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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Sali Berisha, President of Albania (U)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
The Vice President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Joseph Lake, U.S. Ambassador to Albania
George Stephanopoulos, Senior Advisor to the President for Policy and Strategy
Christopher Hill, Director for South Central Europe, Department of State
Daniel Fried, Senior Director for Central and Eastern Europe, NSC Staff (notetaker)

Albania
President Sali Berisha
Dylber Vrioni, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
Alfred Serreqi, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Lublin Dilja, Ambassador
Fatos Beja, Diplomatic Advisor to the President

DATE, TIME September 12, 1995, 11:45 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Welcome and I'm very glad to see you here. (U)

President Berisha: Thank you, Mr. President, for this meeting. I and all Albanians are grateful to you, to the United States and to the American taxpayer for your important assistance to Albania at this most crucial time in all of our long history. Since the very beginning of our struggle for democracy, the United States has provided assistance to Albania, the most forgotten country in Europe. You are helping us through one of the worst crises in Europe and are helping us to build the rule of law and a market economy in Albania. The level of friendly feeling by Albanians toward the U.S. is very high, and I am especially proud of this.

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When (former Secretary of State James) Baker came to Albania there was an explosion of friendly feeling toward the United States, and Albanians are just as well disposed toward the United States now as then. (S)

The President: I greatly appreciate the progress you have made, especially your work to develop democracy in Albania and to transform your economy. I also appreciate your role in Albania's policy toward Kosovo and your support for the enforcement of sanctions on the former Yugoslavia. The United States is trying to create the basis for peace in former Yugoslavia but we will not forget Kosovo. We will not have fully normalized relations with Serbia without fully restored autonomy for the people of Kosovo. (S)

President Berisha: I have always been convinced of the crucial and useful role of the United States in Europe and the Balkans. The United States is not playing the role of world gendarme. But it is responsible for international law and order. Please accept my congratulations at the latest developments in Bosnia. Now, thanks to you, there is a real hope for peace. Your agenda should be supported and this includes airstrikes which I consider important and completely justified. In a way, the airstrikes have compensated for the arms embargo, which was not justified. Albania is ready to work closely with you and in particular to increase support for your pilots and planes. (S)

Other Central and Eastern European countries did not start their process of democratization as badly off as Albania. But thanks to the impulse of freedom and your help, Albania in the past three years has fixed two goals and made progress. First, we have created a democratic space for Albanians: the rule of law and a market economy. Second, we have achieved fast economic growth. This is an impressive achievement because we lost fifty years. Now we are moving ahead. (S)

In all of our efforts we had your support. We are a nation divided into three states. We shall oppose changes of borders through force, and we will seek to support democracy and free markets for Albanians living in these other states. Such achievements would bring 90 percent happiness to these Albanians. (S)

The President: Ninety percent is as good as it gets. (U)

President Berisha: We are striving to make progress. We have changed our laws and passed laws on a European model. We have changed 40 percent of government personnel and 60-90 percent in some categories. I tried to use my political mandate to speed economic reforms, and we liberalized prices and began to privatize. The result has been lowered inflation and a tripling

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of per capita income from \$200 to \$700. We have achieved macroeconomic stability, and I think we can call ourselves today a poor but healthy economy. Now we are engaged in large scale privatization and are making progress. (X)

Our main goal is integration with Euroatlantic structures. The Partnership for Peace (PFP) was a great idea, a great invention that opened doors to countries in our region with a strange past. We were the first country to ask to join NATO. We have begun good military cooperation with NATO countries which will help us, one day, to join the alliance. (X)

We also have made great progress in human and national rights and in the establishment of democratic institutions. Before, Albania was a country that banned religion, that banned rights. Now we are establishing tolerance and freedom. Freedom of information is important, and we have different television programs and stations throughout Albania. We have passed good laws, although the referendum to establish a new constitution failed. (X)

Still, the situation in the region is very worrying. Kosovo is under total occupation. I spoke about this with the Secretary of State and asked whether the United States could take the role of intermediary in negotiations to restore autonomy there. Of course, I'll be asked by Albanians about whether we should ask for more. But I say no because asking too much would mean war. The warnings of the Bush Administration (the Christmas warnings with respect to Kosovo) and the presence of U.S. troops in Macedonia was crucial to preventing a spillover of the Bosnian conflict to the south. (X)

Our relations with Greece went through a very difficult stage but now are becoming better. What is the real story? In 1990 and 1991, during a period of real turmoil in Albania, many thousands of Albanians fled south. Greece received them well, and I am grateful. But some Greeks thought that Albania was dying and they began thinking about annexation, about "Northern Epirus." I am grateful to your statements encouraging Greece to negotiate and to remove a blockade in our relations with the EU. The Holbrooke mission was successful. He understood the situation. We want to work with Greece to improve relations. The current issues can be solved and will be solved. This is important for us. If the Government of Greece is willing, we will be able to work toward this result. (X)

The President: What you have said is very important. The Greeks are working with the Government of FYROM, and if we make the progress we hope for, it may become easier to make progress between Greece and Albania. We were right to put troops in FYROM. President Bush issued his warning to the Serbs about Kosovo and because it took occurred in December, after the

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elections, the Serbs came to me. I said this was a proper decision. We are doing what we can to end the war and we will keep up our efforts. I appreciated what you said to me about Greece. They are showing a new willingness to work with their neighbors and this is very important. Still, the Government of Greece has concerns regarding the Greek minority in Albania in the areas of education, religious discrimination and employment discrimination, including in areas of administration and law enforcement. We're hopeful that you can make progress on these questions. (S)

You mentioned progress in establishing democratic institutions. I hope you will do more regarding an independent judiciary. We have found some funds in our assistance budget can help with a program for the training of prosecutors and the police, and I'm encouraged that we are able to help. (S)

Our assistance to Albania has come to about \$140 million so far, and we hope to be able to provide about \$45 million in fiscal year 1996. We hope that this will be helpful to your efforts. We are impressed by your economic growth and by your efforts to resolve issues concerned with human and minority rights. Some believe that ethnic conflicts will destroy the world in the next twenty years, but you can prove them wrong. If you can, we won't have more Bosnias, Rwandas and Burundis -- a world in which people just kill one another because of these issues. So, Albania is not simply a little country all alone and forgotten. (S)

President Berisha: The role of the United States is primary, and we appreciate it. I assure that you we will move ahead. The most difficult question is the consolidation of democratic and other institutions. Albania must do better than in the past. Freedom gives a great potential and freedom can be assured by consolidating institutions. I asked Secretary Christopher and Secretary Rubin for help to do this. I am grateful for your offer of judicial assistance and believe that, working with Ambassador Lake, we can use it well. Please encourage your government to keep providing such assistance. (S)

We also need support for our institutions that are doing the most to stimulate economic growth. We need foreign investment and OPIC could play an important role. Perhaps OPIC could treat Albania as a special case. (S)

President Clinton: How is the Albanian-American Enterprise Fund doing? (U)

Mr. Fried: It is very active. (U)

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President Berisha: It is very good and has strong leadership under Mr. Domenick Scaglione. He wants to launch a commercial bank and we consider this a very good idea. Your decision to appoint him was excellent. (✓)

President Clinton: Perhaps we could do more with OPIC as well. Let me thank you for your support in basing the Predator unmanned aircraft. Thank you also for your active participation in the Partnership for Peace. I want to continue our defense cooperation and look to increase it. (✓)

My notes for this meeting mentioned a \$7 million reforestation project. This is very important. We are working hard to support democracy in Haiti near to our own country, and we have found that erosion and environmental problems have a bad effect on the economy and on peoples lives. In Haiti, the top soil has just been washed away because of the absence of forests. So we don't underestimate the importance of such projects. (✓)

President Berisha: It is a very important project, and we need to proceed with it. Military cooperation is very important as well. I would particularly appreciate your support for military infrastructure projects. We need basic things, not any sort of high technology. Before, our military was dispersed through the country in a crazy way. We need to deploy it in a way that makes sense. We also need help to control our territorial waters and airspace. We are facing pressure from the east; problems could come from this area, and we lack the capability to carry out our responsibility to control our own water and air territory. We would be grateful if you could help us in this area. (✓)

The Vice President: It is great to see you here. I have many friends in the Albanian-American community, including Bill Kovac. I know how excited they are about Albania's transformation. This generates great enthusiasm. Listening to you, it seems to me that you are close to the threshold of a surge of your economy and a surge of investment. (✓)

Countries that have enjoyed democratic successes are often held to higher standards. Problems in this area can cause more concern on the part of your friends. So it would help us to help you if you were able to fight any authoritarian trends or anything else that could hurt investments. But it is clear that there is great excitement about Albania in the United States. (✓)

The President: We may be able to do more in our military cooperation. For example, we may be able to support the equipping of an Albanian peacekeeping company. I understand your point about control of your airspace and territorial waters and we will follow up. (✓)

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President Berisha: Thank you. This would help us control our own territory. I understand the Vice President's point. I assure you that we will do your best to consolidate our democracy. We had to make some strong decisions, like cutting back on the state administration, and proceeded. The results justify these steps. Of course, we have committed mistakes and lots of them. We are engaged in a tremendous transition and the forces involved are very powerful. (S)

The Vice President: We here are still trying to perfect our own democracy. (U)

The President: I can't tell you how pleased I am that you have come so far in so short a time. (U)

Secretary Christopher: I should add that Albania has just dedicated a new military hospital to the memory of Joe Kruzel. (U)

The President: Thank you so much. (U)

President Berisha: I was shaken by the news of his death. I had had two meetings with him and knew that Mr. Kruzel was a real friend of Albania and a real supporter of PFP. I also had met with Bob Frasure and had had a long conversation with him; I was very impressed by him. I think that the most recent developments in Bosnia are the best memorial to their sacrifice. America's commitment to remain engaged in the Balkans brings us hope. NATO's airstrikes are a great step for NATO and for friendly countries. (S)

I think that Yeltsin's recent reaction to this shows that he is really a member of the Politburo. He reacted in a Brezhnev style. (S)

The President: We are determined to resolve the Bosnian situation. We cannot let it remain a cancer in the world, unresolved and festering. (S)

President Berisha: How do you plan to help reorganize the Bosnian Army? This is an important question. (S)

The Vice President: Do you have any suggestions for resettling General Mladic?

The President: Thank you.

-- End of Conversation --