

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

CROATIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO TRANS-ATLANTIC
BONDS AND SOLIDARITY: PUNCHING ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

A CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT KOLINDA GRABAR-KITAROVIĆ

Washington, D.C.
Friday, September 28, 2018

PARTICIPANTS:

Conversation:

JOHN R. ALLEN
President
The Brookings Institution

H.E. KOLINDA GRABAR-KITAROVIĆ
President
Republic of Croatia

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure to have you all with us today. I'm John Allen, I'm the president of the Brookings Institution. And it's also a pleasure to welcome those who are coming in via webcast.

Today is another reiteration of the Alan and Jane Batkin International Leaders Forum here at Brookings. And I could not be happier than to welcome this morning Her Excellency, the president of the Republic of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic.

President Grabar-Kitarovic is the fourth president of Croatia, the first woman to be elected to that office, and the youngest president to be elected to that office.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Thank you.

GENERAL ALLEN: Absolutely. I've known her for some time. We first crossed paths when she was the assistant secretary general of NATO, the first woman to serve in that position, and the most senior woman who had served at NATO to that point. I have to tell you that her long and distinguished service to Croatia has been exceptional. By any measure, not by just Croatian standards, but by the standards of any country around the world.

Madam President served as minister for European integration immediately after the republic was formed. She would then be named as the foreign minister of Croatia. Following a very successful term as the foreign minister of Croatia she would be named as the ambassador to the United States. And again, strengthened the relationship between Croatia and the United States. From that tour she would become again, as I mentioned briefly, the assistant secretary general for public diplomacy at NATO. And from there would be elected to the presidency of the Republic of Croatia.

I have to make just a couple of comments. First, one of the observations that I've had of Madam President since the moment I met her was the integrity with which she

lived her life and the distinction that she brought to everything she ever did, not just on behalf of Croatia, but on behalf of the liberal democratic states in the community of nations.

And I often take this opportunity when I will be with you or others of our friends, America's friends, to thank Croatia for the sacrifices that this country, Croatia, has made on behalf of women's rights around the world, but in particular, your forces truly distinguish themselves within the NATO and International Security of Systems Force Coalition in Afghanistan. And you visited them regularly as the assistant secretary of NATO, but you visited all the forces regularly, but you never missed the opportunity when you were there to stand for the rights of women and to do all you could in this very traditional society where the rights of women are always at risk, you stood for them, and Croatia stood for them. And I think all of us who observed you in that process were enormously proud of that.

And then of course as we have come to know you, many of us have most recently seen Madam President at the end of the World Cup where Croatia took on France in the finals of the World Cup. And I think I speak for everyone in this room, and I believe by going out over the webcast, I probably speak for everyone who watched that event around the world, how proud we were of Croatia that day and how proud we were of the example you set for all of us as the President of Croatia in the aftermath of that event.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Thank you.

GENERAL ALLEN: And Madam President has very kindly consented to have lunch after this event with the Women's Impact Network of Brookings, where we hope to establish a relationship between this institution and the Republic of Croatia. Ambassador Simunovic is here with us this morning to begin the conversation within this institution with Croatia on the issues of women's rights globally.

We're going to run several minutes of my asking Madam President some questions, she'll respond. We are collecting your questions on cards, and they'll be

presented to me at the end of our Q&A, which will run for about 40 minutes or so. We're on the record, Madam President, and we're going out over webcast. And then we'll have the opportunity for her to respond to some of your questions as well. And we'll end, as I always try to do, on time, which will be at noon.

So, Madam President, thank you for joining us today. And Croatia, of course, plays an enormously important role in the community of nations, in Europe within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and I'd like to touch many of those.

But I know that you were personally responsible in many ways for Croatia's accession into the European Union years ago. We're five years on, and we would love to hear from you your views from your perch today as the President.

In the aftermath of that good work, how do you see and how do you reflect upon Croatia's joining the European Union. And then perhaps talk about some of the stresses that the European Union faces today.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Yes. Well thank you very much, and first of all thank you very much, General Allen. I don't know what they call you these days, but as we work together, for me you were General Allen, COMUSAF, and then in different capacities as well.

And first of all good morning to you all dear friends. I see so many familiar faces in the audience that I remember not only from my time as Croatia's ambassador to the United States but also as NATO assistant secretary general and in my previous capacities as well. And thank you for your interest in Croatia, and thank you for your interest in these topics.

You were very gracious in your introduction of what I have done so far. And, yes, I have really tried so far not to move forward only Croatia's interests, but the interests also of my gender of women, and also to bring about the equality in the world. In particular in

Afghanistan where our troops are doing a great job together, shoulder to shoulder. And I never miss the opportunity to thank the American troops and all of the other coalition troops for their service, for their sacrifices, because they are doing a wonderful job.

In spite of the world media focusing on these high profile events that involved assassination and attacks, what we have been doing in Afghanistan and in other parts of the world is really helping the people from within, from the roots, in order to instill what I regard as universal human rights. Not issues of cultural, of religion, or anything else. Because every true cultural and religion regards every single person as equal to each other. And this is the position that we have been taking together in the context of the coalition and in our individual work.

Now looking at our EU membership, I have to say that for Croatia, it was a huge success because that was one of the goals that we put forward when we were striving for independence from the former Yugoslavia. Which was just one of the state contracts in our region. So when people say or sometimes are even sad about the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, we have to remember that all of our countries in the territory of the former State used to be independent states at one point or another, and we were a part of different State contracts that sort of tried to exploit the fact that we need to be equal and that we need to express not only our national interests, but the collective interests of the region.

So having regained independence, one of our primary goals was to become a member state of the European Union. In the meantime the European has become, I would say, not more complicated, but more complex than when we strived to become a member state. And it's an epitome of freedom.

We were at war, we were a victim of aggression and occupation in the early 90s. We remember the Berlin Wall, we remember the Iron Curtain that Churchill, who coined the phrase, said that it has descended from Chechen and the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic.

And we remember the reasons, the values, why the European Union was founded.

First it was a peace project to remove any reasons for any kind of armed conflict on the European soil. And secondly, it was a value project that allowed for all of us, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall. And I think of what was the greatest success of the European Union is really incorporating the countries that were behind the Iron Curtain by making them part of democratic societies, of market economies, and by upholding the values of freedom of the individual. But also of the responsibility not just towards your own state or nation, but towards the European Union and towards the human kind. And of upholding the values of solidarity and working together towards global peace, no matter how limited our capacities may be either in the national function or on the level of the European Union, but making the European Union really the most successful integration process in the world so far.

And in spite of all of the circumstances that we're facing today, having celebrated the fifth anniversary of Croatia's succession to the European Union, we're very proud to be one of the nations that supports a European Union of equal nations that is against any divisions, any kind of European Union that would be divided into core and periphery or a multi-tiered European Union, that we are in favor of the European Union that is connected to the citizens, that cares about its neighborhood, and that is a global player that actually contributes to resolving the root causes of the joint security challenges that we're all facing today, the European Union and the United States equally.

So five years after having succeeded to the EU, I must say that in the beginning I was a little bit disappointed. Because in the beginning we behaved like a State who was there, thinking, okay, we need to follow European policies, we need to fulfill these criteria. It took some time to have that switch from attendant country to an EU member country and to start participating very actively in creating and leading rather than following.

Because all of us, be it small in geographical size or big in geographical size,

are equal members of the European Union. And this is one of the aspects that I also underlined in my speech at the United Nations General Assembly. There are no small countries --

GENERAL ALLEN: That's right.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: -- in terms of size of territory and population. We're only as big as we make of ourselves. So we need to be ambitious, we need to have a vision, and we need to have that courage to implement the vision.

GENERAL ALLEN: Okay. I wish every American could have heard that, and why. Because in the end the European Union stands for values.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: It does. And we want to protect those values.

GENERAL ALLEN: Extraordinarily important values in a world today where values are frequently trampled on with alternative facts and in post-truth environments, it just makes it difficult to articulate values and then to hold them dear. And for those Americans who see the European Union potentially as a competition or even as a foe, I think that we've heard from Madam President a view that is extraordinarily constructive and one that we should note.

I think it's really important to recognize that the trauma that Croatia went through in the aftermath of the breakup of Yugoslavia, in what they would term and what we should all learn a bit more about, the Homeland War, the destruction that Croatia went through, the personal sacrifices of the citizens of Croatia, the entire region went through with that war, to have Croatia emerge from that moment of national trauma and seek to be part of an organization that stands for values and equality, nation for nation. You could have gone another way. And I think we're all better for that.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Definitely. Thank you. Thank you. It

wasn't an easy process. And when you say that, unfortunately, sometimes the EU is perceived as a foe. That couldn't be further from the truth.

GENERAL ALLEN: That's our view by the way here.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: No, the European Union, believe me, is the biggest ally and partner of the United States. And Croatia and countries like Croatia are really your biggest partners and your biggest allies. And when I listened to President Trump speech in the United Nations, asking for respect and saying that the United States will provide assistance only to those countries who respect the United States, that trade should be free and fair. Well I can say we think reciprocally as well. We want to be respected as well. And we want that free and fair trade.

For instance, Croatia has been asking for an avoidance of double taxation treaty ever since the 90s. We still haven't been able to conclude the treaty, apparently for lack of administrative capacity, which is hard to believe looking at your -- and I'm being really honest right now -- looking at your administrative capacities as the United States. So when President Trump asks for free and reciprocal trade, we ask for the same. We ask that Croatia be given the same respect and the same benefit of concluding that avoidance of double taxation treaty, which in my opinion, is just a technical issue that can be negotiated very quickly based on the treaties that we already have with other nations.

And by the way, Croatia is the only nation of the European Union, and one of the three nations of NATO that doesn't have that treaty with the United States. So, yes, it would be great for us to fulfill what President Trump is asking, but let's have that relationship of mutual respect. And in Croatia, believe me, as the United States, you'll have one of the most foremost allies and partners.

For us the United States is really one of the most foremost friends and allies. But the people of Croatia are still looking to these little -- to the US, you know, in the global

sense, a nation of four million people is tiny, it's just a drop in the ocean. But for us it means the world. It's the partnership, the equality that we want. We will support you, we supported you after September 11, we've been together in Afghanistan shoulder to shoulder since 2003. We've been part of the forward enhanced presence in Lithuania and in Poland. In Poland under a US leadership, and we'll continue to do that.

We sort of respond to every request from the United States in order to contribute to global peace and security and will continue to do so, of course, in the context of our own abilities because we have limits in terms of our absorption capacity and human and financial resources.

But 6,000 people from Croatia, 6,000 of our troops, of whom I'm so proud, have participated in the ISAF and Resolute Support Mission. Maybe in overall numbers it seems a small number to you but if you compare it to per capita numbers we're so very close to US participation.

So I think when we look at our relations we shouldn't think of these overall numbers but in the contribution that we make that really comes from the heart, and that really contains the epitome of what Croatia has gone through. Aggression, occupation, reconciliation, rebuilding, we understand these aspects. We want to use this experience in Afghanistan and in other places. And I think that in that sense, although again not a geographical big country, but we can find that special niche where we give that special contribution that is different from countries who have forgotten in the meantime what it means to live in the Europe that has razor or barbed wires on the borders, that has a wall, that has checkups in between our borders, that does not look at every single country as deserving the same rights, but that looks at sort of a multi-tiered element.

I think that the fact that all of us in Central Europe, I don't like to call it Eastern Europe, because I think that Eastern Europe is further away from us. But that

Central Europe that was absorbed through the fifth enlargement wave in the European Union and that has proven to be one of the staunchest supports of the US in terms of the transatlantic relationship, needs to be taken into account.

And in that sense, let me give you an example. For instance, Croatia can look through a fresh perspective, fresh eyes. Together with the Polish President Duda, the two of us approximately at the same time, came up with this idea of creating the Three Seas Initiative, connecting the Baltic, the Adriatic, and the Black Seas. Why? Because there are still differences in Europe that you can see in infrastructure, that you can see in the standard of living, and even in the opportunities for our own people. There are still divisions embedded not only in the physical differences, but in the minds of people of the old versus the new Europe, or the west versus the east. So President Duda and myself, about three years ago, started working on this Initiative of the Three Seas connecting again, the three seas of that area of Central Europe.

And in the beginning the initiative was looked at with a little bit of skepticism from all sides. It was declared as an American Trojan horse in Europe. It was declared as a cordon sanitaire towards Russia, or something that is aimed against the rest of Europe, etcetera. But our goals are just, you know, to provide the exact same opportunities for our own citizens from the Baltic to the Adriatic to the Black Seas, as the citizens of the other countries who had enjoyed the freedom, not only of democratic systems, but also of market economy for a much longer time than we have. We're still struggling, not only with the physical elements of connecting our infrastructure, most notably when it comes to the Three Seas Initiative in terms of transportation, energy, digitalization, etcetera, but it's also the mind sets.

The mind sets that we need to keep changing. Both in the so-called West Europe, but also in East Europe as well. And I see that in Croatia every single day. And

that's one of the things that I keep fighting against. Because there is -- sometimes I have a feeling that we're running in circles, that we have the same old, the same old people who grew up under the old system, who have not had the benefit of mobility that the EU provides and that the United States provides as well. And that we're sort of re-implementing the old formula that did not work earlier.

So I think that we need modernization in our part of the world, which the Three Seas Initiative is aimed at. But also modernization in the thinking of the European Union. And I would say in particular in the transatlantic thinking.

I appreciate -- I listened very closely to what President Trump had to say in New York. And I must say that probably the overall expression or impression was that the speech ultimately was not as harsh as it had been expected by some of the European allies. And there are elements, such as the revival of the Monroe Doctrine and some of the elements of free trade that is taking us backwards. But there's also elements, I think, of mutual respect and the respect for the sovereignty and the sovereign decisions. And what I would in particular underline as a person who grew up under Communism is the majesty of freedom at what he said, the dignity of the individual that was not respected under Communism, and a system like that it was always about some kind of a collective, strong families, deep faith. So that's what's bringing us all closer together.

I wish we will overcome some of the differences that we have with respect to solving some of the hot spots in the world and in particular the free trade between the United States and the European Union that I mentioned already, the Croatia Bilateral Treaty which I hope that it will come into existence.

But overall, the dignity of the individual and the respect for each other I think is what really underlies the international relations and our mutual relationship.

GENERAL ALLEN: One of the things that we have frequently spoken about

here at Brookings is the value of the American relationship, the US relationship, with the Central European States.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Yeah.

GENERAL ALLEN: For all the reasons you've just said. They're not big countries, they're small countries. That's an irrelevant measure. But in many respects they are new democracies for whom all of those points that you've just mentioned, inheritance to the human law, human rights, traditional values, all of those things.

There are some countries that have taken that for granted. And when America needs to get an infusion of the excitement of democracy and human rights and the rule of law, we ought to be paying very close attention to our friends in Central Europe for whom this is a new experience, and who clutch it very closely to their hearts. And I think it's an important realization for us to have as well.

You don't like the term "The Balkans."

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: No.

GENERAL ALLEN: You have another term for it "Southeast Europe." And there are candidate members in that region, Southeast Europe, that could succeed eventually to the EU or even to NATO. As you think about the region, help Americans and help Brookings to understand, because I believe your view is unique and it's extraordinarily constructive.

As you think about Southeast Europe, what is that mean for us, what does that mean for the region, and what advice would you give to potential States accessing into those two organizations?

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Well let me just explain why my resistance to the term "Balkans," or the "Western Balkans," which is the official designation of the European Union or NATO when they refer to our immediate neighborhood.

Unfortunately, Balkanization has become a global trope designing dissipation, war, instability, etcetera. And I think that as long as we call the area the Western Balkans there will be a psychological barrier in the minds of people, of citizens of the other countries of the European Union, well nobody wants Balkans in their home, of course, nobody wants dissipation and war.

In addition to that, I mean it's in an indispensable part of Europe, so currently it's a vacuum that needs to be filled. So we're not talking about enlargement, we're talking about consolidation in Europe.

GENERAL ALLEN: It's a great term. That's a really important realization.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Yes.

GENERAL ALLEN: Consolidation of Europe.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Consolidation of Europe. And Southeast Europe is not only a more neutral geographical term for the region, but it's the right term because it's Europe.

GENERAL ALLEN: Right.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: It's part of Europe and it shouldn't be called anything else but Europe. I know that there are a lot of people in the region who call themselves to be proud Balkans, inhabitants, etcetera, and I respect that. But again, I resist the term because I think it has been a barrier to that consolidation of Europe and the European Union.

Croatia has been one of the staunchest supporters of integration of our neighboring countries in the European and NATO for those who chose to do so. Of course the decision is up to the citizens of these countries to make. But we've been doing everything that we can in order to help them politically and technically in helping to fulfill the criteria.

So for me, looking at the situation right now, we have the upcoming referendum in Macedonia this Sunday. Of course I stick to the principle that as President of a country, according to what the Venice Commission has said and has prescribed, I shouldn't be involved in any referenda either in Croatia or in any neighboring countries. But I truly hope that the people of Macedonia will take the right decision that will take them forward into the European Union, into NATO, and that for most of us have been fighting so staunchly to bring Macedonia into the Euro Atlantic fold will make it a lot easier to argue the process.

So I wish the people of Macedonia, whether they be Macedonians or Albanians or any other minorities, all the best, and I hope that they take the right decision that may take them forward.

Another aspect is Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we have the elections coming up on the 7th of October. And I have been openly criticized by some politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina for interfering in the domestic affairs. Well first of all I have to say that in today's world, when it comes to human rights and the rights of nations and minorities, appealing to internal affairs, unfortunately, is a distinction that belongs to undemocratic countries.

So I think that we all look at State Department or any other reports about the state of the human rights or the rights of minorities or the rights of religious or ethnic minorities in our countries as something that comes in useful in what we work towards achieving.

Additionally, Croatia is one of the signatories or co-signatories of the Dayton Peace Accords, which are also the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. So it's our obligation to uphold that constitution, to protect the rights of the Croatian nation as one of the constituent nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the entire territory. And I will never get tired or discouraged to continue to fight for the equal rights of the three nations, including the

Croatian nation, even if I be accused of meddling or interfering in internal relations.

And this, again, is not the case. Because what I'm doing is I'm upholding the decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina which says that the current electoral legislation is not in line with the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

So what I want for the outcome of these elections to produce a functioning government, both on the level of the country, and on the federation level, and to protect the Croatian nation as one of the constituent nations in the country. I wish them all the best, and I hope that after October 7th we'll be able to talk about Bosnia and Herzegovina continuing in the direction of more reform and more stabilization in the political emancipation.

What I'm truly disturbed and worried about is the lack of interest of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The US, the European Union, I think that everyone is taking peace and security for granted, and it's not like that. I mean just one single incident could trigger a series of events that creates instability in the whole neighborhood, in the whole region.

Now when it comes to Serbia, I've invested so much of what I would call political capital in improving our relations with Serbia. And I must say that I'm really not happy about the inflammatory rhetoric that comes from the other side. Because within just a few minutes you can create situations that cannot be repaired for years afterwards. And what we want is full normalization.

We want to resolve issues from the past. In particular the missing persons from the war. There's still thousands of families, both on Croat and Serb side, waiting for that closure. And we want to solve the border issues and all else. And we want to help Serbia to proceed on the way to the European Union. But they must fulfill the same criteria that Croatia has fulfilled as well.

GENERAL ALLEN: My colleagues, I think, have some questions. I'm going

to ask, Madam President, one more question, and we'll do what we can to have some of these be asked. And the first one actually corresponds with the direction I wanted to go in.

Again, in addition to the presence of His Excellency the ambassador, we also have your defense attaché here, Brigadier General Olujic, who we served together briefly at Central Command, but he also served in Afghanistan with me. So this question is related to that.

And that is, and we've talked about this in the past. The intersection of the EU and NATO is extraordinarily important to Croatia. And you've been such a great contributor to the NATO missions over time. But we find now that such things as migration and other forces that are at work have made things difficult, have put real stress on both of those organizations.

From your position as (inaudible), and as truly a world leader, your observations of these stresses and your confidence about the capacity of both the EU and NATO to maintain its cohesion under these stresses. What are your thoughts at this point?

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Well first of all I have to tell you that during the migration wave in 2015/2016, I was very critical of that. And I'd say that I was perhaps misunderstood in parts of the Croatian and international audiences. Because I'm not, of course, against migrants or the fact that every single person on this planet has the right to a better life.

But what we did at that time was a chaotic flow of migrants that actually put us in a situation as the European Union that we were breaking the law, international law, or being even immoral in terms of letting people who had the means, the financial means, who were physically fit enough, that means men mostly from age 16 to 45, to get to the European Union and I knew that the doors were going to close sooner or later. And that was what I was warning about. We're letting in a number of people, but what about people who are left

behind?

So what happened afterwards is that we started fighting and bickering about 1.2 million people who had made it to Europe, to the European shores, about the distribution as per different countries. Whereas 69 million people were left behind.

And I will never forget when I was minister of foreign affairs and when I thought, "Oh, you know, such a difficult life, you're under attack from the public, etcetera." And when I was traveling in, I think it was in Frankfurt, that I picked up one of the international papers. And the front page was divided into about six different areas that showed mothers in Iraq at that time.

GENERAL ALLEN: Right.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: By the bedside of their children in hospitals, not being able to get them food or medication, etcetera. So I carried that with me and I said whenever I thought that I had a difficult life, I took out that paper and I looked at it, and I said "Well, there are so many people in this world who have such more of a difficult time and who are thinking about the very existence of their children." And during that migration crisis I was thinking about the same, you know, that there's these young persons getting into the European Union, but what about the mothers in Syria thinking about how they're going to feed their children or give them medication. What about those in Afghanistan and other places of the world.

So first and foremost I thought that it was unfair. And secondly, I thought that we were supporting human trafficking networks who help those who have the means, financial, physical, or other means, to get to the Europe to the European Union. So in my opinion it remains our joint responsibility.

Croatia, again, does not have huge economic means. But we support the global compact and we support the common European asylum policy. On the other hand

we're also asking for solidarity in thinking of what you want to do or what you can do with migrants. Because you don't want to isolate them, you don't want to ghettoize them. In order to absorb the migrations you need to involve them fully in the life of the society. So you need to give them jobs, you need to give them a proper place in society, you need to give education both to local communities but also to most of these migrants who, as you know, are not all of them are benevolent to begin with, but most of them have a different idea of human relationships look like. So you need to teach them about equality, about universal human rights, about the rule of law about the fact that men and women are equal in the right to work, etcetera.

So it's a lot more complex than just talking about 1.2 million migrants whom we want to distribute around the world. It's our joint responsibility, but first and foremost in uprooting the causes of migrations, and that is instability, terrorism, inequality, lack of education, lack of gender equality, etcetera. So it's a long-term job.

And I'm very sympathetic, and I have great empathy for each and single person, but this cannot be resolved just by moving populations from one place to another. Because what we do ultimately would empty the areas for the radicals to actually win.

GENERAL ALLEN: That's right.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: It's very complicated, it's very difficult, it's a long-term, it requires a lot of energy, but it's also requires a lot of solidarity that goes in multiple directions.

GENERAL ALLEN: An important question. I want to make sure that we can get this one off. Jim Mattis, who you may have heard of.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Yes.

GENERAL ALLEN: Has been very clear publicly in stating that Croatia punches well above its weight. And you truly do, both in terms of your influence in security

matters but also in being a great ally to the United States in the NATO context. You've recently gone through the experience of the NATO Summit, in addition to the UNGA. As you look at NATO from your position now as the president and the commander in chief of the Croatian armed forces, and you've heard so much conversation about the two percent and are we going to make two percent, and if we ever made two percent what is that actually mean for NATO.

What are your thoughts I that regard? Because NATO, of course, is the largest, most successful military alliance on the planet.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Absolutely.

GENERAL ALLEN: And in so many ways has brought us the values or preserved the values that you talked about are accumulated because of the EU. Tell us your thoughts about NATO and this controversy about two percent.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Well first of all, Jim is a great friend.

GENERAL ALLEN: Yes, he is.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: And he has visited Croatia several times. And he really understands the difficulties not only in Croatia but other countries that have gone through the same experience are experiencing, and that we are punching above our weight in terms of if you look at overall numbers it doesn't seem that great. But if you look in per capita numbers you'll see that Croatia is contributing much more than many of the NATO or EU member countries who have had marked economies and solid democracies for much longer than we had.

So what do I think? I think about two percent. I mean before the summit in Brussels I visited with the secretary general. It was perhaps a couple weeks before that. And a journalist asked me "What do you think President Trump was going to say." And I said "Well, you know, he's probably going to ask about the two percent, but rightfully so." Because

this isn't just an international commitment that we took in Wales when we all committed to spend two percent of our GDP for national defense, and I don't look it as spending, but as an investment. Not because of that, but because of our own responsibility towards our own societies.

And when Jim said that we're punching above our weight, it's not only that we're fulfilling the NATO criteria of fulfilling the certain elements that NATO has set for Croatia. But we've gone above and beyond that in participating in Afghanistan and other missions in Lebanon as well, and in enhanced forward presence in Lithuania and Poland. But also in, for instance, acquiring our own new, or relatively new, used aircraft, but new capability of a fixed wing aircraft, supersonic aircraft, in order to maintain that capability.

Because we're looking into the future, we're not looking at the situation today and the potential challenges that we're facing, we're looking into the future and what could happen and what Croatia needs to contribute in order to protect not just ourselves but the neighborhood and the alliance as whole.

The alliance is a great umbrella of security for us all. But what I always say, it's first and foremost to all of us to provide for our own defenses, to rely on ourselves. It comes in great that we're a member of NATO, but the fact that we're capable, not just militarily, but in all other sense, is the best deterrent against any future potential danger to Croatia, be it in the security or any other area.

So I think that two percent is fair enough, although the GDP is changing, Croatia's GDP is rising, so it's not going to be easy to catch up with the two percent. But I remember the time when I was minister of foreign affairs and when I was negotiating Croatia's accession into NATO, when I was here as Croatia's ambassador, who actually delivered that prodigal on accession on the 1st of April of 2009 when Croatia acceded to NATO, that we had promised, we had committed to that.

And keeping commitments, keeping your promises to each other and to others for me is one of the basic elements apart from respect, of international relations. And you can't just say "Oh, it was the former government." No, it's the responsibility of a continuity of different governments and different presidents who determine these elements that are so essential to our national policies that contribute also to our joint security.

GENERAL ALLEN: Let me ask you a final question. I just want to make sure that we have the chance to get to this.

You are in fact the commander in chief of a very effective military, and as you say, you're working to modernize it and to play an even more important role within NATO. But you're also the president of a country that has a very effective football team.

Now recently, I think we all know, in Russia you placed second in the World Cup. So you don't have to comment on this, but your views on who in the final match Vladimir Putin was rooting for. You don't have to comment on that.

But the accomplishments of your athletes have not been insignificant. And what has that meant for your country and how you feel about each other as Croatians, but also how the world views Croatia.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: I mean it just goes to show that the magnitude or the size of the country is not determined by the size of the territory or the number of population, it's the talent that you have and the way that you use it. And as I said so many times these days, we have many Luka Modrics. And Luka Modric, for those who do not know, has been declared the best player in the world by FIFA, and I'm so proud of him. He's a personal friend of mine, I know his family really well. I've watched so many games together with his dad before I became president as well. And I'm so proud of him and of all the other players of the team. Because many of them have gone through very difficult personal histories and circumstances.

And Luka was one of those. Just one of those, one of the several players who were driven out of their homes, and he had seen his grandfather shot before his eyes. But that did not stop him in setting the goals to be the best in the world.

And for me, being in Russia was an emotional roller coaster really. On the one hand nobody had expected Croatia to become second and to win silver. On the other hand, of course, we were a little bit disappointed that we didn't win the gold, and we were rooting for that. So that emotional roller coaster went up and down.

And to respond to your question, and I told -- I mean we're talking informally right now, so I told the minister of foreign affairs, the Russian Federation, Lavrow, that I have a feeling that President Putin was cheering a little bit more for Croatia. But it doesn't matter. What matters is that he was really kind. He went down to me, to the locker room, both to the French locker room. And the French were very gracious, and we received so many congratulations from the French people, so no hard feelings whatsoever. And President Macron and myself have already made a deal that we'll be there in November to see the finals of the Davis Cup between Croatia and France.

GENERAL ALLEN: We know how we want that one to go.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Yes, of course, Croatia's going to win. But it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, it's just about the sportsmanship, about what connects us, about what makes us people, about what delivers that respect towards each other.

So for me the breaking moment was Luka Modric. So he's on top of the world, he receives this cup as the best player of the World Cup in Russia. And I see tears in his eyes and I see that he would have gladly have exchanged that personal trophy that he got for the other trophy that I kissed goodbye for four years only. And I said "Okay, you're coming back to Croatia in four years in Qatar during the next world championships." But I saw it in his eyes that he would have gladly exchanged that cup for the one that goes to the

team and to the country. And that's the ultimate patriotism.

GENERAL ALLEN: That's wonderful. That's wonderful. Thank you.

Madam President, we can't thank you enough for being with us today. We have something we'd like to give you, and it's relevant to the last question. We all saw you, with great admiration, on the pitch after the soccer match. First of all, Croatia has a really cool jersey, we have to tell you that.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Oh, it's wonderful, I know.

GENERAL ALLEN: We love it, and I don't use the word --

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: We ran out of all those from the -- sorry, from the former World Cup we need to start printing new ones.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, and I don't use the word "cool" very often, but it really is a cool jersey. Now all of us who watched with great pride the performance of Croatia in the finals recognized that you were standing in the rain out there, hugging the players and leading by example. And while there could not been yet another umbrella over President Macron's head --

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Yeah, but he got wet as well.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, okay. But you really got wet. And so what we want to make sure of is that in the future, should you -- and undoubtedly in Qatar you will find yourself, probably doesn't rain much in Qatar, but we never want you to be in a place in the world where Brookings isn't over your head taking care of you.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Oh, thank you.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT GABAR-KITAROVIC: Thank you.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020