

Saturday, March 16, 2013

Brussels Forum

Conversation with Baroness Catherine Ashton

Mr. Craig Kennedy: Good morning. So we must be doing right. The room was filled on a Saturday morning at 9:15. I hope you had terrific discussions last night. It was fascinating watching as people left the night owls. You get a sense that there were some very lively discussions. It's just great to have such an engaged crowd here. This morning, we have two back-to-back sessions. We're going to start out with Cathy Ashton, who needs no introduction, for a conversation that she's going to do with Steve Erlanger. And then, we're going to move directly into a very, very provocative session on China.

I can just say thank you for being here again, to have someone of your stature that is so engaged in this Brussels Forum means a tremendous amount to us. So thank you very much and we're looking forward to what you have to say this morning. Mr. Erlanger.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Thank you, Craig. Thank you very much. Welcome to everyone. This is brief. We only have half an hour so I want to get right into it. You all know who Cathy Ashton is. There are probably 50 things I want to ask you and 100 things everyone wants to talk about. But I did want to give you first--I mean, you took this job, which was invented, in a way, in 2009. You're coming toward the end of a first term, which I think has one more year to go. I mean, what have you built? Could you explain to people? I think there's a lot of confusion. I mean, after Solana left, you took something under a new treaty. What have you produced? I mean, how many people? What's the budget? Where are you?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Where am I? I think I'm in Brussels but I'm never sure. The treaty, the Lisbon treaty, tried to do something, I think, quite amazing, which was it said, you know, Europe does extremely well on economic issues by using its self-power, by working collaboratively. What about doing that on foreign

policy? What about actually bringing together the way that Europe operates in the world into a cohesive thing? And any of you outside of the EU have kind of dealt with Europe, will know that trying to work your way through the different bits of the European Union can sometimes be a bit of a challenge.

So what they did was take three different roles and turn them into one. Javier Solana was a high representative. There was a vice president role of the commission and there was a rotating presidency role.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: And the aid role.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, there were other things attached. I'll come up to that. But those three fundamental roles were brought together into one role called the high representative vice president. And the ambition was to bring together the external activities of the European Union, to be coordinated, to function in a specific way.

And I'll give you an example of that. When I was first looking at how we might approach our work with

Somalia, I brought together in one room in Brussels the people who were working on the anti-piracy campaign, the military, the navy, different people from different parts of the defense world of the European Union, together with those working on how to support justice and the development of the government, together with those who were running the 30 development projects in Brussels. They were all based in Brussels and they had never sat together before.

So the big change was to bring it all together. The service was transformed from being delegations dealing with specific commission issues, development, aid, work on climate change, into being more like a foreign policy service. We have 140 delegations across the world. The budget is about half a billion. The context is naught-point-naught-three percent of the overall budget, before you think I'm spending too much money, and there's about three and a half thousand people who operate for us across the world.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Because, I mean, one of the things that fascinates me is given - everyone talks about how big European Union is and it's bigger than the United States and it has more people and the economy's bigger and it spends as much money on defense, in some fashion or another, but it still feels very puny. It doesn't carry its weight. And you are supposed to be the foreign minister for this big pygmy. And why? I mean, why is there such a disconnect between the chest-beating economic power of the European Union, even in an age of austerity, and, you know, the focus of your office on basically side issues, small issues?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, I don't agree with that analysis because there were two things I said at the beginning, which I think are still true. The first is that Europe should be judged by its impact on its own neighborhood, south and east. A lot of the focus of our work is on supporting economically and politically the countries of our region. And we do that, not just through my office, but actually through all of the

foreign ministries of the European Union. Everything I do is done by unanimity in the council. Therefore, we work together as a team.

And the second thing I said was that we needed to develop our strategic relationships across the world with countries like, of course, the United States, like Russia and China, but also Brazil, India, South Africa and the regional organizations who we increasingly work with, the Arab League, the Africa Union and so on. That's where I think we can add value to what individual member-states are doing.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: But let me ask you, let's say, on Syria. I mean, there's a big debate. I've been told, maybe it's wrong, but you were taken by surprise by the British and the French going public so heavily on their desire to lift the arms embargo. Is that the way Europe should be working?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Did you read that in the media?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I've been told it.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: OK. No, look, the British and the French have made clear for a long time that this is an issue that they were most concerned with. And when the foreign ministers met on Monday, we were talking about Syria and talking, as you know, Akmar Bohimi(ph), who came to visit us. So I wasn't surprised. And, as you know, in the discussion that we had at the European Council yesterday, the decision was taken that this would go to the informal ministers meeting on Friday. Again, nobody announced it. See, a number of foreign ministers here will be at all surprised. But that's what we need to discuss.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I mean, your position, as I understand it, is hesitant on the idea of adding more arms to Syria. Is that true?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: What I said at the council was this, that any decision to lift an arms embargo, you need to consider the implications of that in a number of different ways. The ambition that everybody holds is to stop this killing and the war,

for Assad to leave and for a new government to come in that's going to be representative and respectful of its people.

The question is how do we do it. And in the end, you always need a political process, whatever else you might do. So what I said yesterday was before we make that decision, we have to work through, very carefully, the best understanding we can have of what would be the implications. Would putting more weapons into the field make it more or less likely that others will do the same? What would be the response of Assad, based on what we know about his response so far? Would it stop people being killed or would it kill people faster?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: You know, because, I mean--

Baroness Catherine Ashton: All of those--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: --the French and British are arguing that shifting the balance at this moment would produce in Assad more of a willingness to negotiate. But you're not convinced by that argument.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, I think we have to think about that very carefully and we also have to consult other people, you know, because the political work that's going on by Mr. Bahimi and also by Sheikh Muaz al Hatib, which is about trying to get some form of dialogue moving, they need to also be consulted about what they think because what we've got to make sure is anything we do does not make that harder.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Can I ask you? I mean, the Americans are saying Assad has to go, will go, you know, it's almost like a prayer. But what happens the day after Assad goes? Are you planning on what you should be doing for Syria, with Syria, for that day?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, we are, but essentially it's also for the Syrian people to be planning that. And when I first met with Sheikh Muaz al Hatib and with the opposition coalition, in all the meetings we've had with them, which have been very many, it's been about helping them work out what this roadmap, if you like, has got to be. How do you get

from here, through a transition which will be messy inevitably, into a process that can let people decide for themselves what they want to see from their own government?

And they started to do quite a lot of work on thinking that through. They're being helped by many people in this room, by many governments, by many individuals to do it. Because just as we've talked about before in other situations, you don't want the vacuum, because into the vacuum can come the kind of chaos that could be even worse.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: One other big topic that is very edgy these days, you're very intricately involved with, is the Iran talks and we've seen each other there. And talking to the political directors, they all give you very high marks on your handling of these talks. But are you afraid they're a kind of fig leaf for something else? I mean, are they a sideshow really to Iran's efforts, which it denies, of course, to build a bomb and a way of buying time? Because it seems to me

that the West doesn't want to come to the decision point either. Because if these negotiations fail the question becomes then what?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, you know, the mandate we were given by the Security Council was to try and find a diplomatic solution to the concerns that the international community has about what Iran is doing. I take that mandate incredibly seriously and that means we have to be determined and creative in our discussions with Iran to absolutely try to work through all of the ways in which we can persuade them to show that they mean what they say, which is that they want a civil program and not a nuclear weapons program.

And you know very well with Iran that that means building a level of communication, you might argue a level of trust, so that you can have those detailed discussions. When I first started to lead those negotiations, we weren't really discussing the subject. Now, we discuss the subject in detail. We have the slideshow presentations. We have a real discussion

about the issues, both when the technical level discussions take place and the political level discussions.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I mean, experts are about to meet in Istanbul--

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Yeah.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: --and then we'll have a better idea. But do you have, I mean, you know, to some degree, the P5-plus-1, the EU3+3 have made a couple of considerable concessions in their offer for this round, which is not to dismantle Fordo and to allow them to keep some 20 percent enriched uranium. And they seem to be being very careful to keep underneath the key redline of 240 kilograms of enriched. But do you have the sense they're really engaging this time or is that left to be seen?

I mean, when you listen to Jalili, you can't tell between the lectures about Iranian history and--

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, we don't get lectures now. And I've worked it out, I think, 27 hours

in bilaterals with Dr. Jalili so I know him a little bit and he doesn't do the lectures, you know. There is a history, which as in any discussion, is always present. But nonetheless we now talk about these issues. It remains to be seen. Look, I am determined to do my best with the support of the political directors and Helga, who leads a lot of this work, who's sitting over there, to do everything we possibly can to make this work.

And that means not making concessions, I wouldn't put it that way, but actually thinking through what is it that could make a difference? You see, what we're discussing now is not the end package. It's the first confidence-building measure.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well, that's right, and it's a long way from where they need to be.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Yeah, of course. But if we can do that, built into that is also the possibility of a timeframe--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I mean, Obama just said--

Baroness Catherine Ashton: --in which we would move forward.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: --that there's another year. So he seems to be wanting to push the clock back farther so maybe that gives you more time.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Lots of assessments are being made what could happen when and I've heard lots of different timeframes. We have to stick to the job we've been given, which is to show all of you that we really did work extremely hard, that we came up with ideas, that we listened to what Iran was saying and that we moved the issue forward.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: But can I--I mean, in a way in that role you are acting as an honest broker and a chairperson of a group of nations and in this job, in a sense, you're doing the same. And cruelly, one would say, it's a kind of maitre d' job. I mean, does that frustrate--shouldn't it be more? I mean, you're the foreign minister of the European Union. What do you want the European Union to be? I mean, can't you use

your bully pulpit actually to stand up and speak for the Union? Something some critics say you seem utterly reluctant to do?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: No, well, that's not true. I think, look, there are two or three different aspects to what we did. The first is developing the policy of the Union is, as I said, the process of unanimity between the ministers. I chair the foreign affairs council in foreign ministers', defense ministers' and development ministers' format. But the decision-making is done there. We agree and we conclude what our discussions are. But it's me that's put forward those conclusions. It's my services that drive what we should have on the agenda. We listen very carefully to our colleagues and we take into account what they want to discuss. But in the end, it's us that set the agenda and set out what we think we should conclude and then try and reach that agreement.

In the end, this is about Europe going forward. It's not about me being over here and the rest of the

27 nations being over because it's pointless. What we do have to do is drive forward.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Because I mean--

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Where I think--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Sorry.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: --but, no, but where I think it has to be recognized is there are specific issues where I think this role can do things on its own. You've talked about Iran. That's a very important role to be given, but there are many other areas. Soviet-Kosovo talks--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Yes, exactly.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: --are much in the news now, which is where I'm leading those and where what I'm doing is what I think the European Union can do best. But it's not about going out and saying we should be able to hear when actually the Union needs to move in that direction by itself.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: But I mean, can't you lead--I mean, if you come out and say something strong, who's

going to criticize you?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: But I think you--well, that would be an interesting question to put to the audience, wouldn't it?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I mean, not in public, certainly.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, but the implication is that I don't and I think that the, you know, that sometimes what I find fascinating is that people decide to interpret what I do in a very particular way. This role is given to a person in order that they can coordinate and pull forward and drive the foreign policy of the European Union, but it does not mean it's a role that means you move away from where Europe is heading or where Europe wants to go. And it's not about being criticized. I've had enough of that so I'm not worried about that anymore. But it's actually about saying, if you've got 27 foreign ministers in a room developing the policy together and then acting on the policy, it's a fantastic way of working.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well, let me ask you something. I mean, your title is, of course, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Europe is engaged in a deep round of austerity. Defense spending is dropping. The two main military powers, don't want to insult anybody else, but French and the British are both engaged in rethinking their defense systems. Um, the ability of Europe to actually have a military force in the world seems less and less and less. There were goals of, you know, putting 60,000 troops on the ground within two--I mean, nobody even talks about those anymore. The Franco-German Brigade does nothing. Do you feel that this is dying, this idea of Europe as a functional, active, self-acting military force that has a real security policy? That's what everyone wonders, that the EU seems to be dying.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: We spend \$200 billion euros on defense between the 27 nations and nobody will argue that we could spend it better. So what we--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: You mean no one will argue you

couldn't spend it better?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Couldn't spend it, that's right.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Correct.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: I mean, there's no question that we could do more with that. There are two or the three things that we do. First of all, it's really important that we get the opportunity to be able to, what we call, pool and share resources. Europe does a lot of things together so there's a whole program of activity on how we do that, how we can use our resources more efficiently and effectively together. Secondly, learning from things that have already happened. What happened in Libya taught us many lessons. One of them was air-to-air refueling capacity in the European Union so there is a European-led, by the European Defense Agency which I'm also head of, to develop better to air-to-air refueling. Equally, we work closely with NATO. I attend all the NATO foreign ministers and defense ministers meeting to try and

collaborate on program where we can be beneficial to all nations. So our work on improvised explosive devices is being used not just in the EU, but further afield.

There's a whole capacity within the European Union to use our defense resources more effectively and more efficiently, but these are national services. And the decisions to deploy and to put people in harm's way is a sovereign state responsibility.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: It's just that, you know, one thinks of the last two little engagements, I mean, and they were Libya, which, you know, was almost inevitable, but it was extraordinary. It took so long to defeat such a badly organized and equipped military, and Mali, where it seems even the French have given up on using EU resources for their military goals. So I mean, what is left? How can the EU have a serious pretention to play a role in international security when even its key members aren't using it?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: But I don't know what

you mean by France has given up on using EU resources.
You know--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well, I mean, even the training mission, I mean, this was part of the deal--

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Yeah, but China was just--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: --that was supposed to happen in October--

Baroness Catherine Ashton: No.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: --and it's still dragging on.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: It wasn't supposed to happen in October. About 18 months ago, we developed what I call the Sahel strategy, okay? And the ambition of that was to do what Europe does best, which is not just come up with one bit a solution, but look across the spectrum of things that need to happen. And in the Sahel, you have hunger. You have a lack of development. You have real lack of capacity for government to operate. You have huge challenges in the north of all of those countries that we call the Sahel. And you need

to put it together in a comprehensive way. We also put in the training mission. We have a mission in Niger and we had a mission that was ready to go in Mali. We think partly as a response to the fact that this was about to happen, you've started to see movement from those organizations in the north who wanted to take territory, possibly in order to bargain it away again. And at that point, the president invited France to send forces. We don't have the European force sitting in Brussels. What we have is the capacity to work together so we were in touch with Paris throughout. We brought forward the training mission, which wasn't due to start from some time, and now the beginnings of that are on the ground. We've worked--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: And have you yet pulled together the protectors for the training or are you still working on that?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: What you have to do is put together a whole group of different people from different nations and with the best one in the world,

it's not the fastest process, neither could it ever be, if you're going to do it that way. So yeah, everything's now in place and it's moving to get the rest of it on the ground in the next few weeks. That will enable us to start working with the training of the Malian forces as quickly as possible. But also, and it's a but also, we've mobilized the humanitarian aid. We've brought a lot of development money that was sitting and waiting to go is now ready to go out so that you've not only got the training mission, the French forces on the ground, the support to echo as we're moving in. You've also got development, humanitarian aid, support for the elections, and the roadmap, which has been really significant to work through with the Malian government, that gets them to a democratic future and an outreach to the people of the North.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Some people would have said your job is impossible and it takes a lot of patience, obviously, 27 people? I mean, what would you say are

the biggest constraints on you being able to do the job you really would like to do? I mean, nobody's very happy with any job that they do so I'm presuming there are areas of dissatisfaction that you feel.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: I think the biggest challenge is that if you could have chosen a time to create a brand-new service that has an enormous focus on its neighborhood, you probably wouldn't have chosen a time when austerity has hit the European Union, when budgets are so tight and when so much is happening in the neighborhood at the same time. And I've often described it as trying to fly a plane while you're building the wings at the same time. You know, even moving people from eight buildings into one, choosing the carpets and the curtains.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Getting deputies.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, yeah, but--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Budgets.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: --but yeah, the deputies is not the problem people think it is. Actually, I have

27 foreign ministers who work as a team and who are often out in the field, not just representing their own country, but working together, so it's not unusual to see two or three foreign ministers going out together and they also represent the Union. We have the rotating presidency that undertakes other issues, not foreign policy, but they're always willing to take on lots of meetings. We have Commissioners, Stephen Fuehlle, who does the neighborhood work, often represents me, as well as the senior team that I've got in the ES itself. So it's not the issue that perhaps people thought it was at the beginning, in my view.

You can argue we should have them formally, and that would make a difference, but we've managed to find lots of informal ways of doing it. But the biggest challenge is the times we live in and the fact that things change every day and we're always trying to, in a sense, respond as effectively as we can.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I mean, you're also Vice President of the Commission, and certainly in the

beginning, you may disagree, most people felt the Commission was trying to cut your wings or not let you grow any. Was that a mistake? Should you still be a Vice President of the Commission? Does it get in the way? And has that relationship improved or is it still difficult?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, I was nominated for this job by José Manuel Barroso originally and then supported by member states so he's always been a hugely supportive president.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Slightly jealous one, though.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: No, I don't think so. Well, why would he be jealous? Blimey. No, I don't think he's jealous at all and I think he really wants us to succeed. But, you know, when you create something new, and the External Action Service is one line in a treaty, you have to find ways of making it work because from the Commission side, there are lots of things that they want to work through with us about how we do something. From the Council side, they may take a

different view. And, you know, setting up what's called the political decision to make this happen, I had to get unanimity in the Council. I had to get the Commission completely on the side. So that's 27 foreign ministers, 26 of the Commissioners, and the Parliament because I also have to be before the Parliament so you have different institutions. And in anything that's created, there are different views and different priorities so people have aspirations for what you're going to do from their point of view, which you may not meet.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: What I'm hoping to do is take at least one or two questions from the audience. But my only real question before I do that, because I want people to think about what they want to ask is, in the beginning one had the feeling that countries were willing to give some sense of their sovereignty up for this greater goal of a foreign service. My impression is that's reversed again.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, I don't see it in

that way. I think the most important thing is that this is about when you bring together the sovereignty. It's not about losing it. And I think sometimes there's a misunderstanding about what this could be, at least in the beginning. You know, the real test of whether this new treaty and this new role and this new way of working is successful is further down the road because we're only at the very, very beginning of it. I see it much about people coming together and agreeing how to operate. It doesn't mean they lose their individuality. And if you've met the 27 foreign ministers--

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I've met some of them.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: --they're all individuals.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Yeah, and they're not shrinking violets in my experience, generally.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: No.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Question, anyone? In the back. Wait for the microphone and please identify yourself. Thanks.

Ms. Patrizia Antonini: Good morning, I am Patrizia Antonini from Mansa Press Agency. I have a question about the increasing diplomatic crisis we are having between Italy and India. And I wanted to ask the Commissioner if the EU thinks to play a role in helping to negotiate and find a solution to this?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: The particular thing you're referring to is the case of the Marines who have returned to Italy and who Italy is in discussion with India about how to move forward. For reasons that will be very obvious, I'm going to say very little about this. We are in touch with the Italian government. We're in touch with the Italian ambassador in India through our Ambassador, who is keeping in touch with this issue. But I'm really not going to comment on it right now because, as you will appreciate, there are some ongoing discussions between Italy and India that we need to see how they work out.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Okay, let's go to this gentleman here, if that's possible, and then Larry

Norman in the back. I think that's all I have time for. Go ahead, but please be brief.

Mr. Marcus Fuentes: Yes. My name is Marcus Fuentes from Brazil. My question is a quick one. With this idea of having a two-speed Europe, when it comes to economic integration, how will it affect the foreign policy being worked by one body? And second, what do you think will be your legacy in the future? Thank you.

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Easy questions. I don't believe in a two-speed Europe. For foreign policy, you know, I think we have a huge amount to offer from the experiences that we've had. And one of the things that's very interesting, and it's true in my discussions in Brazil, too, that people are very interested in how Europe is working through this very difficult economic time and sticking together. We have our debates quite often very vocally, very openly, because we're all democracies and that's what we do. And sometimes that's interpreted as being hostility to each other. It's not. It's about working through

something that's been very challenging, but we've stuck together. And I know many countries have been very pleased to see that and very interested.

My legacy will be the foundations of the External Action Service and the beginnings of what this role can be. It will grow and develop in ways I can only dream of or imagine in the future, but I hope what they'll have is a solid service, 140 delegations, and I believe quite a lot of respect across the world.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Larry.

Mr. Larry Norman: (Inaudible). You mentioned Serbia-Kosovo. There's been a flurry of meetings. You've been to Pristina. They've come here. How close are we to a breakthrough, do you think, in the ties between the two? Do you expect something to happen significant? I think we're meeting on Wednesday. And on this issue of legacy, what kind of characteristics would you like to see your successor have?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, I'm not going to answer the second question. My successor will be

chosen, I'm sure, very well and they will have 100 percent of my support for the rest of time.

For Serbia-Kosovo, let me just say I pay great respect to the two Prime Ministers, Prime Minister Tadic, Prime Minister Dacic, for being willing to come and sit together. They've met six times. They will meet on Wednesday. You're right. I've been to Pristina and to Belgrade. I think it is possible for them to reach an agreement. Whether they will or not will depend on whether we can find a way through some of the difficult problems they have. But I've met with members of the government and in Pristina, I met with the opposition parties. And there is, I think, a genuine willingness to achieve this. And I'll do my very best to see if we can.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Do you want a second term?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: There's no possibility having a second term and it needs to go to someone else next. I think it will have been a great privilege to have served in this role, but it's quite hard. And

there's a lot of travel and a lot of sitting on planes. And my dear friend Hilary Clinton and I talked about this a few times. It is exhausting at times. And I think, in any event, you lay the foundations, but there are people who can do things with this that probably I couldn't do so it would be good to hand it over.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I just want to ask you one last thing because we really are running out of time. It's a little bit special pleading, but Richard Holbrook, who was a man of many qualities, most of them good, was wonderful at using the press. Its relations with the press were sometimes complicated, but he always understood they were part of his job, that they were an intricate part of his diplomacy, of his effort, to win arguments. You seem shy of the press. I mean, you don't give briefings, you don't give off-the-record briefings. Why? What constrains you from being more of an advocate, even on a background basis, for issues that you're dealing with?

Baroness Catherine Ashton: Well, what we do is we use a lot of background briefings, but the background briefings are done by the experts that we have in the service. And we try and make sure that the briefings I do are on the record because that way we can get across the messages we want to do. Sometimes, and this is true in the question I had about Serbia-Kosovo, I very deliberately said very little because it's, A, important that this is their process and, B, because the media, in particular in Pristina and Belgrade, is anxiously trying to interpret all sorts of things that are said. If we're successful, I'll be talking a lot more. And I think it's also about recognizing that when we're working through issues, that's what we have to do.

But I (inaudible) on the Foreign Affairs Council, and I think what I do should be on the record and actually getting our specialists to do off the record.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well, Ms. Ashton, thank you so much for doing this. We much appreciate it.