

**Mark Fleming, Public Diplomacy Officer, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Washington, DC:** I'd like to thank all of you for coming. It's my pleasure to introduce to you our Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker, who's here to answer your questions about the NATO expansion process and Macedonia's role in this. He would like to make a brief statement and then be ready to take your questions. So, thank you.

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** Good morning. Good afternoon for you.

**Public Affairs Officer Michael Orlansky:** Good afternoon.

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** As introduced, I am Kurt Volker, I am Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary here, which has me doing in particular NATO policy, but also European Union, OSCE, and then on bilateral relationships with most of our Western European countries. So, it's a pleasure to have a chance to talk to you about where we are and some of our thinking on NATO. Let me just check a couple of things. First of all, can you hear me ok, should I speak louder, more softly?

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** Yes, sir, we can hear you OK. It's helpful if you might speak just a bit more slowly for purposes of clarity. We can hear you fine.

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** No problem. I think what I'd like to start out with is just a sense of where we are thinking about working together with Europe as a whole and how our approach toward NATO relates to that.

Essentially having gone through the period of the Cold War and the end of the Cold War, gone through September 11<sup>th</sup>, I think we've seen an evolution in our engagement with Europe that instead of working together – I'm sorry – instead of working – as though trans-Atlantic relations is principally about Europe – we see it in a wider context, where it is about what we do together on challenges beyond Europe, and here Macedonia has contributed in important ways to these efforts working together beyond Europe, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, with the Adriatic three countries, in their joint contributions.

So, that's the first part, it's how we would look beyond Europe itself as the object of our attention but rather what we're doing together in the world.

The second part is recognizing that we've not done the work in Europe, that there are many things ahead, both in the Balkans, in Kosovo, in Bosnia, further NATO enlargements, supporting further EU enlargements, helping countries like Ukraine and Georgia strengthen their democratic institutions, dealing with remaining dictatorships, like Belarus. So, we have some work yet to do within Europe.

And then thirdly, is making the institutions work better. That sometimes the EU and NATO fall into kind of rivalry. We don't believe that's appropriate. We think that we form a common democratic civilization, we need to be able to work together, we need to use the instruments, use the institutions that we have effectively as instruments for achieving our policy.

So, that's some of our overview. And, concerning NATO in particular, we have felt that, as NATO has taken on additional operations – if you go back to 1995, NATO had never conducted a single operation – then you had Bosnia, and Kosovo, there was the operation in Macedonia briefly, there's Afghanistan currently, there's Iraq, there's operation "Active Endeavor" in the Mediterranean. There's a lot going on that NATO is involved with, and NATO's strength, its effectiveness in executing the decisions taken by the North-Atlantic Council needs to be reinforced and strengthened. So we've put an emphasis on both capabilities that NATO countries can provide, on how we fund operations in order to facilitate that happening more quickly once a decision is made; so there's a lot that we are trying to stress on strengthening NATO.

And then we're also putting an emphasis on continuing the process of further enlargement. We view the entry of ten new members into NATO since 1997 as a great success; this has also strengthened NATO, it's a process that we want to see continue and we -- I think all after the Prague Summit and the invitation of seven countries, and then their effective integration into NATO in 2004 had taken great pride in that, saw that as a tremendous accomplishment, but what we wanted to do was make sure that it doesn't stop there and that we continue the process of reviewing countries for membership, which is why we proposed that we get this train rolling again. And we therefore at NATO in the past few

weeks discussed an approach about working towards a summit in 2008, where we would again review the applications of countries for membership, review their performance, see who the strongest candidates are and be prepared to take decisions at that time on further membership.

So, taking a process that had sort of come to a pause for a while within NATO following the Prague expansion and getting that re-launched, is what we've tried to do.

So that's how we see things at NATO also in the next couple of years. Let me stop there as sense of introduction and I'd be happy to take your questions.

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** Thank you, Mr. Volker. And now, if journalists here in Skopje would indicate if they wish to ask a question, we'll take questions for Mr. Volker.

Please identify yourselves in terms of your name and your news organization. First question over here.

**Biljana Sekulovska, A1 Television:** Macedonian Prime Minister Buckovski announced that he would ask for a document, a written document, as proof that Macedonia is a regional leader as far as reforms are concerned. Is it possible to get that kind of document, Mr. Volker?

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** I don't want to comment specifically on what the Prime Minister said. I am not familiar with those remarks. What I would say is that every country that is in the Membership Action Plan produced as its annual cooperation plan, its Action Plan with NATO.

This covers a wide range of areas; from addressing issues such as political and economic reform and legal matters, to interoperability with NATO defense reform and contributions to NATO activities and actions both regionally and globally, including Iraq and Afghanistan would be mention in that as contributions to NATO operations. And NATO engages very actively with these countries in helping to develop this individual plan and provide feedback and commentaries in areas where we think countries' performance could be strengthened.

I can say that Macedonia has consistently earned very high marks from NATO as having put together a credible program for its cooperation with NATO, taking action in defense reforms, in working toward a professional military and contributing NATO operations; so there's a very high regard for Macedonia within the Alliance.

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** Our next question, please. Please go ahead.

**Slobodanka Jovanovska, "Utrinski Vesnik" daily:** Mr. Volker, you mentioned 2008 as a date for the next enlargement. Is it a definite date or maybe we will have to wait more after that?

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** With 2008, we were saying about that, the same things that we said about NATO enlargement before the Prague Summit, or that we said before the Madrid Summit, when invitations were issued, and that is to say we will review the process of enlargement, we will review the strength of the candidates at that time, and we'll be prepared to take decisions on invitations.

Now, that's not -- I can't commit today -- or no one can commit today what exactly that decision will be in 2008, that's gonna depend upon the performance of the candidate countries themselves. And whether they are seen to be strong candidates that would make strong, effective members of NATO, that's something that the member of NATO will be able to judge only at that time, in 2008. What we're trying to do, is make it clear that we believe that that's the time that NATO needs to focus on as they make those decisions.

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** Next question for Mr. Volker, please.

**Vladimir Mircevski, Kanal 5 TV:** Mr. Volker, in your first statement you mentioned that countries that are interested to get in NATO, that they are not prepared to be part of the Alliance. We are talking here about a group approach. But can you tell me specifically, because I want to hear a specific answer to my question, is Macedonia ready to enter NATO without looking [at] what the Adriatic Group has done, or what Ukraine will do until 2008.

How much Macedonia has made its way towards Brussels and the Euro Atlantic integration?

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** Right. Let me put it this way.

First, we strongly support the aspirations of Macedonia and the other countries for NATO membership. That's been our position for some time; it's why we have encouraged Macedonia and worked with Macedonia, both bilaterally and also through NATO, in the Membership Action Plan, because we want to see Macedonia succeed.

Second, every candidate country will be assessed individually, so that there's no group of saying that you have to be part of the group or not part of a group now. Everyone has to make it on their own. Every country that is invited to join NATO has to measure up, has to be seen as a strong future member of NATO at the time those decisions are made. There's not going to be -- there's no pass, as though we can take a couple of weak ones because they are part of a group. Everyone has to make it on their own.

As people will remember at the Madrid Summit, there was debate over which countries would be included at that time, there was talk about a larger group, and in the end three were invited: Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland. Similar thing with the Prague Summit - there was talk about how many, and we included as many as we could at that time, which was seven, which I think reflected the strength of those candidates. Again, I can't commit now to what countries will be in a position to present candidacy strong enough that they will in fact get invitations in 2008, but I, you know, I would hope that with the time available to all of us between now and then, the work that can be done on further reforms, both political, economic, the defense area, that as many countries as possible would be in a position to receive an invitation.

I think in terms of Macedonia, NATO is not confronted with the decision today, to say "Yes, are we taking in members today", and if we were in that position, I would be concerned that we would not get positive results, and what I want to do is make sure that we use the time between now and 2008 to -- to use that time for countries to do more in the area of reform, combating corruption, rule of law, justice, democracy, defense reform, so that when that time comes, every country will be in as strong a position as possible.

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** We have some additional questions. Yes, please?

**Iso Rusi, "Lobi" magazine:** I have a two-part question. (Unintelligible) our expectation of the membership in NATO for 2006 were unrealistic. First, did you send any kind of warning information to the governments of Croatia, Albania and Macedonia before your statement in Brussels – that's the first question. And the second, do you think that our unrealistic expectations were supported by different kind of messages sent by Washington through officials, NGOs, or even Macedonian lobbyists in the USA?

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** I think I should be turning that question around to you. If there's an expectation for invitation in 2006, it would be interesting to know what was the basis of those expectations, and in terms of the United States or in terms of NATO we have never laid a date or a timeline for when we would expect further invitations to be issued. And in fact what's new is that we've decided to try to give this process a bit of a kick and say "We ought to have a date in mind, and we ought to be working toward that." So, I think we've tried to move the ball forward.

And in terms of doing that, we've been in frequent consultation with the governments of Croatia, Macedonia, Albania – the A-3 – as well as others, about where we are in the process. And so, the answer to that is yes, and including before I went to Brussels few weeks ago, in July, I know I met with representatives of these countries here in Washington to sort of lay out where we are. I don't think this is big news, maybe I am underestimating the expectations the people had in Macedonia, which I think we can talk more about, but NATO had been coasting along without a timeline in mind and what we've tried to do is insert into this the timeline and the desire to come to some decisions on countries (unintelligible).

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** We have some time for additional questions. Please go ahead.

**Mirjana Matevska, Macedonian Television:** Mr. Volker, do you have any recommendations for the next two years about our way towards NATO?

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** Well I think that the Membership Action Plan has been a very effective mechanism. And that if I was working in Brussels in 1999–2000, when this was being developed for the first time and going through the first and second cycles, and I was

unsure how effective this instrument would be at the time. And looking back I think it has really made a difference, I think it has helped countries define more clearly areas where they ought to be working on reform, both political, economic, defense, interoperability, contributions they can, legal areas, security agreements – it has been very, very effective.

I think Macedonia has made very good use of the Membership Action Plan.

So, the first answer would be, continue to use that process and continue to follow through on reforms that have been set in motion that still need to come to fruition. And I would look at this in a holistic sense, so that certainly part of this is in the defense area, as you look at the professional military, as you look at contributions to operations, interoperability, the language ability, and so on; I would also look at it in the sense of the strength of your democratic and civil society, and your economy as well, whether it is in justice, law enforcement, or corruption, or democratic reforms following through on the implementation of the -- what's it called -- the Framework Agreement after the Lake Ohrid process. So, I think all of those things are important to follow through on them in the next couple of years. I also think as -- as was the case in the past, you know, this is not a US decision alone, there are 26 countries in NATO, all of them have to reach consensus on the candidacy of any country to become a member of NATO, so I think you want to cast your net widely and have strong affirmative relations with all of the NATO countries evaluating future membership, and that means both the governments and in the case of US and (unintelligible). We are looking at US as a whole too, in the United States this is a Treaty commitment, it will require Senate ratification and the administration will be working on this and will want to have full support from our Senate as we go into this.

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** I believe we have time for few more questions. Yes?

**Sladjana Dimiskova, Radio Free Europe:** In Macedonia there is an atmosphere that there is a delay in the enlargement of NATO, and I want a direct answer. Did anyone from the US administration or maybe NATO mention or maybe promise about any enlargement in 2006?

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** Now the date of 2006 is not something that the U.S. or NATO has ever put out there as a time for decisions about enlargement. So I don't agree that this is a delay. Rather,

the way I see it is that this is getting the process moving again after the pause that had set in after the Prague Summit.

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** Do we have any further questions from Skopje for Mr. Volker? Any further questions on the topic of today's teleconference on NATO enlargement?

Mr. Volker, is there anything you'd like to say in winding up before we have to bid farewell?

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** I think I had a chance to cover some of the points that I hope people in Macedonia understand and appreciate.

One, that we see the process of further enlarging NATO, and also of further enlarging EU as important and something that we support, that we've tried to set the NATO process in motion a bit more actively, through some of the steps we've taken in the past few months, that we strongly support Macedonia's aspirations and we'll be working together, both bilaterally and through NATO, through the Membership Action Plan, to assist NATO.

And (unintelligible), the success here's going to depend on Macedonia itself, that we can take the process so far in terms of being willing to invite countries to join NATO who are strong candidates and will strengthen the Alliance, and it's going to be Macedonia's job to make sure that it is the strongest possible candidate at the time that we are looking at those decisions.

**PAO Michael Orlansky:** On behalf of all of us at the American Embassy in Skopje and our colleagues in the media, I'd like to extend our sincere appreciation to Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Volker for his willingness to engage in what I think has been a very wide-ranging, informative and productive dialogue. Thanks to all your colleagues in Washington for facilitating, and we hope to have the chance to speak with you sometime in the near future. Good day.

**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker:** I look forward to that. Thank you very much, and best of luck.