



For Immediate Release
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John Kerry: Working Together with Serbian-Americans

Senator John Kerry issued the following statement:

I am proud to receive support from Serbian Americans. Like many immigrants to our great country, Serbian immigrants came to America with little more than hope and optimism for their future. They quickly became integral parts of our neighborhoods and towns. Serbian Americans quite literally built the engines and foundation of American growth through their tireless work in the great industrial centers of this country. They have served our country as civic leaders – governors from Illinois and senators from Ohio, and Serbian Americans have fought bravely in our military, several winning our highest award for valor in action, the Medal of Honor.

As your president I will promote policies that protect the communities you have built and preserve the values you have honored. We will care for our elderly, make health care a right for all Americans, promote education, help small businesses, and provide equal opportunity for all.

The Serbian-American community has a strong tradition of maintaining close ties to their family and friends in South-Eastern Europe. These relationships help make your communities stronger, and make our strong country a great country. Through your historical ties, you help America win friends and influence, advise us of opportunities and threats, and help construct the alliances that protect our friends and promote our values. Serbs were America's loyal allies in two world wars at a terrible cost to their population, and many Americans of the Greatest Generation remember with deep appreciation the heroic efforts made by our Serbian friends to save American pilots shot down behind enemy lines during World War II.

For generations, American presidents of both political parties worked tirelessly with our allies to create a Europe that was safe, democratic and peaceful. As president, I will refocus U.S. attention and leadership on the process of consolidating democracy and fostering stability and prosperity in South-Eastern Europe. The region is critical to a Europe whole and free, and Serbia and Montenegro is the keystone of the region.

The Bush administration has hurt the region. It has hollowed out US security in Kosovo, making it difficult to protect Kosovo's Serbs. It has let religious extremists and nationalists dominate political debate in the region. It has dictated to Belgrade's democrats, limiting dialogue to the topics of Kosovo and war crimes, leaving them at the mercy of nationalist extremists and not helping them to provide better conditions for Serbians.

Over the last five years many historic Serbian monuments, churches and monasteries have been destroyed in Kosovo. This is unacceptable. The government's decision to take responsibility for rebuilding them is admirable and must be followed through on. Yet, as of today, little progress has been made. Rebuilding these monuments, churches and monasteries sends the right signal to

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all who wish to see a multiethnic Kosovo become a reality. Violence must not be rewarded and the perpetrators of ethnically or religiously motivated crimes must be punished.

As president, I will work with Belgrade to see that democratic governments are able to help their people. We must help them create jobs, fight crime, and cut into corruption -- not just dictate to them on tough issues like war crimes and Kosovo. We can address all the issues by listening to and cooperating with the people who share our faith in democracy.

My administration will take immediate action:

- We will work with our European allies to see that all states of the Balkans are able to take their place as law-abiding members of the key institutions that helped to win the Cold War, including NATO and the European Union.
- We will insist that all societies cooperate in prosecuting war criminals. Ethnicity will not be a defense, and the whole truth must be told. We will insist on cooperation from all governments in the region to bring war criminals to justice. We will respect Serbia's prosecutions and will help see that those who have committed crimes against Serbs are punished.
- Kosovo's future status should be decided as soon as possible. The people of Kosovo must be able to determine their own future, including how they want to be governed. Proposals to change the territory of Kosovo or to partition it along ethnic lines do not help build a multi-ethnic society or prepare the region for its future in Europe. As we pursue Kosovo's final status, we want to work closely with others in the region and engage them in promoting a smooth transition. Continued delay hardens the positions of Kosovo's Albanians and Serbs and puts Serbia's democrats in an ever more difficult position, increasing the chances of new ethnic violence.
- Kosovo's Serbs and other minority communities must be able to live normal lives, wherever they want to live. The magnificent Serbian churches and monuments must be protected and preserved. My administration will insist on full guarantees for the political, cultural, and human rights of all people in Kosovo. Otherwise, it will be more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve a solution that fulfills the legitimate aspirations of the Albanian majority.
- Likewise, ethnic minorities throughout the Balkans must be able to live normal lives, wherever they choose to live. My administration will insist on full political, cultural and human rights for all the people of the Balkans.

Long-term stability can come only when all the states of the Balkans are full participants in NATO and the other institutions that helped to win the Cold War and keep Europe safe and democratic. Not every issue will be easy to resolve, but America at our best stands for human rights, for everyone. My administration will enlist your support on the path to achieving lasting peace and prosperity for the region and all who live there.

Together we can help make real the dream of a Europe that is peaceful, democratic, and free from fear and from oppression -- a Europe whole and free, from the Baltic, to the Black Sea – and in the Kerry administration, to the Adriatic.

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