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Joint statement on the United States-Bulgarian partnership for a new era. (made by US Pres Bill Clinton and Bulgarian Pres Petar Stoyanov)(Transcript)

February 10, 1998

President Clinton and President Petar Stoyanov met at the White House today to discuss the strengthening of U.S.-Bulgarian relations as well as mutual efforts to enhance cooperation in Southeast Europe and advance Bulgaria's integration into the European and transatlantic communities, including NATO.

President Clinton noted the historic changes that have taken place in Bulgaria over the last year and the key role played by President Stoyanov. During his tenure, Stoyanov's Bulgaria has aligned itself firmly with the family of democratic nations, moved forward with difficult economic reforms, strengthened its civic institutions, stepped up its fight against organized crime and enhanced cooperation with its neighbors. The two presidents committed themselves to building a partnership that reflects a new era in Bulgarian-American relations.

President Clinton reaffirmed America's commitment to NATO's "Open Door" policy and welcomed Bulgaria's aspiration to NATO membership. The two Presidents agreed that Bulgaria's engagement in the Partnership for Peace, enhanced dialogue with NATO and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council were key tools to making Bulgaria the strongest possible candidate for NATO membership.

The United States will continue to support Bulgaria's efforts to consolidate its democratic and free market reforms, including Bulgaria's engagement with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The United States and Bulgaria are committed to reinforcing implementation of the Dayton Accords. They also have a common interest in expanding mutual trade and investment and encouraging the development of multiple routes for energy from the Caspian Basin.

The centerpiece of the visit was the announcement of a new U.S. Action Plan for Southeast Europe. The Action Plan will give further dynamism to U.S. cooperation with countries in the region in such areas' as promoting peaceful resolution of disputes, combating organized crime and consolidating democratic and economic.reforms. President Stoyanov expressed full support for the Action Plan and committed Bulgaria to doing its part.

U.S.-Bulgaria Work Program

The two presidents noted with approval the detailed U.S.-Bulgaria work program that will translate the Southeast Europe Action Plan into concrete projects in the areas of economic and commercial concerns, political-military affairs and law enforcement cooperation.

President Stoyanov welcomed continuing U.S. assistance which plays a key role in facilitating Bulgaria's transition to democratic and free market structures. President Clinton applauded Bulgaria's commitment to accelerating privatization and affirmed continued U.S. support through various bilateral assistance programs. Over the past seven years, the United States has provided Bulgaria with over $235 million in assistance under the Support for East European Democracy Program (SEED) to advance fundamental economic and political reforms.

* The program for this year, budgeted at $31 million, will focus on ensuring the development of a free-market economy and strengthening democratic institutions.

In view of the improved reform environment in Bulgaria, the United States and Bulgaria have identified several new priority areas for cooperation: reinforcing the rule of law, strengthening financial markets and encouraging the development of civil society. In this regard, the two Presidents agreed to:

* Deepen cooperation between their countries' respective law enforcement agencies in the struggle against terrorism, narcotics trafficking, money laundering and illicit arms transfers. The United States announced an increase in funds dedicated to providing criminal law enforcement training.

* Project intellectual property rights, including a commitment by President Stoyanov to seek strict enforcement of Bulgarian legislation and strengthen cooperation among relevant Bulgarian institutions in the fight against intellectual property piracy.

* Develop a new education curriculum in Bulgaria to promote democratic values with a grant of $250,000 from the United States Information Agency.

* On the military front, the Department of Defense has developed a number of programs to support the reform of the Bulgarian military along Western lines, including for this year:

* A $900,000 International Military Education and Training program that has eleven Bulgarian cadets studying at U.S. military academies;

* A $3.2 million dollar Foreign Military Financing program; and,

* A military liaison team resident in the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense to organize staff and information exchanges.

Regional Cooperation

In an effort to breakdown barriers and encourage regional cooperation, the United States and Bulgaria, together with several other stable democracies, are engaged in a number of cooperative efforts such as the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, the South Balkan Development Initiative and the annual Southeastern European Defense Ministerial.

* The Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) aims to enhance regional cooperation, commerce and development. It is pursuing plans for improvement of operations at border crossings, models to finance energy efficiency projects, and promotion of small and medium-sized enterprise development.

* The $30 million South Balkan Development Initiative (SBDI) seeks to energize the efforts of Albania, Bulgaria and the FYR Macedonia to upgrade their transportation systems and develop a regional approach to transport planning.

* The Southeastern European Defense Ministerial brings the Defense Ministers of the region together with other interested countries to discuss issues of common concern and develop projects for the year aimed at promoting regional cooperation and confidence building. Bulgaria hosted the last Ministerial in October 1997, which resulted in 27 follow-on activities.

These bilateral and multilateral initiatives will advance our shared goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace. They will also promote the integration of Bulgaria and the other stable democracies of Southeastern Europe into the European and transatlantic mainstream.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.