

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN SERBIA



APRIL 3, 2008

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Washington: 2012

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 56 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 2:03 p.m. in room 2220, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Commissioners present: Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. G.K. Butterfield, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. Robert B. Aderholt, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; and David J. Kramer, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Helsinki Commissioner.

Panalists present: Ivana Howard, Program Officer, Central and Eastern Europe, National Endowment for Democracy; Robert Benjamin, Regional Director, Central and Eastern Europe Programs, National Democratic Institute; and Lindsay Lloyd, Regional Program Director for Europe, International Republican Institute.

Mr. HASTINGS. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you all for being here. I'd like to bring our hearing and briefing to order.

And I'll begin. I expect several of my colleagues may be coming along. But as you all know, when Congress is concluded in its weekly session, members head to the airport. [Laughter.]

That seems to be a frequent occurrence.

In the 8 years since Slobodan Milosevic was ousted, Serbia has made considerable progress in its democratic development. And much of the credit for that goes to the high degree of civic activism in Serbia.

The courage of numerous non-governmental organizations, the independence of many media outlets and the democratic platforms of some political parties have shown that Serbia has enormous potential.

Unfortunately, the legacy of extreme nationalism, fomented during the Milosevic years, has not been so easy to break.

While the damage the criminal, corrupt Milosevic regime did to Serbia is readily acknowledged—and footnote right there, I had the good fortune to travel to Serbia when Milosevic was in power. And just as a note of reference, there were 22 Members of Con-

gress. The delegation itself was led by former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert. And Speaker Hastert was not the Speaker at the time.

And I only cite this because, of all of the people that I personally have met around the world, I have never met with a person like Milosevic who, with 22 Congresspersons in the room, did not have a single aide or secretary or anybody like the fine young staffers that work with me. He had no one in the room with him. And I found that absolutely amazing that he had that much control of himself and his environment.

Additionally, that was the day that two French pilots had been captured and held by him. And a former Vietnam prisoner of war, Pete Peterson, who was in the U.S. Congress at that time—he was from Florida. And Pete was a Vietnam prisoner for either 5 or 6 years. And he went after Milosevic like I have never seen a person do.

And when we got to the airport for our plane, the French plane was there to pick up the two pilots.

At that time, I had such great hope that this person would be listening to people. But he listened that day and that was all apparently.

The regime committed many atrocities against Serbia's neighbors. And a lot of that is not truly understood and oftentimes is denied.

The hesitancy to admit a tremendous wrong is certainly not a character unique to Serbia. But it is a character of Serbian politics that, today, is particularly profound and limits the ability of the country and the region to achieve more rapid progress.

There is concern that Kosovo's declaration of independence in mid February and the subsequent recognition of that independence by the United States, much of Europe and other countries may have upset an already unsteady balance in Serbia between democratic progress and nationalist politics.

In addition to the group of demonstrators who attacked the U.S. and other Embassies in Belgrade on February 21, there have been numerous reports of intimidation and threats against independent voices in Serbia, as well against some citizens who belong to minority populations.

Meanwhile, new parliamentary elections have been called for May 11 in which the voters of Serbia may face a sharper choice of never before between democracy and European integration on the one hand and nationalism and isolation on the other.

How concerned should we be about these developments? How hopeful should we be about Serbia's democratic prospects?

Our briefing today intends to give us a better perspective of how the contradictory forces in Serbia's democratic development may play themselves out in the short terms and the long term.

Our panel of experts consists of three people representing organizations that have a strong track record of promoting democratic change in Serbia and many other countries in Europe and around the world.

First, we have Ivana Howard from the National Endowment for Democracy, following by Robert Benjamin from the National Democratic Institute, and Lindsay Lloyd from the International Republican Institute.

They're going to report on recent visits to Serbia, as well as recent polling of public opinion in Serbia.

And just as yet another frame of reference, I visited Kosovo in July in the previous year. I was in the former Yugoslavia as well and Montenegro, to add yet another factor.

But if we could begin now and hear from Ms. Howard?

The biographies and curriculum vitae of our briefers are on the table outside.

Since I've taken up so much time, I won't take all the time to tell you how great they are.

Ivana?

Ms. HOWARD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I really welcome the opportunity to be here today and brief you on my recent visit to Serbia and also offer some comments on the recent developments ahead of the Parliamentary and local elections scheduled for May 11.

I would also like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and other members of the Commission, for your continuing support for the National Endowment for Democracy and its institutes over the years.

National Endowment for Democracy is a non-governmental organization whose primary role is to offer support to other NGOs to promote freedom around the world.

So today, I will speak about the recent developments in Serbia primarily from the aspect of civil society, especially NED grantees.

Let me begin by recalling an event that happened about a year ago in Belgrade in March 2007. It was organized by the International Republican Institute and it focused on backlash against democracy. It gathered policymakers and civic activist from around the world to talk about backlash against civil society, and it featured Carl Gershman, our president, as the keynote speaker.

Although Serbia was facing deep political crisis at the time, with its pro-democratic parties unable to form the government 2 months after the parliamentary elections, it was difficult to fit Serbia into this discussion of backlash.

However, some incidents that soon followed showed that the threat might not be so remote.

Already on the occasion of my next visit to the country in October 2007, I was aware of how the situation has changed dramatically. In fact, only a few weeks after my and Mr. Gershman's visit to Belgrade in March 2007, Dejan Anastasijevic, a prominent journalist with the independent weekly Vreme was the target of a bomb attack following his criticism of the sentences handed down to the members of the Scorpions Unit for the atrocities committed in Bosnia.

Soon thereafter, the prominent journalist, Dinko Gruhonjic, who is the Novi Sad correspondent of the Beta News Agency and the president of the Independent Journalists Association of Vojvodina, both of which are NED grantees, received death threats on the neo-Nazi website StormFront for exposing a neo-Nazi organization from Novi Sad for the incidents that they caused.

I arrived in Serbia in October just in time to attend an anti-fascist rally, supporting ethnic and religious tolerance, and organized as a counter-demonstration to an attempt by the very group that threatened Dinko Gruhonjic to publicly commemorate the birthday of Heinrich Himmler.

The neo-Nazi rally was previously authorized by the Novi Sad city government, but subsequently banned following the public outcry. Nevertheless, the group clashed with the

counter-demonstrators, the anti-fascists, leaving several of them hurt, including Pavel Domonji, Director of the Novi Sad branch of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.

By the end of my visit, it was obvious that the atmosphere in Serbia has changed dramatically.

It was also at this time that I first started hearing about black lists, containing names of unsuitable Serbs, traitors, possible future targets, especially in the aftermath of then expected Kosovo's declaration of independence.

Not surprisingly, names mentioned were usually those of NED grantees—Natasa Kandic of the Humanitarian Law Centre, Sonja Biserko of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Andrej Nosov of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, and others, and journalists, including the two I previously mentioned.

Although such rumors were very hard to substantiate, we did not take these threats lightly and had alerted the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Serbia, enlisting their support in raising awareness in Serbia and beyond about the dangers possibly facing our grantees in the months to come.

By the end of the year, even the most casual survey of the daily press indicated something that one activist called a low-intensity war waged against those who speak differently and, above all, the activists of civil society.

Journalists, civic activists, and writers started publicly speaking about the existence of these lists, lists of those who, and I quote here, “are deemed inappropriate, unwanted and ready for execution.” Serbia was, in the words of a prominent writer “facing the return of populism,” that Mr. Chairman spoke of earlier, “and attempts to prosecute those who speak differently.”

It was becoming increasingly obvious that a number of our grantees, but also other civil society actors who were critical of the government and had contrary opinions of popular views on Kosovo, The Hague Tribunal cooperation and the war crimes in the 1990s were treated as “state enemies.” They not only became frequent subjects of harassment, threats and libel suits, as pointed out in the latest State Department report on human rights practices in Serbia, which was just released, but were openly demonized by the media and some even personally attacked.

As we expected, this pressure peaked in the period immediately following the Kosovo declaration of independence when, for example, Natasa Kandic, of the Humanitarian Law Center, was openly attacked and threatened in leading media outlets, most of which were political tabloids.

Some even cited high party officials, such as the Vice President of the Democratic Party of Serbia, calling Natasa Kandic a traitor thereby encouraging attacks of others on her.

I will only remind the audience that Natasa Kandic is a recipient of NED's Democracy Award in 2000 and was also listed on the “Time” magazine's European edition list of heroes.

More sophisticated pressure on civic activists was applied in prominent dailies, such as Politika, which is partially owned by the Serbian government, which criticized activists, such as Andrej Nosov and Sonja Biserko for their views on Kosovo independence, which differed from government's views of course.

On February 21st, the day that most of us here remember by the riots that happened in Belgrade, the day that U.S. Embassy was breeched into and set on fire, most of our grantees were away from their homes, fearing for their lives and their safety, and some even left the country.

And if we were to judge by the media coverage that immediately followed the riots, in the words of analyst Dusan Bogdanovic, it is to be expected that the offensive against the “state enemies” will become one of the key elements of the public discourse in the next few months.

It’s come as no surprise then that this intensified hostility against critical NGOs, human rights activists, journalists, and even political parties is equated by that experienced by dissidents under the Milosevic regime. Some even say that it’s worse.

I will not attempt to compare the two and assess which one is worse. But I will note a few differences which, in some ways, make the current situation more dangerous.

First, the attacks and threats of which I speak now occur under what the Western world considers to be a democratic government in Serbia, not an authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic.

While such treatment by the government of critics was to be expected under the Milosevic regime, it is neither understandable nor acceptable in a country that’s governed by pro-democratic parties.

And just as the members of the Helsinki Commission have pointed out in their recent release urging the Serbian President to protect the Belgrade independent broadcaster B92, stating that no matter the editorial views of B92, Serbian authorities have an obligation to ensure protection of all journalists, so does the state have a duty to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the obligation to protect the rights of civil society.

As pointed out in a recent publication *Defending Civil Society* by the World Movement for Democracy, such duty derives from a number of international charters and declarations, most of which Serbia is a signatory to.

But judging by these intensified media attacks, the government in Serbia has failed to offer this protection to civil society.

It is for this reason that NED and the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights along with Impunity Watch issued a joint statement on February 20, petitioning the government of Serbia, and more specifically President Tadic, Prime Minister Kostunica and the Speaker of the Parliament Dulic to act to protect human rights defenders and journalists who have come under threat, especially in the period following Kosovo’s independence.

This statement was soon followed by almost identical requests by organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and International Bar Association, among others.

Unfortunately, to date, there has been no response or reaction by the government to this appeal.

The second dangerous phenomenon that I would like to point out, which even in the time of Milosevic was not tolerated and was certainly more controlled, if it existed, was the existence and proliferation of extreme right wing groups in Serbia.

The atmosphere has been created in Serbia in which extreme nationalism has become widely acceptable.

And, Mr. Chairman, you touched on this briefly in your introduction.

Even statements equating the E.U. with the Third Reich have become acceptable in Serbia.

I'm not going to elaborate more on the extreme right wing groups. In the Q&A session, if you're interested to hear more—but I will just say that some of these groups are not only allowed to attack civil society groups in Serbia, but some even boast they've been supported by the government bodies of Serbia, such as the Ministry of Faith, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija.

So we now ask what will happen after May 11. I'm not going to talk about what happens on May 11. I think my colleagues from NDI and IRI are more qualified to speak on that. But in terms of what can civil society in Serbia expect, maybe I can briefly develop three scenarios.

If the radicals win, if they stay true to their rhetoric, I can only say that the hard times of Serbian NGOs are about to get much harder. I really don't know what else I can say on that. I think it's just going to be a period in which we are going to have to be very open to supporting our friends in Serbia and possibly even host some of them outside of Serbia.

If the government remains the same as before these elections, I'm not expecting much of a change to happen. And I will elaborate a little bit on what we could do in that scenario.

It goes together with this third scenario in which, if we see in Serbia a democratic government formed, one that is truly committed to democratic values and Serbia's future in the E.U., there is a true opportunity to rectify the situation.

In either of these last two cases of having a democratic government, the new government should be encouraged to take responsibility to defend its human rights advocates, journalists and other critical voices and not allow the atmosphere of prosecution to continue.

One of the first tasks of such a government should be to fight against extreme nationalism as an acceptable option that it has become in the society. And we should do everything from our side to encourage this.

And this leads me to just a couple of more recommendations that I would like to offer at this time.

First, civil society in Serbia should be seen as an essential partner in the process of bringing about the democratic changes in Serbia.

It should be actively included in the policy dialogue between Brussels and Belgrade, and Belgrade and Washington.

Allowing the government bodies to monopolize this dialogue, as it has been up to this date, with the international community not only sidelines the civic sector and diminishes its importance in the public view, but it also allows for manipulation of information related to such dialogue.

I therefore encourage you to maintain active dialogue with the civic sector in Serbia either directly or through organizations that support it, such as NED and others and include it, as much as possible, in discussions related to various aspects of Serbia's future.

I would also like to ask you for your support in encouraging our partners in Central Europe to reengage with the Balkans as they used to be initially after the democratic changes in 2000 and before.

New E.U. member states are increasingly moving and turning toward their colleagues in Eurasia, but they still have much to offer to the Balkan countries.

Within their new neighborhood policies, they should make Serbia a priority.

And along Serbia, I would like to point out here two more countries whose stability really depends on stability in Serbia, and those are Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In general, more regional initiatives should be launched. And we can talk in the Q&A session on more specifics. Or I would especially like to have you talk about these issues with our grantees.

And finally, and most importantly possibly, make the democratization efforts in Serbia a long-term commitment. It's very important to understand that this is a long-term process.

I know it's difficult to look beyond elections, especially when it seems that elections occur in Serbia every few months. [Laughter.]

But the international community has to not only recognize that Serbia has a crucial role to play in assuring the stability in the region, but also commit resources, tangible resources to encourage and facilitate these democratic changes that come from within.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, I would like to just point out that the job, democratization of Serbia, is far from being done. And despite the threats facing them, our friends in Serbia continue to fight to take Serbia on the path to Europe, to finish the job started in October 2000, and to realize the vision of the late Prime Minister Djindjic 5 years after his assassination.

As in 2000, they continue to fight bravely and they will need every help they can get.

And with this, I will conclude and be open for any questions.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you. Thank you very much, Ms. Howard.

Mr. Benjamin, before I turn to you, I'd like to offer my colleagues who have joined us an opportunity to make any remarks that they might, if you don't mind.

And I'd also like to take a special point of privilege in welcoming our newest Commissioner, David Kramer, to today's briefing. He's not only the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy for Human Rights and Labor, he's also a Helsinki Commissioner.

And just a bit about the Helsinki Commission very briefly, in addition to Congresspersons and Senators, the State Department, the Commerce Department, and the Defense Department are, at the instance and appointment of the President, are also a part of the Helsinki Commission.

And very recently President Bush nominated and he was confirmed to be with us.

As an independent agency, the Commission has these three executive branch Commissioners. And I believe it's important that we can cooperate across the branches of government in this way. And the reason I take personal pride in it is because I spoke frequently with Secretary Rice about this appointment, not Mr. Kramer. I didn't know who it would be, but I knew we needed someone.

And I'd like to express my appreciation to her and the State Department bureau, that you now head, Mr. Kramer, which has worked closely with the commission over the years on human rights issues of concern.

This is the Assistance Secretary's first time after today as a Helsinki Commissioner, but he is no stranger to our work. He previously testified before the Commission on developments in Belarus and last November on OSCE security issues.

As a Commissioner or an administration witness, we value the academic background and professional experience you bring to our proceedings. And I hope you find your participation at the Helsinki Commission events to be useful to your work.

Senator Cardin sends his best to you as well.

If you don't mind, I will come to you, Senator Kramer, but I would like to offer my colleague, G.K. Butterfield, from North Carolina, an opportunity to say anything he may wish. He has to leave at about 5 minutes of three and so I wanted to give him an opportunity.

He's used to leaving me. He left me in Germany after I flew to Germany and wasn't a part of a meeting. [Laughter.]

I go to the meeting and then he had to leave and I didn't see him anymore. So I had the whole day by myself. [Laughter.]

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. We love you, Mr. Chairman. [Laughter.]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't have any formal remarks to make today. I came today to listen because I know Serbia is so important not only to this country, but to the world.

And the events that are taking place on the ground there in Serbia, we must devote sufficient attention to the detail.

And so thank you very much, witnesses, for coming forward today.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for leading this Commission. You are very passionate at what you do.

And the fact that we have Mr. Kramer here today representing the administration is a testament to your leadership and your willingness to reach out to the executive branch of government to include all of the stakeholders in this process. So thank you for your leadership.

And I look forward to the rest of the testimony.

Thank you. I yield.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much.

We've also been joined by my colleague and traveling buddy, who helped me get elected as President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Congressman Robert Aderholt, from Alabama.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me just say it's good to be here. And I thank the panel for being here.

I have had a chance to visit Serbia and Belgrade a couple of times over the last couple of years. And it is a fascinating place and it's something I—as Congressman Butterfield say, you sort of come in to listen and find out what I can learn more about the region because it is such an important and strategic region and country in the world.

And I, too, have to leave. I am actually between hearings. I have a hearing on the third floor that I'm sort of going back and forth between. So if I get up and leave, it's not because of anybody's testimony. [Laughter.]

It's simply because of my schedule with the other committee that I'm on.

So thank you.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you.

Secretary Kramer?

Sec. KRAMER. Well, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you very much for that warm welcome. It is extremely good to be here. I welcome the opportunity to be an active participant on the Commission.

I must say it's nice to be on this side of the desk as opposed as the others, though I've appreciated your hospitality and professionalism when I have been on that side of the microphone, so many thanks.

And I think in the interest for everyone here, I will just stop there and say I appreciate hearing from the witnesses and look forward to hearing what they have to say.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much.

OK, Mr. Benjamin?

Mr. BENJAMIN. All right, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Representatives and members of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to speak with you today about Serbia's political environment and about its democratic future.

The National Democratic Institute has worked in Serbia since 1997 with political parties and civil societies and parliament to support its democratic transition. NDI is also supporting similar efforts throughout the Balkans with nine offices in seven countries.

The countries of the western Balkans, as it's been said, are at a crossroads. One path goes forward toward democracy, economic reform, European integration. The other path loops backward toward nationalism and ethnic conflict.

Each country in the region has dedicated itself toward moving toward the first path and many have started. But each is also struggling with the legacy of the ethnic and sectarian wars of the 1990s and related problems in their democratic development.

A dozen years after the war in Bosnia and 9 years after the Kosovo conflict, one might be forgiven for thinking that the struggle to build multi-ethnic democracies would be overcome by now. But these struggles are politically very alive.

The lure of Europe remains the most compelling engine in the region. But at times, that engine sputters.

And while democratic foundations have been laid, countries in the region are struggling to make democracy work, to deliver on jobs and health care and education and, at a fundamental level, to give people, regardless of ethnicity or religious confession or gender, a sense of security and dignity and the prospect of a better life.

Democracy's particular task in the Balkans to construct political systems that enfranchise different ethnic groups is not yet complete.

I begin my remarks with a few words about the region because despite the wars, Serbia and its neighbors are inextricably tied politically, economically, culturally, ethnically and pragmatically in the shared mission of joining Europe.

And for its size and location and for its historical role, Serbia is the region center of political gravity. The path chosen by Serbia, forwards and backward, has a direct and significant impact on its neighbors.

So which path will Serbia choose?

It's somewhat vexing in 2008 to be asking this question. Most people in Serbia thought it had been answered in 2000 when they removed Slobodan Milosevic from power. And, in an important sense, it was. The people of Serbia said yes to Europe. They said yes to democracy. But 7 years on, the public's frustrated over lack of progress in the E.U. integration, the slow pace of socio-economic reform and the development of democratic political institutions.

And we're seeing this in the elections that follow the collapse of the governing coalition between the Democratic Party, led by President Boris Tadic and the Democratic Party of Serbia, led by Vojislav Kostunica.

The Democratic Party, Mr. President Tadic's party, and its allies have coalesced around Europe. They assert that Serbia's aspirations for economic prosperity and political prosperity and, on the issue of Kosovo, are better achieved inside rather than outside the union.

This message worked just 2 months ago when Mr. Tadic won reelection as President, beating his challenger, Tomislav Nikolic, leader of the Serbian Radical Party, in a close but convincing win.

And fresh off that victory and with considerable international support and pragmatically oriented toward the future, President Tadic and his allies should have considerable momentum to prevail in today's elections.

But there are political currents that speak to the fortunes of Mr. Tadic's opponents, Mr. Nikolic, and now Mr. Kostunica. They espouse an agenda placing Kosovo's return to Serbia before all else, even if that means forfeiting European integration for a time anyway, as they would have it, and so doing their tapping into high levels of public frustration of, as I mentioned, Kosovo, the pace of European integration and socio-economic reforms. And this frustration is shaping the May elections.

Kosovo: Serbian sentiment over Kosovo's independence is negative and, for the moment anyway, raw. We saw this last month in the violent riots that included the attack on the U.S. Embassy. These riots just made many outside, and importantly, inside Serbia, and for good cause. There's no excuse for the violence that was perpetrated, not for the rhetoric that fueled it.

That is not to say however that there isn't genuine public anguish over Kosovo and underlying anti-Western sentiment in the face of pragmatic, sometimes impatient, fueled by Washington and Brussels, to in effect get over it and move on.

Many people in Serbia will move on, but not necessarily right now and not necessarily in time for these elections.

So these elections inescapably are about Kosovo. They will focus on Kosovo.

The U.S.-E.U. underwriting of Kosovo independence, Washington's announcement of direct military assistance to Kosovo, today's acquittal of Ramush Haradinaj by the Hague Tribunal will put a political dent in Mr. Tadic's pro-Europe, pro-integration message.

Belgrade's intention, seeming intention, to hold elections on Kosovo's territory in the North and in Serb enclaves will also raise political temperatures and security concerns

in Prestina, and keep Kosovo very much on the front pages. And all of this is seen to benefit Mr. Nikolic and the radicals in particular.

We'll turn to Europe.

Voters have heard the government talk a lot about joining Europe. As we know here, politicians have to walk the talk and Belgrade's had a hard time with that lately.

Through [inaudible] in Serbia, we've signed a stabilization and an association agreement, a major advancement toward E.U. membership. The membership has not been signed, denying pro-Europe forces in Serbia of a major political asset.

Some Europeans, notably the Dutch, are resisting signing the agreement because a key condition, the apprehension and extradition of Mr. Rocom Lovic (ph) has not been met. And now Kosovo's coming into it as well.

The Europeans are appearing to Belgrade to work with them on Kosovo by engaging, or at least not hindering, the new E.U. mission there.

It is not clear that Mr. Kostunica or Mr. Nikolic, for their part, will hear those appeals. For them, Serbia will not sign any agreement until the E.U. has reversed itself on Kosovo's independence. And this is squeezing out political space for President Tadic and the Democratic Party to campaign on joining Europe and defending Kosovo at the same time.

Coming so closely after Kosovo's independence, this campaign may see Europe trumped by Kosovo. And if this is true, it bodes well for the radical camp and for Mr. Kostunica.

There are also some incumbency problems.

Serbia has seen its fair share of political instability since 2000, some four governments in 7 years, which can, in part, be traced to the tragic assassination to Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in March 2003. The problem's been mainly political.

Tadic and Kostunica have formed repeated governments with lots of encouragement from Americans and Europeans only to preside over dysfunctional coalitions unable to agree on Europe, ICTY, NATO membership, all of which, of course, speak to Serbia's geopolitical orientation, vis-a-vis, the West.

For their part, voters have wearied of voting in problematic governments that bicker instead of deliver. And this, too, gives an opening to the radicals who are attacking in a populous direction and campaigning effectively on bread and butter issues.

Then you have to look at the political map.

Mr. Tadic and Mr. Kostunica have parted political company. And a return to their cohabitation is virtually unthinkable.

The Europe-Kosovo debate has put Mr. Kostunica in the company of the radicals politically, if not formally.

Serbia's election fault line, which before ran to Kostunica's right, now runs to his left, separating him and the radicals from Tadic and his allies. This, too, favors the radicals who typically receive the most votes of any party, but have not yet found a partner with which to build a governing coalition. They may not have that partner in Mr. Kostunica. But there are several ifs concerning a possible radical Kostunica government.

How strong will Mr. Kostunica's showing be on election day? Are his followers as gung ho about governing with radicals as he might be? What will his reward be if the radicals stake the claim to the Prime Minister's office?

But without Kostunica's, the mathematical burden in terms of having parliamentary seats to form a government, that burden is on the Democratic Party.

One final election point, May 12 may be just as important as May 11.

If the election outcome is close, we could see very messy and protracted coalition tosses. Much has happened in last year's—rather, following last year's parliamentary elections. And roughly 4 months were needed to piece together a government.

A close outcome, if it happens, does make Kostunica's presumed spoiler role very important.

We also need to remember local elections are occurring and negotiations around local election collations may have some bearing as to how things go at the national level, particularly over the city of Belgrade.

It's a bit of a stretch to say, but the outcome of the elections may turn less on the actual results than on the negotiations after the elections are concluding in how a government is formed.

I want to turn now just to a few points round Serbia's democracy agenda. I want to highlight a few “democracy issues,” quote, unquote, about these elections that I think speak to the need of all of Serbia's politicians to connect to voters, most of whom want to talk about how Serbia can function better in terms of economic growth, in social cohesion and government reform.

Let's start with the election system.

For parliamentary elections, Serbia is, as a whole, one election district. That means that voters receive one party of coalition ballot listing 250 candidates, the total number of parliamentary seats. There is little, if any connection, between voters and individual candidates as a result.

Campaign strategy and media coverage funnel to the top and center on one or two issues, such as Kosovo, without sufficient debate, beneath on such other critical issues as job creation and public health and employment discrimination.

The recent decision to stop the direct election of mayors and return to their indirect election by municipal assemblies also stymies an important political dynamic at the local level can favor greater public participation in the political process.

These election issues feed post-election governance problems.

There is a near-complete absence of links between members of parliament and the public through a continuant offices, policy dialogue with civil society and legislative public hearings and the like that can be used to take Europe, as such, off the shelf and bind it in concrete ways to the reforms that people want.

Political parties need to do a better job of developing these linkages and then using them to communicate their political vision, their principles along with concrete policy agendas.

And NGOs, for their part, need to become legislatively literate, help aggregate the public interest on many issues and engage politicians constructively.

These links are critical for both Serbia's European prospects and its democratic health.

I will close by saying that Serbia's definitely contending with the legacy of the Milosevic area. I do think that people, for the most part, want to move on. But I also think that predominance of, quote, unquote, “nationalist issues,” the predominance in Kosovo,

that we seem to see taking place in this election campaign means that Serbia will had a very tough time, indeed, in moving on.

Thank you.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much, Mr. Benjamin.

Mr. Lloyd?

Mr. LLOYD. Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here this afternoon.

My name is Lindsay Lloyd. I am the Europe Director at IRI. And like our friends at NDI, we've been working in Serbia for more than a decade to try and consolidate democracy in Serbia.

Our programs there are funded by USAID. As with our colleagues, we are working to strengthen political parties in the civil society, working for better and more accountable governance, encouraging the participation of women, youth and ethnic minority and similar goals.

As my colleagues have said, Serbia's path toward democracy since the downfall of Milosevic in 2000 has been a difficult one, perhaps the most difficult transition of any of the post-Communist countries in Europe.

The collapse of the former Yugoslavia has been keenly felt by the Serbs. Economic progress has been slow, hindered by deep political divisions and the lack of a unified commitment toward European integration.

Since 2000, Serbia has been governed by a series of unwieldy coalitions that bridge the left and the right. And these coalitions have always excluded the Serbian Radical Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia, two parties which have been branded as anti-reform and undemocratic.

I believe the coming elections on May 11 have the potential to dramatically alter the Serbian political landscape, although it's much too earlier to say with any confidence what the outcome will be.

We see trends already in the electorate that point to the possibility that the next Serbian Government may include participation by the Radicals or the Socialists.

As part of our program to strengthen Serbian political institutions, IRI conducts frequent public opinion polls in Serbia. These polls are fielded by a reputable private, independent firm there and then overseen by an American pollster who has extensive experience in the region. And our polls have proven over the years to be quite accurate. By way of example, for the Presidential elections in February, we had the outcome forecast within a margin of less than 1 percent. So we're quite confident as to what the day will show.

Our polls are done however to forecast elections. Rather they're a critical tool that we use to help political parties and political leaders better understand what's on the mind of the electorate and helpfully respond to it.

With that brief introduction, I'm going to present to you some of the findings from our first pre-election poll. This is one of 13 polls that we'll do between now and the parliamentary elections on May 11. And we will find the findings with our political party and civil society partners out in Serbia.

This poll's quite fresh. It was conducted just last week. We collected the data between March 22 and 26. The sample's quite large for Serbia, over 2,500 respondents, which gives us a margin of error plus or minus 1.25 percent for the entire population.

And one more. Throughout the poll, we see indications of real discontent among the Serbian electorate. In this first slide, we asked respondents whether they think Serbia is generally going in the right or wrong direction. The red line represents the wrong direction, the blue line, the right direction, and the green bars at the bottom represent the difference between them.

I'll direct you toward the far right on the chart. In the next to the last data point, you see a number that was taken at the time of the Presidential elections. You had a narrow majority, 45 percent saying Serbia was heading in the right direction, and closely behind that, 42 percent saying the country is going in the wrong direction. That's just about, by the way, the margin of difference between the two candidates in the Presidential election, about three points.

In the far right, you see then numbers from our most recent poll, the March poll. And you see there's been a dramatic uptick in the wrong direction, which is now up to 51 percent versus just 34 percent of Serbs who say the country is headed in the right direction.

This country typically is a very good predictor of the outcome of the election, unless it's potentially bad news for incumbents.

When we talked to Serbs about what's the most important issue facing the country, you can see that Kosovo is, indeed, the leading answer with 31 percent. This is unusual. Kosovo is typically always in the mix of issues, but it only surges to the top when Kosovo has been in the news, as it has, of course, been recently.

Better news though perhaps is the economic issues.

The top bar is unemployment with 20 percent, the standard of living 15 percent and the economy in general, with 5 percent, are all near the top of citizens' lists of concerns. When you take those together, they total 40 percent. And that may, indeed, be an important factor in this election.

Serbs are generally gloomy about the economic situation overall. And we asked them to compare their situation today with their economic situation 8 years ago, in 2000. We see that most responses feel there's been very little progress. Thirty-eight percent—that's the red line—say that their situation is worse than it was 8 years ago. Thirty-five percent, the black line, says the same, while just 26 percent say they're better off than they were 8 years ago.

This question is also typically a very good indicator of how an election might go and, thus, potentially another bad piece of news for incumbents.

Looking at the elections themselves we see indications of high turnout. At this point in the campaign, we have basically 90 percent of the electorate saying that they intend to vote versus just 10 percent who say they don't.

While it's unlikely we'll get quite that high, we find that respondents often lie when they're asked this question, we do expect robust turnout. We had 67 percent in the Presidential elections. And I would estimate that we're probably going to be in that range of about 70 percent turnout for the parliamentary elections.

Now what matters, of course, is which demographic groups decide to turn out for the elections.

In the Presidential elections, we saw that Mr. Nikolic and the Radical Party had a great deal of enthusiasm behind them; somewhat less so on the side of Mr. Tadic and his

Democratic Party. So which voters actually end up going to the polls is going to be crucial in deciding how this election turns out.

For the Prime Minister, his numbers are not particularly encouraging.

In this slide we see that over half the electorate, 55 percent, feel he does not deserve another term in office versus just 32 percent, the blue line, that say he does.

Now bear in mind, of course, that in a parliamentary system, like Serbia's, the mere popularity of the candidate does not necessarily determine who's going to be prime minister.

We also asked respondents for their opinions on a series of political figures.

In this chart, which is difficult to read, the blue bars represent the positive opinions. The yellow bars represent the negative. And the green line is the ratio of positive to negative.

Now there are only two politicians in the country right now, President Boris Tadic, who you see in the first column, and Radical Party leader, Tomislav Nikolic, who you see in the third column, have positive ratings.

For Tadic, he has a net rating of plus six, for Mr. Nikolic, a net rating of plus six.

Political parties in Serbia are deeply unpopular. And there's no party that has an overall positive impression among the electorate.

This slide, again, is a ratio, positive to negative numbers, with the most recent numbers being on the right for each of the parties.

The Democratic Party, that's President Tadic's party, is in the far left column. It just barely misses a neutral score with a minus 1.14 ratio. What that means is that for every voter who has a positive opinion of the Democratic Party, there's 1.14 that has a negative opinion.

The only other party to fair this well is the Serbian Radical Party in the fifth column which, again, just barely misses a neutral rating.

This slide, by the way, is very typical for any post-Communist country where one of the legacies of Communist Party rule is to make all political parties unpopular.

And it's nearly impossible that any party will get a majority vote, 50 percent of the vote in the elections. So a coalition government is almost certain.

We asked respondents to give us their preferred outcome among several potential collations. And the preferred outcome is the one you see on the bottom, which is a coalition of Prime Minister Kostunica's DSS, together with a smaller party, New Serbia.

The Serbian Radical Party and the Socialist Party in Serbia—that option was the most popular choice, among 30 percent. Twenty-six percent say they didn't have an opinion or they didn't know, while the coalition centered around President Tadic's party garnered 23 percent support.

The next two questions are ones that we use extensively with on our work with political parties. And they give a lot of insight into what's going on.

The first, this is an open question. We ask, what do politicians spend too much time talking about? Well, Kosovo is far and away the leading answer, with 35 percent. Well behind our topic, such as the E.U., arguments among politicians and so on.

In the next slide, the flip side of it, what do they spend too little time talking about? The standard of living, people's problems, unemployment, the economy and so on.

These two slides together I think give a—next one, please—give a clear focus here in terms of which issue is most important in guiding how voters are going to choose. Jobs in the economy is the overwhelming reply, with 47 percent, nearly half of the respondents. Kosovo is a distant second, followed by E.U. integration.

This shows that parties are going to need to focus on those pocket-book economic issues.

This next one should be of some concern to the Democratic Party and to President Tadic. We asked voters, regardless of who you support, which party do you think can do the best job of handling certain issues. And the winning party is highlighted in red.

You can see that the Serbian Radical Party is the most trusted to handle the economic, unemployment, the standard of living and Kosovo. The Democratic Party of President Tadic does lead on the question of European integration.

When we start looking at international issues, we see that Serbs remain sharply divided on a number of critical questions. Many of these answers seem to contradict each other and reflect the variety of opinion in the country.

When we asked about Serbia's cooperation with The Hague War Crimes Tribunal, we see some weakening of support in recent months. The dotted blue line represents we approve cooperation, it's a necessary evil. And it's the leading answer, with 37 percent. But that's down by nearly 10 points from a year ago.

A statistically identical number of 35 percent say there should be no cooperation whatsoever with The Hague. Just 17 percent, the solid blue line, say there should be unconditional cooperation, including extradition of suspected war criminals.

Recent events, Kosovo in particular, have hardened Serbian attitudes toward the West.

Despite the discord over Kosovo, or perhaps because of it, Serbs do see themselves has having some natural allies in the world. More than half of Serbs say the country does have allies. And the leading answer, as you'll see on the right, is Russia, where you have 52 percent claiming that Russia is Serbia's most natural ally. It's hardly surprising given the recent events over Kosovo independence.

One the flip side of that, over half say that Serbia has natural enemies, a number which has increased sharply over the past year. We see also a sharp uptick in anti-Americanism, where you have over one-third, 35 percent, describing the United States as the natural enemy of Serbia.

Here, too, we can obviously conclude that U.S. support for Kosovo independence has taken its toll.

This slide reflects the fact that Serbs have yet to come to terms with Kosovo's independence.

We asked what the government's response should be now that Kosovo has been recognized by some governments. The red bars on the top of each series represent the most recent data. Half of Serbs say that there should be no acceptance of independence; 12 percent favor accepting it, while 19 percent say that Serbia should declare Kosovo to be an occupied territory.

Note that these numbers have gotten harder over the 2-years.

Again, we see Serbs that have not yet adjusted to the new political realities on the ground in the region.

We asked what outcome Serbs prefer in Kosovo. Nearly one-third, 31 percent, on the far right—that's the red bar—say that they prefer autonomy within Serbia. Equal numbers prefer either partition or integration with Serbia.

There's been some slight movement away from the most extreme positions here since the Presidential elections. But overall, you still have more than 90 percent of Serbs favoring outcomes which are unacceptable to the West.

We talked about partitioning Kosovo with our respondents. You see 42 percent calling it unfair, but the most realistic outcome. Nearly as many oppose partition all together. Only 8 percent support partitioning outright.

There's one consistent and important current in public opinion. Many Serbs are somewhat realistic about the prospects for regaining Kosovo. We asked whether Serbia could ever get Kosovo back. The red bars are negative answers. Fifteen percent said never; 21 percent said probably not, for a total of about 36 percent. Just over one-quarter, 26 percent, said maybe, and the remaining 26 percent said that, yes, that expected it would be possible in some period of time.

On the question of E.U. membership, we see continued strong support, 79 percent for Serbia joining the European Union. Opposition is stable at 16 percent, with little change seen over the last few years.

However, the next chart will show there's something of a disconnect between the desire for E.U. membership and the political reality.

Here, we asked which mattered more, Serbia's membership in the European Union—those are the blue bars—or Kosovo remaining in Serbia. Those are the red bars. And respondents said that keeping Kosovo trumps joining the European Union.

There may be some small comfort here for the reformers, as we see that Kosovo has declined a little bit over the last few months and evens this up slightly.

Finally, we asked our respondents to choose between two competing political messages.

Candidate A, the guy here represented in blue, says that Serbia should use all diplomatic means to restore sovereignty over Kosovo, but to continue with the E.U. integration as quickly as possible.

Now this is essentially the message of President Tadic and it has 45 percent support.

Candidate B, here in red, says Serbia should continue with E.U. integration, but only if the E.U. states that Kosovo is part of Serbia. This is essentially Mr. Nikovic's message and it has 44 percent support.

So you can see that the Serbian election is likely to be a closely fought contest with an unclear outcome at this point.

In repeated elections over the last 8 years, the Serbs have narrowly voted for pro-western parties/

The Presidential election was just a few weeks ago. President Tadic narrowly prevailed over Tomislav Nikolic of the Radical Party.

It's worth noting, I think, that Mr. Nikolic ran an outstanding campaign. Over the course of the weeks of the campaign, he reduced his negatives and increased his positives with the voters.

He found traction with voters, not just on the issue of Kosovo, but also on issues like corruption and economic reform.

In a sense, the May elections are a continuation of that campaign.

Boris Tadic was able to narrowly prevail over Mr. Nikolic in a one-on-one race. However, Serbs are not going to be voting in a one-on-one race. They're going to be looking at parties and coalitions of parties come May.

Given the dynamics in Serbia today, I would expect the radical party to do well in these elections. It's far too early however to forecast an outcome. Voters are not yet fully focused on the campaign. Orthodox Easter is around the corner. And it's far from certain what sort of coalitions may emerge after the voting.

One thing that is clear, however, is that virtually along among the countries of post-Communist Europe, the Serbs have not yet made a decision for Western integration.

Use support is a mile wide, but an inch deep, as support for NATO appears to be abysmally low.

I differ a little bit with my colleague, Rob, I don't think Kosovo is going to be the decisive factor in the May elections. I think it's part of a larger continuity that exists in Serbia, reflecting the divisions and the ambivalence toward the West.

Whatever the outcome on May 11, it seems evident that Serbia's transition requires continuing engagement by the United States and other Western democracies.

At the end of the day, Serbia's direction is a question for the Serbs. We should continue to extend the assistance to them and remind them that the door remains open as long as they choose the conditions.

Thank you.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much, Mr. Lloyd.

And I thank for all of you. You answered really a lot of the questions that I would have told.

I really appreciate the comprehensive and substantive way you put it forward.

After Secretary Kramer and I ask a few questions, ladies and gentlemen, it has been a part of my Co-Chairmanship and Chairing on the House side this time the desire to change the mechanism of the methodology of these hearings and to get more participation.

Many times I have been in hearings and people have been present—hearings and briefings. And I thought to myself, sitting out there is somebody that has a lot more information that we don't hear from.

So when we finish our questioning, if any of you have any questions that you wish to frame, then we will try to respond to them.

I would ask you to step up to our podium and state your name very clearly and any organization that you represent so that the matter may be recorded appropriately.

The way you all have described the situation in Kosovo would suggest to me a deterioration of considerable import.

A lot of the time that I've spent working in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE has been in the election monitoring field. And of course, all of you have your experiences in that regard.

I guess I am interested in you saying what you think about whether or not the election will be free and fair. And if I'm not mistaken, our Presidential election was perceived to be basically within standards. So what do think about May 11th with all of the factious information that you have provided us? And I ask all of you to respond.

Let's start with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. LLOYD. Sure. We have no expectation of any sort of serious electoral irregularities in Serbia. They've been through, it's close to a dozen elections, I think, all told since 2000. There are high levels of participation. The NGO community is active in monitoring them. The OSCE does continue to monitor to a limited extent. But we have no expectation that this is going to be a troubled election in terms of the technicalities of it. We have not observed elections in Serbia in many years.

Mr. BENJAMIN. There's a strong robust civil society presence when it comes to election processes. The Center for Pre-elections and Democracy has a premier election monitoring organization in Serbia. There are other organizations that really cover the process that do not, as Lindsay indicates.

I think that does raise public confidence in the election process as being reflective of the voter's voice.

I think that there are a few areas probably to mention.

One would be media and just making sure the media is not overstepping its bounds in terms of state media in particular in terms of qualitatively or quantitatively showing bias.

And then we have to look at the—in so far as the elections are going to take place in Kosovo territory, which is a very, very politically sensitive topic, but just from a technical perspective, if that occurs, then one has to look at the conduct of that election process I think in particular. And I would also maybe extend that geographically to South Serbia as well.

Mr. HASTINGS. OK.

Ms. Howard?

Ms. HOWARD. I would echo what my colleagues have said and just pick up on what Rob mentioned in terms of media. Basically, it will be very important to make sure that the media on the national level report without bias, which has not always been the case, especially for the media that are largely controlled either by parties or by tycoons.

I just have to point out here that there is a serious problem in Serbia when it comes to ownership of the media. It is very non-transparent. And sometimes it's difficult to judge who stands behind some of the leading media outlets.

But I'm even more concerned with the regional, local media specifically. And the area that Rob mentioned, South Serbia, Preshevo Valley comes to mind as well as Sandzak.

There are a couple of problems there. One is that, contrary to the provisions of the broadcast law that requires that all media be privatized by April 2006, a process that has been delayed for various reasons, the new law on self-government and the new law on capital city actually allow the municipal governments to own local media. And this it's contrary to a number of international laws.

Not only that, but the Article 60 of the Serbian constitution that was passed in October 2006 also allows for anyone to operate and open media outlet. This could be very dangerous because it allows political parties, especially on the local level, to continue to—how would I say—not just finance and therefore influence the media, but also put financial and other pressure on them.

This is especially dangerous in these two vulnerable areas where I said that media are already facing increasing pressure.

In Sandzak, for example, I can tell you that according to the OSCE report of last October, and this continues today, many journalists are forced to either declare loyalty to one particular side in the political rift that's been created in the Sandzak, or otherwise are banned from even reporting on any events. And this is bound to be misused in the pre-election period.

So this is just one concern that I would raise, especially, like I said, on the local level.

Mr. HASTINGS. It occurs to me that the organizations that you work in, all of you, do a lot of democracy building. I'm wondering what, if anything, or what vehicles do countries that have interests—and that ranges from the E.U. and Russia—what kind of organizations or institutions do they support to perpetuate their positions?

Mr. Lloyd?

Mr. LLOYD. Well, starting with Europeans who have frequently partnered with groups like IRI and NDI are the German Stiftungs and the political party foundations, like Conrad Adenauer.

Some of the other Western European democracies, countries like the Netherlands, the U.K. and others, work primarily on a political party, sister party basis, where conservatives are working with conservatives, liberals with liberals, Labour with Labour and so on.

Some of the newer democracies have, in fact, been engaged there. There are a number of NGOs from places like Slovakia that have been working with civil society, trying to develop that.

In Serbia though, as we said before, I think that's come down a little bit as their attention has been turned further east and further afield.

In terms Russia, for example, doing any sort of political training, there's none that I'm aware of.

They clearly have significant and growing interests there, as evidenced by the purchase of the largest oil company and so on. But——

Mr. HASTINGS. But how do they influence the process? For example, there's a distinct possibility, based on your polling and other things that you all have said, that what we call radical and what we perceive as radical groups could very well control the government. And I would think, in many respects, they would be people that Russia would be supporting.

So what do they do? Do they just spend money in or——

Mr. LLOYD. Well, money helps. Yes, sir. [Laughter.]

Mr. Chairman, I think you have to start off with the fact that there's a great historical affinity between Serbia and Russia. There are long-standing historical, cultural ties that are there.

But the fact that Russia has been so vocal in support for Serbia's position on the issue of Kosovo——

Mr. HASTINGS. Kosovo.

Mr. LLOYD [continuing]. And other issues has played a big role. And they are investing large amounts of money into the Serbian economy. There are creating some jobs.

We should not that the deal to privatize the oil company was not signed by the Radical Party. It was Prime Minister Kostunica and President Tadic that went to Moscow.

So Serbians of all stripes, I think, feel some affinity toward Russia and don't necessarily look at it as a negative force in their society.

Mr. HASTINGS. And, Ms. Howard, when the human rights advocates and independent media and Western-oriented political parties are either harassed or attacked, what has been the reaction of the government authorities? What are they doing? Are they more to protect the vulnerable? Or just exactly what is their position?

Ms. HOWARD. No, no. As I mentioned in my statement, this isn't—not been the case. Like I said, the statements—the appeal of NED, the Swedish Helsinki Committee, Impunity Watch and a number of other organizations that addressed the Serbian government went unanswered. There has not been a single reaction by the Serbian government to these attacks in the media and physical attacks. So I would say that unfortunately there has been none——

Mr. HASTINGS. My attempts my humor sometimes fall flat, Mr. Benjamin. [Laughter.]

But I couldn't resist, as I was listening to you describe that the results may not be as important as the negotiations after the election, and I was, you know, thinking about the Democratic primary here at home. [Laughter.]

But it's kind of similar. [Laughter.]

Mr. Kramer, new Commissioner, welcome. And please, sir, any questions that you may have.

Sec. KRAMER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I will stay away from that last point, certainly. [Laughter.]

Sec. KRAMER. If I may be so——

Mr. HASTINGS. We'll see you in November. [Laughter.]

Sec. KRAMER. Yes, sir.

Two questions, if I may, please, to the panelists—whichever ones may want to answer.

Given the concerns we have about the human rights situation in Serbia and growing harassment of civil society, representatives, as each of you have described, what impact has that had on your activities operating on the ground? How is that affecting your ability to operate there?

Ms. HOWARD. Well, maybe I should start.

Just like a mentioned, immediately when we started hearing reports of some of these very dangerous things that could be happening, or threats that our grantees could be facing, we started working very closely with the U.S. embassy in Serbia to raise awareness of the issue.

We have just, in a way—because, you all also know the way NED operates is we are not an implementer and we don't offer technical assistance. But we have increased financial assistance to the activities, which continue without interruption for the most part. There was some interruption in the period immediately following the declaration of Kosovo independence. Some events by the Humanitarian Law Centre were postponed simply because they felt that it was too dangerous.

Some were, in fact—even though not funded by NED, but some were banned by the government itself. For example, March 8th, the International Women's Day was not allowed by the Belgrade city government on the grounds which were really not justifiable.

The organization that wanted to organize the Women in Black then organized a—they called it a Postponed 8th of March the following Saturday and I had an opportunity to attend and support it. And all of our grantees—most of our grantees in Belgrade attended this.

But the other way that—we have spoken to the U.S. Embassy and to some of our other colleagues in Central Europe that in case that our grantees face specific threats that we would offer specific assistance, such as enabling them to leave the country if necessary or offer any kind of financial assistance. So we worked on that, developing somewhat of a contingency plan, I guess, in case something like this happened.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you.

Mr. Benjamin?

Mr. Lloyd?

Mr. BENJAMIN. In the run up to Kosovo's declaration, we definitely took some security precautions, as would be fitting for the situation.

We found that things are, for us and our work, OK. I was just in Belgrade a few weeks ago. I did not sense any discomfort—discomfort, if I can use that word properly—around my being in Belgrade. Our expatriate staff being in and around Serbia, and certainly our national staff.

It may sound a little cavalier, without intending to do so, we had a training session the day after the riots outside of Belgrade with our colleagues from the G-17-Plus Party.

And I mentioned that because I want to underscore a point around this situation. For our partners and political parties, civil society, et cetera, it is very important, I think, for them to stay connected. And it's exactly as it was in 1999 and 2000 because there are a lot of people in Serbia who want to do good things for their country. And that type of connection, that solidarity in these instances is very important.

If I can make just two very brief comments about the European Union and Russia.

The Europeans and the Americans are very united in promoting democracy, democratic values. We have comparative advantage in certain ways. And I think it reinforces one another.

The Europeans' assistance is largely about machinery, in the sense of harmonization of government, of private sector, of all of those things that feeds well into the software systems, if you will, that groups like ours, based in the United States, provide in terms of democratization support.

I think that Russia and Serbia have, as Lindsay said, tremendous cultural affinity and a historical legacy. I also think that the Russians are obviously making a statement in terms of economic investment and, with that, some inroads. But I also think that Serbia is fundamentally a Western-oriented country. And I don't think that if some politicians would like to offer an alternative to Europe in the form of Russian, particularly political speaking, I'm not sure how well that's going to sell as we hopefully move farther away from the Kosovo situation.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you.

Mr. LLOYD. Just briefly, our experience is very similar to that of our colleagues in NDI. I would say that certain parties or perhaps certain leaders are less interested in working with American groups right now. But at the same time as we have these parliamentary elections, we have local elections. And the cooperation continues on a high

level at all these different village, municipal branch levels with an array of parties out there. So the effect, thus far, at least for IRI, has been great.

Sec. KRAMER. Well, thank you for that. And let me just say obviously being in touch with U.S. Embassy is extremely important and we work closely with out embassies. And in certain extreme cases where we have some mechanisms that we can deploy to help out certain situations. So by all means, please do keep us apprised on that.

My second and last question, if I may, Mr. Chairman, is if you were to identify two or three areas, issues that we're not covering now if we were given—if the chairman and his esteemed colleagues give us a little more money that we could devote to Serbia, what areas aren't we covering that we should be? What are we missing right now? What gaps are there?

Mr. LLOYD. Well, I'll start off.

There is an ongoing need. I mean, our colleagues at the NED would gladly take a larger check to assist with projects in Serbia and the Balkans in general where we've seen huge cut backs over the last few years.

Both IRI and NDI have seen programs cut or eliminated in a number of countries where the transition is not yet complete.

But perhaps, more specifically, there is limited but not enough engagement, for example, with the Parliament, where there's a lot more that we could be doing.

A huge area, I think, that could be fruitful is finding ways for Serbs to interact with their neighbors and with other places, like the United States, to bring young Serbs to the United States on Ivy programs and so on, I think would be of tremendous value.

Regional programs where we can sit Serbs down with Croats and Bosnians and so on have consistently been very effective vehicles for both the institutions. So probably nothing all that radical or outside of the box, but just more of the same, you know, to continue to apply resources to the Balkans because we're not done with the transition yet.

Mr. BENJAMIN. I need to, if I can, echo that both in terms of not necessarily adding new things but sustaining the engagement at a level commensurate with the need and basically in terms of commensurate with how we can function at an optimal level. And I think we face challenges in that area. I would hasten to add less so in Serbia from a funding standpoint than in places like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, for example, where I think we're sort of skating at the bottom.

And the commitment of the United States, I think, needs to come forward still. We're running a race here. And we're hopefully entering the bell lap, but we haven't crossed the finish line. Put it that way.

I want to, in terms of programming, put the accent on region level engagement. I did spend time in Serbia, Kosovo, where we have a program, Bosnia and Montenegro. We had a local party seminar, a regional one, in Belgrade. And I was talking to the Serbian there who said to me, "Well, I've been corresponding with the woman sitting down at the end of the table now in Belgrade for 5 years. This is first time I'm meeting her."

I asked another gentleman from Croatia, who's in his 40's, when's the last time you were in Belgrade? 1986 was the answer.

There is definitely a need among people to connect. Because I go back to my original point at the outset. This region will go forward or backward together. They're too closely connected. So that regional impact is a very important connection.

Ms. HOWARD. I would just also echo, in terms of funding. And thank you Lindsay for the plug. The SEED funding, which I'm sure you're familiar with—

Sec. KRAMER. Yes.

Ms. HOWARD. We have been receiving—NED has been receiving SEED funding for probably 7 years now and we have experienced a significant cut in the last 2 years, just as we made an attempt, we tried to move out, out of Belgrade, and work more intensively in some of these vulnerable regions, such as Sandzak and southern Serbia.

One of the things that's very useful, that we found was very useful and is in a way a comparative advantage that NED has is the ability to conduct some of these cross-border regional programs, especially between Serbia and Kosovo, which have been very successful. And sometimes the donors on the ground are limited from doing these types of programs. Having more funding would really enable us to do such work.

When it comes to work that is not necessarily conducted by us, but maybe the State Department, I would really emphasize the need for exchanges. I've heard over and over again wherever I go that the International Visitors Exchange Program, run by the State Department, is extremely valuable. And I think that no matter who you talk to in Serbia, you will hear over and over again that, along with the liberation of the visa regime, it's one of the things that young people in Serbia still need. And we really have to put a lot of our resources and hopes into the younger generation. It's really just the opportunity to travel, to exchange ideas and to open this discussion on a variety of usually common topics, but across borders. But there's not a lot of opportunities for that, so—

Sec. KRAMER. Well, Mr. Chairman, if I may, I want to thank the panelists very much for their very thoughtful assessments and ideas and suggestions. Extremely useful for me just in my second week on the job.

But I also want to thank you for letting me join you here today and in future hearings and briefings. It's extremely useful to have this congressional-executive collaboration. I look forward to it very much.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you.

Sec. KRAMER. And I apologize. I have to head back to the department for a meeting.

Mr. HASTINGS. I understand. And thank you so very much for being here.

Sec. KRAMER. Absolutely.

Mr. HASTINGS. We look forward to you working with us, as I'm sure you will.

I wanted to ask you all what role, if any, is the Internet playing? And I guess the subpart of that would be, in a rather general way, can you maybe, Mr. Lloyd, since you did a rather substantial poll—2,500-plus is extraordinary—and roughly how many households is it estimated—and I know there are no accurate stats on this—that people would have the Internet or communities where libraries or other places may exist to access the Internet?

Mr. LLOYD. Well, on the whole, this first one was done with a very large sample so we could get some results for the local elections as well so we could look at how it may turn out in Belgrade and other cities.

In terms of Internet access, it's still quite limited. But it is extensive among the youngest demographic groups, such as among students, among more urban populations. You see actually quite high levels. Almost every young Serb you'll meet has got a Yahoo? or e-mail account and so forth.

The Internet has not yet become a real political tool in terms of the campaigns, although that's changing too. The candidates in the Presidential elections have their web sites where you could watch their videos and learn their positions on the efforts and so forth. And it's spreading very, very quickly. But the penetration is nowhere near where it would be here in the United States. But it is gaining very quickly.

Mr. HASTINGS. I follow you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'll open it up to you if any one or two or three of you may have some questions. Please feel free to step forward and let us know who you are?

And if we answered all your questions that's even better because then I can get out of here. [Laughter.]

Well, here we have. Yes, ma'am?

QUESTIONER. My name is Mary Mullen and I'm with the Bosnia Support Committee. This is a little bit negative and you're a much more positive. I just wanted to know if Serbia is going to be held responsible for Milosevic or is there no question on that anymore?

Also, at the USIP, they had a Serbian panel. And they were saying that there were still in the Serbian government some more criminals that——

Mr. HASTINGS. Any response?

Mr. LLOYD. Well, in terms of—you know, it's probably more a question for the policy-makers. It remains a very large political issue as I alluded to in the one of the slides.

Whenever there is a European or, indeed, for that matter a U.S. political figure, be that a legislator or someone from executive branch, the issue is raised. The government has cooperated to a certain level. But there are actually squeezed between public opinion and Western Pressure.

The West is saying that they must make good on their obligations. And the public, as you see, is ambivalent at best, or adamantly opposed at worst.

We have a good example in Croatia where the government there finally decided to cooperate. And they're now, as of yesterday, on their way toward NATO membership and on their way toward joining the European Union. So there's a positive example right next door.

Mr. BENJAMIN. On frustration with existing government—and I would also say that if it were the case that the Serbian Radical Party were to lead the next government, I would not be looking for extraditions anytime soon.

And I do think when it comes to these questions, while there is, again, considerable frustration, perhaps not without foundation, I do think there's some difference in terms of who prevails in these elections as to Serbia's willingness to fulfill its duties and comply with ICTY requirements.

Ms. HOWARD. Well I can only answer from, again, the aspect of civil society and organizations with which we work. And there, again, you have a split of sorts. We were talking about it just recently of the split between these two groups, which the latest policy brief by the Pontis Foundation, also a NED grantee, has called pragmatists versus essentialists. We sometimes like to call them idealists versus realists maybe or—one of our staffers calls them value people versus political people.

And the difference here is basically between organizations which usually tend to be human rights defenders. And they tend to be those that I spoke of in my statement that

think Serbia should go into the E.U. but not before it delivers the other four criminals to The Hague.

There are those who think that such a view hurts Serbia in the long term and that Serbia should be given an opportunity to basically open doors to the E.U. Then it will create conditions to deliver war criminals. I'm not sure whether that expectation is realistic. But that's basically as far as I would go in answering it.

Mr. BENJAMIN. If I may just add one point to that.

When you go to Sarajevo or Pristina, there is a sense there—and I'm not saying it's correct—of Serbia getting a kind of preferential or perhaps even undeserved treatment, on the part of those really working to see that Serbia does not go backward. And I think that that is a particular issue for Brussels that it has to look at. And I'm sure part of its considerations over war crimes issues and the degree to which those issues—the conditionality, let's say, apply, and the stabilization and association agreement and other things.

Mr. HASTINGS. Robert?

QUESTIONER. Yes, Robert Hand from the Helsinki Commission Staff.

I was wondering if you all three, based either on the polling or with the groups that you work with, could comment on generational differences within Serbia on some of the issues that we're discussing.

I know that there's a large group of young people, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights. NDI has worked very closely with the Domestic Election Observation Organization, which fields I don't know how many hundreds or thousands of election observers that go out and do dedicated work. And so we see a lot of positive things from the youth in Serbia.

On the other hand, we have seen in some countries, and it may be the case in Serbia, that the younger people can also be very easily attracted to the far right and some of their slogans and the macho image that they can portray that way.

What is it right now in Serbia? Do we see the people that are threatening these organizations? Are they the same thugs that were working for Milosevic before? Or is it a new generation of people that are falling into this kind of attitude? And do they have different opinions on things like Kosovo, cooperation with the Tribunal, Russia versus Europe, just to simplify some of the issues? Is there a generational changeover? Are the young people falling for some of the same things that some of the older generations fell for in previous decades?

Ms. HOWARD. I would say, yes. Unfortunately, we increasingly see the younger generations falling into these same types of thinking and modes of thinking. And what is more dangerous is how they act on these beliefs that they hold.

I would say that the older generation tends to be a little bit more sophisticated and tends to direct attacks against human rights offenders through the media.

And sometimes, like I mentioned earlier, in political tabloids, it's more open. It takes more form of a hate speech. Sometimes it's more sophisticated and subtle when it comes to the more—how would I say—mainstream dailies.

When it comes to young people, we increasingly see them joining extreme movements that I mentioned earlier. And I mean, I can think of probably at least half a dozen right now off the top of my head that are there. I feel the atmosphere in Serbia has been created in which they feel they have impunity for whatever actions they commit. And they

also unfortunately use the Internet very effectively. And this is where a lot of the death threats against the journalists and NGOs appear.

So, yes, I think that they are unfortunately attracting the younger generation. But what's even more dangerous is what they're ready to do compared to maybe older generations.

Mr. LLOYD. Just maybe briefly, I agree with what my colleague just said. But just bear in mind the numbers of people that are attracted to this sort of violence and so forth are quite smaller and may be growing. But this is not certainly a majority of Serbs or young Serbs.

Just note, in the elections, as I said earlier, you saw that Tomislav Nikolic has appeal that was expanding throughout the campaign. He did appeal to younger voters, in part, because he talked about economic issues, about jobs and about corruption and other issues that attracted a young vote. And that has historically been one of the key pieces of the electorate for the incumbent parties.

Mr. BENJAMIN. I think the risk for youth in Serbia if that there's a conflation of nationalism and populism of the kind that, on the one hand, can be tied to nationalist movements, and on the other hand, fueled by populist concerns that I can't get a job, I can't build a life. And that's why it's vital.

I think two things are important. The people that want to take Serbia forward have to talk to young people and others about how that's going to happen, how is European integration is going to create jobs, how is foreign investment going to come into the country to make people's lives better. People need to see that from their politicians and they're not getting it.

And the second goes to the need for these regional connections. We have a whole generation that has not been lost but is affectively isolated from the rest of Europe and from their neighboring countries. And I think that, too, has got to be part of how we respond to the work that we're doing, the kind of programs that we design and the way we design them.

Mr. HASTINGS. I thank all of you.

I think one of the more telling points that has come from the hearing—and I heard it from all of you and Ms. Howard began in her opening remarks—is the need for a greater regional interaction.

And I have had the good fortune to visit all of the countries that surround the Serbs and Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania, Kosovo, Montenegro, which is interesting in and of itself. And I was interested in Montenegro and Russian involvement there. I was looking at the property there in Podgorica.

But anyway, I asked the question. And I learned that a tremendous amount of purchase of property there in that area is taking place.

One area I have not been to is Albania. I have been to Macedonia and to Bulgaria. And in each of those places, it would seem that there are opportunities for development. And I hope that we can appropriately fund your efforts in trying to establish regional understandings.

Also, we left out one area as we talk an awful lot about Kosovo. There are a lot of disappointments around the world about people treat people. We used to, before we had the gender perfect, we referred to it as man's humanity to man.

But in Mitrovica, I was stunned when I visited the Roma area. I can only imagine what it's like to be caught between two groups of people that hate each other and hate you more. And I could not complete the tour for that reason. I became pretty much embittered with both sides I communicated with there at the conditions that the people were in.

There world needs to wake up. And Europe needs to wake up quickly to the fact that Roma and Serbia and are parts of their communities and they're going to have to provide some better treatment. Otherwise, they're building their own monsters.

I guess in conclusion, let me also say that while Serbia's democratic development is important for Balkan stability, Kosovo's democratic development will be critical in Serbia. And I doubt that Serbia will accept an independent Kosovo anytime soon. But a Kosovo that does not respect the rights of its citizens, including those belonging to the Serbia and Roma that I just mentioned and other national minorities will represent our own figure to have done the right thing.

As Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I hope to convene a hearing or a briefing of the challenges to implementation of the Ahtisaraï Plan beyond the status questions.

And while others might be focused exclusively on status, the Helsinki Commission views its job as promoting human rights and democratic development until the day that status becomes meaningless in the lives of the people who live there.

I especially appreciate efforts of your respective organizations and you as individuals.

And, ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for your patients with me.

And I hope some of my humor worked out. [Laughter.]

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:37 p.m., the briefing ended.]

APPENDIX

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

In the eight years since Slobodan Milosevic was ousted, Serbia has made considerable progress in its democratic development. Much of the credit for that goes to the high degree of civic activism in Serbia. The courage of numerous non-governmental organizations, the independence of many media outlets and the democratic platforms of some political parties have shown that Serbia has enormous potential.

Unfortunately, the legacy of extreme nationalism fomented during the Milosevic years has not been so easy to break. While the damage the criminal and corrupt Milosevic regime did to Serbia is readily acknowledged, the evil that regime committed against Serbia's neighbors is not truly understood and, often times, denied. The hesitancy to admit a tremendous wrong is certainly not a character unique to Serbia, but it is a character of Serbian politics that today is particularly profound and limits the ability of the country and the region to achieve more rapid progress.

There is concern that Kosovo's declaration of independence in mid-February—and the subsequent recognition of that independence by the United States, much of Europe and other countries—may have upset an already unsteady balance in Serbia between democratic process and nationalist politics. In addition to the group of demonstrators who attacked the U.S. and other embassies in Belgrade on February 21, there have been numerous reports of intimidation and threats against independent voices in Serbia, as well as against some citizens who belong to minority populations. Meanwhile, new parliamentary elections have been called for May 11 in which the voters of Serbia may face a sharper choice than ever before between democracy and European integration on the one hand, and nationalism and isolation on the other.

How concerned should we be about these developments? How hopeful should we be about Serbia's democratic prospects? Our briefing today intends to give us a better perspective of how the contradictory forces in Serbia's democratic development may play themselves out in the short-term and the long-term.

Our panel of experts consists of three people representing organizations that have a strong track record of promoting democratic change in Serbia and many other countries in Europe and around the world. First, we have Howard from the National Endowment for Democracy, followed by Robert Benjamin from the National Democratic Institute and Lindsay Lloyd from the International Republican Institute. They will report on recent visits to Serbia, as well as on recent polling of public opinion in Serbia.



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