not many NATO countries today that meet that threshold, so I thank you for the leadership in that area.

As players on the international stage, Albania and Macedonia are now helping to extend the promise of freedom to those who have known too little of it as part of the coalition efforts in both Afghanistan and in Iraq. Albania was one of only a handful of partner countries to send combat troops to Iraq in the early stages of the fight. In 2003, about 70 Albanian commandos joined the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in Northern Iraq and contribute directly to coalition efforts.

Today Albania has an even larger infantry presence in Iraq and contributes both special operation forces and medical expertise to our forces in Afghanistan – pardon me – yes, in Afghanistan. And Albania continues to participate in the EU-led effort in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Macedonia, too, as you heard, supports the EU mission in Bosnia and hosted NATO forces supporting operations in Kosovo for four years. And Macedonia is contributing troops with key specialized skills to coalition forces on the war on terror, including special forces in Iraq and infantry and medical specialists in Afghanistan. And by removing national caveats in Afghanistan, Macedonia is very helpfully increasing commanders' flexibility and responsiveness. Last year the Albanian representative to U.S. Central Command said, “Even the smallest birds want to fly,” and these countries are beginning to soar.

Now, the way forward doesn't necessarily look easy, but it does look bright. In today's highly complex global environment, Albania and Macedonia have further key contributions to make to both regional security and common global efforts. At the regional level, Albania and Macedonia, working with Croatia and the Adriatic Charter format, have the opportunity to strengthen political, economic, and defense cooperation within the Balkans region, as well as the integration of the region into broader European

and transatlantic institutions including NATO. NATO itself, the bedrock of the transatlantic partnership, is undergoing essential transformation

To meet the day's more complex and geographically diffused challenges, NATO is developing more expeditionary capabilities: the ability to respond quickly and effectively anywhere in the world, and it is a dynamic time to get on board. At the Riga Summit last year, NATO welcomed the effort so far by Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia to prepare, quote, "for the responsibilities and obligations of membership." For its part, the United States has staunchly supported your progress so far, and will continue to support your efforts as you prepare to make the strongest possible case for membership at the 2008 NATO summit.

NATO's recent invitation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia to join the Partnership for Peace program is indeed a reason for optimism and another concrete indication that the door remains open. Of course, as the Riga Declaration made clear, the hard work is not over. NATO does expect further progress on defense reform and the rule of law. Frankly, both areas require fundamental cultural change as well as adjustments on paper, and that will be a challenge. Two-thousand-and-seven will be a pivot year for Albania and Macedonia, a time for hard work and hard choices.

The good news is that the efforts will be well worth it because the benefits of a system based on the rule of law extend into every sector of society. Rule of law is the fundamental pillar of stability. It's necessary to protect the economic and social welfare of citizens, and is the most important incentive for fueling a prosperous market economy. The rule of law gives people reasonable confidence that the hard work and investment are more likely than not to pay off and lets individuals' natural ingenuity flourish.

The Security Partnership Way Forward also includes more specific consideration, like determining appropriate roles for Albania and Macedonia within the broader NATO framework. There is a lot of talk about the importance of interoperability – operating seamlessly together on the battlefield. Now, realistically, our defense budget in the United States far exceeds those of even our very, very close and large allies, and even the GDP shrank of many of our close partners.

So interoperability can't mean that we all buy the same thing. That's not going to be possible. Instead, it means thinking about capabilities in terms of broad portfolios and making sure that all the pieces fit. So, as you heard earlier, for many countries it means developing niche capabilities that are in high demand by NATO, and Albania is developing a deployable rapid reaction brigade as well as other deployable capabilities, including MPs, EODs, special forces, engineers and medical support. Macedonia is also focusing on special forces, MPs, and as you head, their helicopter rotary wing asset. So these are very welcome steps because they are needed niche capabilities in NATO.

President Ronald Reagan said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We don't pass it on to our children in the bloodstream. It must be

fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same,” and that’s the mission we all share today, all of our nations working together with a common mission.

So I do thank you, Minister Mediu and Minister Elenovski, for your own personal commitments for freedom and liberty. I mean, you are quite exceptional. You know, I was thinking, as I was having breakfast yesterday, we all – the three of us had breakfast. I was thinking, here are two ministers of defense, the oldest one is 40 years old – 40 – and one is younger than 40. And I thought to myself, wow, what was I doing at that age. And then I thought, wait a minute; wait a minute, I’m 30 years older and I’m still not a minister of defense. (Laughter.)

So these are obviously extraordinary exceptional people who represent their country, their countries. And I thank them. I thank them for what they do for the countries, what they have already accomplished, and the great future that they hold out for their nation because of their great leadership. And it’s been an absolute pleasure for me to be here today with you both. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. HAMRE: Gordon, thank you – very moving.

And frankly, if everyone would just indulge me for a minute, a personal observation – I have not been very happy with politics in this country for the last year. And it’s a country – our politics is obsessed with kind of getting even and scoring points, and bitterness. You would rather fight and lose on principle than compromise and win for a better – and to be able to hear these guys talk about real hopes to transform their countries to achieve something big and great is tremendous. I want to just personally thank you, both of you. (Applause.)

Now, we have lots of questions. And I would like to frame the first one, but several of the questions have been around it. It’s kind of a tough question to both of you, and it rather stems off of, a bit, the comment I just made.

Both America and Europe seem to be tired about the burdens of institutionalizing a larger Europe, and a larger Europe along the models that we strove for 40 years. Do you think Europe is ready to let Albania and Macedonia to become partners, security partners, and what should we be doing to help you as you are struggling to help yourselves? Please, you start.

MR. MEDIU: Thank you, Dr. Hamre. As I mentioned when I was speaking, I don’t think that there is only one country or a group of countries that can make the world safe today. And a small country also can contribute to the peace and stability first in its own country then to the region and broader. And I think two countries here present an example in working together for peace and stability in the region, where NATO has been involved, security forces are still present in Kosovo, and we even reach beyond the region. So we went together with the SEDM headquarter command – SIBRIG

headquarter command in Afghanistan. We are present in Iraq; we are present in Afghanistan. So it looks at our commitment is not just working in our region but also beyond our region, and we want to do that in partnership.

Is U.S. tired? I cannot tell that from the meeting I had these two days. We find really strong support in the Hill, support in the State Department, great support in Pentagon, and I think this gives us a lot of responsibilities. Maybe the question of being tired or not has to do with some of ups and downs in our countries, so we have to find where our problems are to putting the priorities right. And I believe that we need a clear action plan. We know that we cannot meet everything. We cannot be like France, we cannot be like Germany or Italy, but we can we can progress. We need to show that we have the vision, we can set the priorities right. And 2008 is so close. For me as a minister of defense, it's not one year; it's just one month – a lot of things going on.

So I do believe that the EU will profit most from membership of Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, tomorrow Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, all of these countries being in it. And they will feel also the gap that does exist in Turkey, Bulgaria, and then Italy. So we need these countries – you know, we are kind of bridges that can build all of the relationship that are necessary.

And I think, you know, I have been traveling a lot trying to reach out the other European countries, trying to tell what we are doing because sometimes nobody wants to hear a lot from a small country, you know. The bad thing always is news, but the good thing never comes out, so trying to reach and tell to the ministers of defense – I had a great meeting with the Minister Leomarios (sp), also Minister Yung (sp) and Minister Perez (sp), and all of this, you know – we are trying to build this relationship and trying to offer a partnership, and I think the only way we can make them feeling not tired in the long run is offering them a partnership, but first of all, doing our homework.

MR. HAMRE: Mr. Ambassador

MR. ELENOVSKI: Thank you. I agree with Fatmir. We are linked together – today in 21<sup>st</sup> century with a completely new security environment, which means that all of those definitions from the past have went and they should stay in the past. Now the processes – the right answer is that how many countries in the Atlantic family are seeing those changes, and how fast we are adapting to the changes, and at the end, how responsible we are toward the changes, especially towards the threats that we are all speaking, that are symmetric ones, they are global ones, and that we don't know from where it can appear.

So from the other side, NATO, the security alliance is built and it's based, and we will never forget the base by the – on the transatlantic link between the America and the Europe. And it should stay – and this is only the way of the success for all of us.

Of course there are some times that some countries don't feel the momentum of the challenges of the changes, but the – it's very important, especially it was well

underlined on the Riga summit that we are also – also again, underline the principle of solidarity, and especially on the case – this big test for all of us, the Afghanistan that we need to – if we want to succeed in Afghanistan, we need to deploy more troops and of course to speak in one voice.

It also means, as Secretary England mentioned that we need to move all of those limitations in the operations on the ground, which have many countries put this as a national caveat. That is why even before Riga Summit we as Macedonia moved the national caveats because we felt that this is the right thing – how we need to – and how we can contribute for the faster success. Because I am always saying today, living in a dynamic world, we're speaking also about dynamic risk. We had some opponents in Macedonia, so big of course, that were telling that lifting the national caveats will endanger our soldiers. This is true, but another truth is that without effective power in Afghanistan and without success of the forces and troops in Afghanistan, we are speaking about delayed success or we are speaking about delayed risk or continued risk.

So for me, it's much more important that we will be very much concentrated and effective and finish the job in Afghanistan for two, three years instead of having less effectiveness of our troops – being less responsible, because the situation demands that we need to really be quite concentrated and committed for the success and stay 20 years in Afghanistan. This is, for me, biggest risk for my troops and my soldiers on the ground.

It was an excellent example for me because I'm always sticking to this Japanese sentence that is saying that it's better to see once than to hear one hundred times. I was, on the beginning of Monday, in Afghanistan and I saw the situation on the ground – very different, not so much different, but you must feel it – it's very different than to read the reports in the cabinet, of course. And I knew, and the commanders are telling us that really – for example, when we speak about national caveats, we should move it and we agreed, and as a government, we entered in action just 10 days before Riga Summit.

So, I am saying that we must all over from the both sides of the Atlantic of what our challenges and responsibilities – and that's how we should approach to those challenges. Sometimes there are, of course, in some politics some misunderstandings, but the basic path for all of us is sticking together on this transatlantic link and trying to spread all our common values that we are together in the alliance without the world.

MR. HAMRE: Thank you. Four of my colleagues here in the audience have written questions about Kosovo and I'm going to frame it in – kind of bring them together, because they're somewhat in different directions. But I'd like to bring them together, so I'd like to ask a kind of multi-part question. Is the formula that Marti Ahtisaari has worked out going to work? Do you think that it might lead to violence, and is this violence going to be containable, or do you think it will be a larger regional problem?

MR. MEDIU: Why don't you begin?

MR. ELENOVSKI: Yes, okay. About Kosovo, thank you for the question. This is a really important case now in the Balkans, but this is the case I'm hearing from when I was a child. Maybe a few decades we are speaking about Kosovo in the region and I know that really – we are still really tired of this question. Somehow, because you know, as we are speaking about, for example, the Middle East, so we are living – our lives, in general, are very short, so we cannot stand especially today that we will speak and speak only on the some solutions without any end of some case. And really, especially, after '99, we are a neighbor of Kosovo, of the territory that we don't know who is living, who is governing.

There are few levels of governing of Kosovo – UNMIC, K4, also the Kosovars with the government – but this is somehow shared responsibility and when we have this kind of responsibility on few levels, we, at the end, know that there is no responsibility. And I think that this is the worst scenario that status quo will stay – for example, as I'm just mentioning some options – will stay in Kosovo and that we need also (press ?) by all the integrational processes in the region. We need to go forward, really. And the position of Macedonia will, of course – as it was now being very contributive – we will support the proposal of Mr. Ahtisaari, but also we need to believe in what are we, of course, doing.

And something what is very – and it's everywhere in the – (unintelligible) – regions. If you mention to Iraq or Afghanistan or in Kosovo, it's when you speak about the stabilization and further development, it's quite clear, for example, that the military can do something to some levels – can stabilize the country, can start develop, but on short term. If you want to continue to have long term stabilization, which means, by default, development, then we need to for Afghanistan include the other international factors, as the United Nations and European Union. But of course, we have moved much more further in Kosovo.

At the end, you need the support from the local people. Without support of the local people, you cannot expect that this territory, this region, today, in 21<sup>st</sup> century – when we live in a democratic world wanting to implement democratic standards – cannot expect, and it's very illogical, that something can be against the will of the local people and to work. So, I think that we should all be aware in which direction Kosovo is moving and this is good for all of us, I think. It's moving because it must move.

This will be the last political line in the region and it will be good for all of us because we will not speak anymore about, I don't know, all those stereotypes that we spoke in the past. So, it will be, of course, good also, I believe, even for Serbia. Because if we just, on the single thought, imagine that, for example, can Kosovo stay under Belgrade authority? I think this is already some kind of artificial question because it's really no logic and we need to move very fast because as we mentioned, we're in front of the integrations. We are in front of NATO, the three countries; two of those countries are first neighbors to Kosovo. We are neighbor of Serbia and we would like our neighbors to have really good established road for its development. And at the end, we will result in the improvement of the common goal, which is integration of the whole region.

MR. MEDIU: Thank you very much. I think giving an answer as an Albanian, maybe it is easy, but seeing the complex theater in Kosovo – also an Albanian government trying to see what kind of proactive role we can take on the situation that is in Kosovo. First of all, I think we have a de facto independence in Kosovo. You know, they are acting for a long period of time as a state, different with no connections to Serbia.

Second, we have institutions that cannot exercise with full authority because of certain restrictions that they do have. We have a parliament voted, but they cannot, you know, work on all the laws since the UNMIK administration somehow combines what is coming out, and also in the government.

We do have the economy that is not working – it is going really bad, and people are getting impatient – not just only for the end state and final status of Kosovo but also for their economy. We do have Serbs that don't feel safe, and they are not fully participating in the institutions. We have northern part of Kosovo which are some bad signs that, you know, Serbs are organizing and even help to deorganize declaring de facto partition with Kosovo if Ahtisaari will – proposal – Ahtisaari will be the independence of Kosovo. And we have Serbs in the other side, in Belgrade, which I did believe that the political leaders in Kosovo, in Serbia and using Kosovo as a tool to gain more power. This was obvious in last election, and also why not delaying the process and waiting for a conflict that may happen in Kosovo because people can get impatient, and will see that some impatient votes have been bad situation in Kosovo.

And my belief – and that is what the Albanian government thinks, and the Prime Minister Berisha, when he went in Kosovo, declared openly that parliament is independence conditioned with respecting the rights of Serbs in their culture and culture and religion heritage. And he went even further – went to one of the monasteries meeting with religion leaders and also Serb leaders, giving them all of the support, even parent support or (ability ?) is an example of the approach that the Albanians want to take toward the Kosovo future and relation of multi-ethnic society in Kosovo.

Why I'm mentioning multi-ethnic society? Because I mentioned this question of partition in northern part of Kosovo – speaking with the GFC Naples with the people that have troops in place, we have the concern that something – we need to see how it can control the situation. And if the Serbs will take an action on that direction, I think this will bring conflict. But more than conflict within Kosovo, it's going to set a bad example for the other countries around Kosovo, which are all multi-ethnic countries somehow.

So we don't have any clean ethnic country in the region, and that is why we have to be really focused. And this has been the policy of the EU and the United States, building democratic societies in Albania, Macedonia, and the other countries in the region.

I believe the Ahtisaari proposal is what we, as Albanians, support as well. And if, you know, we will have also a problem with the position that Russia is taking if Russia is going to take a veto in the Security Council. And what is going to happen? I think Kosovo has no choice; they have to declare their own independence, and they have to see how they can recognize independence one by one with the countries that will recognize that.

On the other hand, we have now Kostonitza (ph) that is saying, you know, I don't want to participate in the government with any party which do build relationship with the countries that recognize independence. So it's more in one side political tool, and on the other side, I think it's more a way of living and having a future. And based on that, I think the Albanian government will be fully supportive on the other side of the proposal, and also, always pushing Kosovo leaders to understand that their future is well connected with Serbs in Kosovo, and with Serbs as neighbors, which has to do with the economy and the political instability in the region.

MR. ELENOVSKI: If I just made add something because I didn't explain the last question. Do we expect some conflict? We don't expect any conflict, and we don't believe that something can appear of that kind because really the regionalists very much changed. And it is good from the other side that the democratic forces won the elections in Serbia. It was also good that part of the Albanians in south Serbia joined the elections, and they also voted, which is a good sign. And from the other side, we are here as Macedonia, and I know as Albania keeping mind that we have been in partnership for peace from '95. We are here to offer – and we offered assistance, for example, concretely military, but also the other reforms, and for Serbia, and for Kosovo, and for Montenegro and for Bosnia Herzegovina.

So this is the way how the things are really moving in the region. We don't expect that – some think we'll can't help on all of – let's say from some security threat in the region. And at the end the politics will prevail and will continue – all together with integration.

MR. HAMRE: We are really quite at the end of the hour, and we said we would hold you. But I have one very interesting question I would like to pose, and maybe your answers could be short because I know you have to leave, and I apologize for doing it. And that is, what have your respective forces been learning in Afghanistan, cooperating with NATO, that now you need to take back and gives you a clue on the hurdles you still have to work through in order to get accession? What are you learning from your Afghan experience?

MR. MEDIU: I just can tell, you know, that – a lot of people see this contribution in Iraq and also in Afghanistan as just something that we want to show to the allies that we are able to participate in partnership. But the main element that we get in reforms of our armed forces are the lesson learned. So I can tell you, the best people we have in the armed forces are the people that are in these missions. And when they come back they

are really a great resource for our forces and the lesson learned is something that really, you know, helps the reforms in our air forces.

But Afghanistan, we have troops there. We do have, you know, this medical team, which is an example of, you know, A3 cooperation, which is a kind of niche but is working pretty well because the needs on this direction are very – I think very helpful for the troops and also for the civil population on the area.

And on the other hand, we are along with the Turkish groups in Afghanistan. The problem is that the Turks have their own caveat: they don't fully operate because of their relationship with Afghanistan. So we have a caveat because of this relation, and that's what we have to. So I've been speaking with the minister of Defense of Turkey.

And also we have capabilities that we can offer – more troops on the ground – but we cannot offer more without solving this caveat situation that we already have with Turks. That's what we are trying to work.

What else we need to work? We have a lot, I think. The list that we can put in reforms of the armed forces is a big list, you know. And Albania was starting the changing from the different services to Joint Force Command, but also changing mentality, having a joint mentality now.

Full professional force by 2010, which is a real challenge in an armed force – from conscript to the full professional force. Also modernizing the armed forces. We spoke about budget, but one of the main questions is not just getting the money but why you are spending the money. Are you spending this in the right direction or not? And let's say not (locking up ?), we are just in beginning waiting to have gifts from all the countries which were given out of support, and we are having, let's say, 85 different vehicles for the transportation and things like that, that we cannot maintain. So the question is to have a smart idea. The gifts cost more than buying the new things. So that's the biggest situation we are having right now.

So we are trying to focus that everything we have is self-sustained, is strong, can guarantee the serenity of the country and also can contribute to the peacekeeping operation. That's my point. And you are right, you know; I am not just losing the elections; I'm losing the plane tonight as well. (Laughter.)

MR. ELENOVSKI: Okay, Fatmir, I'll make my words short.

We are learning very, very much. This is the most valuable part of our army, because those young guys, young officers, they know excellent English. They are on the ground and they are seeing what is today's military – modern military. They know today much more than their older colleagues and officers from this side.

So this is very, very important how we will continue with the military reforms because something that we saw in those years is telling us that also with the force

structure, with the specific defense review, we should have some review because when you see the things really how they are on the ground, you are trying to find the better way and more effective way how can you do your, for example, logistic reform, or how you can do your training and education also reform, how your personnel management system should better work, what are the other systems inside about the promotion, about many, many other things in the military?

So it's the most visible part. I'm always saying they are our modern heroes, and really, Macedonia should be gladdened to have them because this is our biggest international contribution for the whole democratic family.

MR. HAMRE: Ladies and gentlemen, I think it's commonly said, you know, that we're all victims of globalization, these big forces moving us around, but I think we've heard this afternoon the difference that leadership makes. Leadership really can shape our future. I think we've seen leaders today in action.

Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you – all three of you.

(Applause.)

(END)