

problems, but there is a guidepost: this OSCE and its principle that human differences should be resolved democratically, with respect for diversity and the basic rights and freedom of every individual. That was true in 1975. It is even more true today.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:48 a.m. at the Ciragan Palace. In his remarks, he referred to President Suleyman Demirel of Turkey; Chairman-in-Office Knut Vollebaek, OSCE; United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan; Helle Degn, Chair, Foreign Policy Council, Denmark; Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

Remarks on the Budget Agreement and an Exchange With Reporters in Istanbul

November 18, 1999

The President. I am very pleased that our administration and the Congress have reached agreement on the first budget of the 21st century. This budget is a victory, and a hard-won victory, for the American people. It is a victory for our children who now will have better education; a victory for our families who deserve the safer streets and cleaner environment this budget will bring; a victory for farmers, for veterans, for our soldiers in uniform. It is a victory for all who agree that America should meet our responsibilities and maintain our leadership in the world. Simply put, it's a budget that meets our priorities, supports our values, and invests in our future.

The budget makes progress on several important fronts. The first budget of the 21st century puts education first, as it should. That's why I stood firm for our commitment to hire 100,000 highly qualified teachers to lower class size in the early grades. I am pleased that Congress is going to fulfill that promise, and I am also pleased that this budget doubles funds for after-school and summer school programs and supports greater accountability for results by helping communities turn around or shut down failing schools.

The budget makes America a safer place. It invests in our COPS program, which already has funded 100,000 community police

officers for our streets and helped to give us the lowest crime rate in 25 years. This agreement will help to hire up to 50,000 more community police officers targeted to neighborhoods where crime rates are still too high.

It strengthens our efforts to preserve natural areas and protect our environment. I am very pleased we successfully opposed anti-environmental riders that put special interests above the national interest.

The budget will also make it possible for millions of Americans with disabilities to join the work force without fear of losing their health care, a terrific advance in the quality of our national life.

Finally, this budget strengthens America's role of leadership in the world by paying our dues and arrears to the United Nations, by meeting our commitments to the Middle East peace process, by making critical investments in debt relief for the poorest countries of the world, by funding efforts to safeguard nuclear weapons and expertise in Russia.

When I insisted that Congress keep working until it finished the job, I hoped and believed we could make progress in all these areas. I believe we can maintain our fiscal discipline, continue to pay down our national debt, and still make the investments we must in our people and our future. That is what we have achieved, and we have done so by working together.

I want to thank the leaders of both parties for their roles in this agreement, and I want to say a special word of thanks to the Democratic leaders and the members of my party in both Houses without whom my struggle for 100,000 teachers, 50,000 police, greater investments in the environment, and paying our U.N. dues could simply not have succeeded. I thank them very much.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Now, let me just say one other thing, then I'll answer the questions. We are about to start the holiday season, and then we'll begin again. And in the months ahead, I think we have to stay focused on the critical business of this Nation that is still undone, from commonsense gun safety legislation to meaningful hate crimes legislation, from a real raise in the minimum wage to

a real Patients' Bill of Rights, from strengthening Social Security to modernizing Medicare and adding a prescription drug benefit. I urge Congress to work with me in meeting these goals in the same bipartisan spirit it took to reach this very important budget agreement.

Thank you.

Across-the-Board Budget Cut

Q. Mr. President, just a week ago, when the Republicans were calling for an across-the-board budget cut of about a half a percent, just a tenth of a percent more than the one that you accepted, you said that it was unacceptable. What makes this one acceptable, sir, and would the budget as the Republicans have written it still, in your opinion, dip into the Social Security surplus?

The President. Well, first of all, when I remember saying it was unacceptable, they were advocating a one percent across the board which some thought would have to be 6 percent to avoid getting in the Social Security Trust Fund. This one is, I think, about a third, a little more than a third of what their last offer was on one percent.

It also is written in such a way as to preserve the management flexibility of the departments so that we can fulfill the mission. Let me give you just one example. When the Pentagon—do you remember when the one percent across-the-board proposal was made and the Pentagon said, "Gosh, we may have to lay off 38,000 uniform and non-uniform personnel"—that was on the assumption that they would have to take the across-the-board dollar amount but fulfill every mandate Congress had imposed in the defense budget.

And so now they've given the Secretaries some flexibility so that we can maintain the core responsibilities of Government. Furthermore, we now have agreements in education and in the environment and in other areas which have raised the investment level to such a point that we can take that across-the-board cut, still have a real increase, still be moving forward. So I think we're in a very different environment than we were just a few days ago, and I'm quite pleased by this.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chechnya

Q. Mr. President, President Yeltsin was pretty tough in defending his military actions in Chechnya and saying that he was going to deal with bandits and terrorists. In your private meeting, was he just as frank? I mean, could you describe the talk and tell us what happened?

The President. Yes. He was very vigorous, and so was I; and you know, we've met together many times. We have a very good personal chemistry, but it didn't stop us from our clear disagreement here.

I would never criticize anyone taking vigorous action against terrorism. I think that's very important. The real question is whether or not the nature of this uprising in Chechnya can be solved exclusively by a military strategy. And I think you could see—you can sense in this audience—it's not just the United States; it's virtually all the Europeans don't believe that an exclusively military strategy can prevail, that it will lead to greater than necessary civilian casualties and greater than necessary refugees.

So I can only tell you that he stated his position. I stated mine. But I urged them to try to listen to Russia's friends at this conference and try to find a way that we could work together and move this thing forward. And I am hopeful that you will see some progress here before we leave. I can't say for sure that you will. I hope you will.

Q. Mr. President, you made some conciliatory remarks during your speech. Does that reflect the feeling that maybe you've pushed him as far as you can rhetorically and through any kind of action the Government can take?

The President. I don't know. Everybody else here thought that I was pretty aggressive.

Q. Well, you referred to standing up to the tanks and so forth.

The President. But the point I was trying to make here—let me just say there are two separate issues here. One is—and I think this is worth taking a second. There are two separate issues here. One is President Yeltsin's view that what they're doing is right in Chechnya and the differences of opinion we have. The second is the general Russian view with which I take very strong exception that

no one should, in effect, comment on or interfere with any internal affair of any other nation. And you heard him refer to American-led NATO aggression in the Balkans.

And so I responded very vigorously about Bosnia, about Kosovo. And the point I made was, when I was very personally complimentary of him is, when he stood up on that tank to save Russian democracy, suppose he hadn't prevailed. Suppose the Russian military had taken him down off the tank, thrown him in jail, and announced they were going to execute him.

I would hope that the entire world represented around that table, that OSCE table today, would have gone into an absolute uproar of outrage about it and would have saved his life and helped to restore democracy. That's the point I was trying to make, that there are times in the world we live in today when we are forced to make judgments about things that happen within the borders of other countries because they have an impact beyond their borders and because they violate internationally accepted norms of human rights. That's what happened in Bosnia; that's what happened in Kosovo. I think I did the right thing. And I hope it registered on the Russians, and I hope we're going to make some progress. I think we are.

I'll see you all some more in the next day or two, but I've got to go to this lunch.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. at the Ciragan Palace.

Statement on the Northern Ireland Peace Process

November 18, 1999

The parties in Northern Ireland, working with George Mitchell, have taken a powerful step toward lasting peace. I warmly welcome Senator Mitchell's final report and support his conclusions fully. We should all take heart from the fact that the parties have strongly reaffirmed their commitment to the Good Friday accord. In a spirit of unprecedented mutual understanding, they have addressed issues of deep concern to one another. Together, they have shaped the outlines of the

way ahead, as described by Senator Mitchell today. I urge the parties to maintain this level of dialog with each other and with the public at large in the days ahead and to proceed with rapid implementation of the agreement. Once again, I want to express my deepest appreciation to Senator Mitchell for his dedication to bringing peace to Northern Ireland.

Statement on Assistance for Southeast Europe

November 18, 1999

I am pleased that yesterday in Brussels the international community pledged over \$1 billion in new assistance to consolidate peace and promote economic recovery in Kosovo. I am particularly pleased that our European partners committed the lion's share of this amount, with the European Commission and EU members together pledging over three-quarters of a billion dollars and additional pledges from other European states.

These contributions will not only provide a significant boost to economic revitalization and reconstruction but also help to fund public administration, establish a civil emergency service corps, strengthen public security and the rule of law, promote market reforms, and encourage private investment. We did our part by announcing plans to provide \$157 million for Kosovo, pending final action on the budget before Congress.

Today at the OSCE summit in Istanbul, Europe demonstrated its strong leadership in support of recovery and stabilization throughout southeast Europe. I welcome European Commission President Prodi's intention to have the EC provide nearly 12 billion euros (approximately \$12.5 billion) of assistance to the region during 2000–2006. Such a substantial package will create tremendous opportunities for those countries and affirm in the strongest terms European support for their transformation. We are continuing our assistance programs to encourage political and economic reform and advance the region's integration with the rest of Europe.