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Remarks prior to discussions with President Glafcos Clerides of Cyprus and an exchange with reporters.(Transcript)

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Russian Elections, Trade With China, and Church Burnings in the South

President Clinton. Let me begin by saying how pleased I am that President Clerides is here. We want to discuss how the United States can help to promote a settlement that is fair and peaceful in Cyprus and what we can do in that regard. I intend to ask my Special Emissary, Richard Beattie, to go back to the region soon to explore further actions that the United States can take.

With regard to the elections in Russia, first, the United States applauds the fact that there was an election that, as far as we can tell, not only had a substantially high turnout but was a free and fairly conducted one. We now look forward to the next stage, the runoff between President Yeltsin and Mr. Zyuganov. We reaffirm our support for democracy and for market reforms. And we will be watching the development of events with great interest.

But this is a very significant thing for Russia to have this election. This had never happened before in a thousand years, where they elected a leader, and then they're going to have another election. And the Russian people are to be complimented, and the Russian leadership is to be complimented for supporting their Constitution and the electoral process. And we very much hope that Russia will continue to support democracy and reform.

With regard to China, as all of you know, we have been involved in an intellectual property rights dispute with China which has cost a lot of money and jobs to the United States. I am pleased that a good agreement has been reached with the Chinese which will protect intellectual property rights and avoid sanctions and allow us to go forward in ways that will be good for the relationship between the United States and China and good for the interest of American jobs and American businesses. I think this proves that staying involved and engaged with the Chinese through the difficult times as well as the good ones is the right course of action, and I am pleased with what's happened.

I'd like to make one final comment, if I might. I'm appalled, along with all Americans, that this wave of church burnings has continued. My heart goes out to the people in North Carolina and Georgia who are

affected. I am very much looking forward to the meeting on Wednesday with the Governors and the attorneys general and some other officials from the States affected, and I intend to continue to work to involve more people in this and to search for all the options at our disposal to try to resolve this matter.

But the - we need every person from every walk of life and all faiths in America to speak up against this. And the American people need to search their hearts about this. This has got to stop. This has got to stop. There is not a country in the history of the world that has valued religious liberty and valued religious expression more than the United States. This tears at the very heart of what it means to be an American. And I intend to keep working on it until we get some resolution of it.

Russian Elections

Q. Mr. President, are you surprised that the vote in Russia was as close as it was? Do you find that threatening in any way the course of U.S.-Russian relations?

President Clinton. No. President Yeltsin got about the vote he was predicted to get in the polls, and Mr. Zyuganov got more than he was predicted to get in the polls. But polling is inexact. And I think the main thing is there seems to have been a heavy majority of people who voted for the democratic process and for the path of reform. And that's good news.

Q. Have you spoken to President Yeltsin, Mr. President, or do you plan to after the voting?

President Clinton. I have not. I hope that we get a chance to talk. He's obviously got a lot of fish to fry right now, and he will be doing a number of things over the next couple of days. But I'm hopeful that we will have a chance to talk. I want to congratulate him on the election, not only on the showing, the strong showing that he made, but also on the fact that he really supported the Constitution, he supported the institution of the electoral process. And the very fact that it occurred in such a vigorous fashion I think is a real credit to him, as much as any other single person in Russia. And probably more than any other single person, he wanted Russia to be a free country that picked its leaders by elections. So he's got two reasons to be happy today.

Senate Whitewater Report

Q. Mr. President, can we ask you about the Whitewater draft report - could we ask you about that? The Whitewater-----

President Clinton. I have no comment.

Q. -----about the leak over the weekend?

Q. Are you concerned about these leaks?

Q. -----about the report itself, sir?

President Clinton. That's just standard practice.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

President Clerides' Visit

President Clinton. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Let me begin by saying how glad I am to have the President here and how much I look forward to a discussion with him. Our bilateral relations are in excellent shape, I believe, and I believe they'll get stronger as time goes on. I'm anxious to see if there's anything else the United States can do to support a settlement of the matters in Cyprus in a way that is fair to all concerned. I'm going to ask my Special Emissary, Richard Beattie, to go back to the region in the next few weeks to see what else we can do, and I want the President to give me some guidance about what he thinks we can do in this regard. But I'm glad that he's here, and I'm looking forward to having a chance to visit with him.

Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus

Q. Mr. President, do you think instability in Turkey poses trouble for the Cyprus initiative and also for the Aegean?

President Clinton. The instability?

Q. The domestic instability in Turkey.

President Clinton. Well, it's difficult for any government that's not settled to make agreements, because agreements normally require some concessions by all concerned. And we hope that Turkey will be able to resolve its internal problems and establish a strong government that can effectively enter into agreement with its neighbors.

Q. Mr. President, will you still intend to keep your promise that 1996 will be the year for Cyprus?

President Clinton. Well, we're doing what we can. But we - the United States cannot control all the events in the region. If it were up to us, we would have had a peace and resolution of this a long time ago. And we'll do what we can to be a positive force there.

Q. Mr. President, do you consider the ongoing tension between Greece and Turkey as a problem toward a Cyprus solution?

President Clinton. I think it is a problem toward the Cyprus solution, and I think it is a problem generally. And both Greece and Turkey have been allies of the United States through NATO and generally, and we would like to see the tensions between the two countries lessened. We think there would be enormous benefits not only to the Greeks and the Turks but to the solution of other problems in the area. And we will continue to do what we can in that regard. And I think as the situation clarifies itself in Turkey we may be able to do more in the years - in the months ahead. But we will use the months remaining in 1996 to do what we can to help resolve the Cyprus issue and to help resolve the tensions between the two countries.

Q. Do you take a position on the Turkish questioning of the sovereignty?

President Clinton. Do you want to say anything to your own press? I think the President should be able to talk. Come on.

President Clerides. As you all know, I'm here at the invitation of President Clinton. And I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and thanks for the interest the President is showing in helping to promote a solution to the Cyprus problem. We have a variety of issues to discuss, and I think this discussion should be carried out without the press. So that's all I have to say.

Q. Mr. President, one last question. Do you take a position on Turkish questioning of sovereignty over Greek islands, Mr. President?

President Clinton. No more questions.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:30 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Gennady Zyuganov, candidate for President. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.