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SUSAN KOSINSKI FRITZ

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is May 30th, 2024, and this is interview number one with Susan Kosinski Fritz. First of all, we're delighted to have this chance to interview you and to learn about your career with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Could you start with just a little background about where you were born, where you grew up, and a little bit about your family.

Early Background, Childhood, Family, and Education

FRITZ: Sure. I was born and raised in New Jersey in a town called South Plainfield, which is a suburb of New York City. I have four siblings and when I was in fifth grade, five of my cousins came to live with us. Their mom passed away and my parents got custody of them, so I became the youngest of ten kids.

Q: Wow.

FRITZ: Yeah. I went to Catholic school all my life – first to Sacred Heart Grammar School and then a regional high school, St. Pius in Piscataway, and then went to Rutgers for my undergraduate work.

Q: Did your father work in New York or in proximity to New York?

FRITZ: While a lot of dads in the neighborhood did, mine didn't. Fortunately, he only had to commute probably about a half hour north of South Plainfield, but it wasn't all the way into New York. So that was good.

Q: Okay. Now I've seen that you are Susan Kosinski Fritz. So, is Kosinski your maiden name?

FRITZ: Yeah.

Q: And is that maiden name of Polish extract?

FRITZ: Yep, it is. My parents came from Chicago. My dad was from the south side, my mom from the north west side. I understand from Chicagoans that it's not common for the two to meet but somehow through family, they did. My mom is German, my dad is Polish.

Q: Was your father born in the U.S. or had his grandparents or earlier ancestors emigrated?

FRITZ: His grandparents emigrated. And my mom's father also emigrated from Eastern Europe when he was about 16 years old.

Q: Okay, this is interesting because much of your career was spent in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. I'm assuming there wasn't any Polish spoken in the home and you didn't have any background in the language. Is that correct?

FRITZ: No background in the language at all. My dad understood some, he can sing some silly Polish songs, but that's about it.

Q: Okay. So 10 kids growing up, I can't even imagine what that must've been like.

FRITZ: It was pretty amazing. My mom's pretty organized and she's got a lot of energy and had even more back then. My dad's an only child so it was quite an adjustment for him. But for my mom, she comes from a big family and she took it in stride more easily. even though she was the one who took on the bulk of the extra work involved.

Q: It's quite remarkable. I'm assuming with a family that large there weren't family trips to Europe, whetting your international appetite.

FRITZ: No, and that's the interesting thing. Because my family didn't have a lot of money, I never traveled internationally. We went to Chicago every year, to the Jersey Shore, and I think it wasn't until I was in college that I flew for the first time. It wasn't until after I joined USAID that I went overseas on vacation to London and Paris.

I took a circuitous route to USAID. When I first joined, I was a Presidential Management Intern (PMI). They are now called Presidential Management Fellows (PMFs). I remember when I first started and the next class of PMIs came in or were looking for jobs, I was always the one in our office that would meet with them. And the first question they had was, "How did you get this job?" And you couldn't repeat the career that I had and how I entered USAID. I'm really fortunate that way, but it was not a clearly planned out chosen path.

Q: Well, probably the best path to take is the more spontaneous one. You went to Rutgers. Did you have a major and was it internationally focused?

FRITZ: No. When I entered university, I was looking at math and science because that's what I was strong at in high school. But I did terribly in those subjects my first year of college. So I said, "Okay, maybe that's not my major." But I had to take an American government course and loved it. Then I started taking more of them and made political science my major and American studies my minor. In my senior year of college, I came down to DC for an internship in Senator Ted Kennedy's press office. And I really got the DC bug and decided that this is where I want to be. And then I moved down to DC permanently.

Q: Was that a summer internship or during the school year?

FRITZ: It was my last semester.

Q: Okay.

FRITZ: I was really lucky, too, because it was through the Washington Center – Rutgers partnered with them to organize the internships. Usually for people like the Kennedys, it's family, friends, and contacts who get these internships. I had no relationship with that family whatsoever. And it just turned out I got selected to intern in his office. It was just, again, a series of really lucky opportunities that came my way. That was the first one. After I graduated, I came back down to DC and I wanted to work on the Hill because I loved that environment and it was just so much fun, interesting, and exciting, but I couldn't find a job. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find a job. But the deputy press secretary in Senator Kennedy's office, a woman by the name of Melody Miller, pointed me in the direction of the Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Memorial Foundation. They were looking for an executive assistant and it's a very, very small foundation. It's much bigger now, but back then, there were two full-time staff and three part-time staff. They were looking for an administrative assistant. I applied for and got that job. I did that for three years.

Q: So, you graduated from college in 1986 and then went to work at the RFK Foundation?

FRITZ: Yes, I worked for the RFK Memorial Foundation for three years, so from 1986 to 1989.

Q: I am a little familiar with that foundation because when I was in Malawi, they gave an award to a Malawi political figure who was in the political opposition. I believe their focus was on human rights. Can you tell us a little bit about the foundation?

FRITZ: Sure, originally it was not human rights focused. The foundation was started by the journalists who covered Robert F. Kennedy's last campaign before he was assassinated. It started with the idea to award journalists who covered stories about the disadvantaged. So that was the initiation of the foundation.

So, shortly after that, I think about five or ten years later, Arthur Schlesinger wrote a book about RFK and the proceeds of the sales of that book endowed the RFK Book Award. And so the foundation added a book award, similar to the journalism award, but in this case recognizing authors who wrote about the disadvantaged. When I joined they had just started two years prior, the RFK Human Rights Award. And the year I joined it went to three Polish activists. Well, actually one went posthumously to Father Jerzy Popieluszko, who had been killed, and the other two awards went to Adam Michnik and Zbigniew Bujak. Remember, this was before the fall of the Berlin Wall so the award ceremony was held without them. This was my initiation into human rights work and the region. It was a great job. It was a great introduction to Washington and I had a wonderful mentor, Caroline Croft who was the Executive Director at the time.

Q: Interesting. During the three years you were there, you had begun looking at positions within the government?

FRITZ: No. So again, all signs were not pointing to the government. I wanted to stay in the nonprofit sector but I got bored with my work at the foundation and there was no opportunity to move up. So I thought, well, let me go back to grad school and that will make life more interesting. So that's what I did. But again, the intention was to go to graduate school and then go back into the nonprofit sector.

I went to American University and got my master's in public administration. In those days, unlike today, there were no masters programs for the nonprofit sector. I tailored my degree to the nonprofit sector—writing papers and gearing my research to that, thinking that's what I would do after. But a lot of American University masters students apply for and get into the PMI Program. Since I didn't know what I was going to do after finishing my degree, I said, “Oh, I'll just apply. Why not? This will just create more opportunities, you never know.” But again, I wasn't focused on international. So I got into the PMI program and then I started looking for jobs related to domestic policy.

Q: Because you get accepted to the PMI program and then you find the government agency that you will work with. Right?

FRITZ: Yes, in those days once you were selected as a PMI, you received a booklet that listed all the PMI jobs throughout the Federal government. You weren't guaranteed a job. So even if you made it through the screening process, the vetting process and all that, you still had to interview and be selected by a Federal government agency. So I was looking at domestic policy. Unfortunately (or fortunately!) for me, I bombed the interview with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), for a position that was working on welfare policy. I got lost getting there. I was late. Everything that could go wrong in an interview, did. But there was a PMI financial policy job at USAID that I interviewed for. Another interest of mine in the nonprofit sector was financial management. And so I thought, "Oh, this is perfect." I thought that's what I wanted to do. I got the job—but it was the most boring job in the world.

USAID, Presidential Management Intern, 1989

Q: Financial policies. Were you in the Controller's Office or Policy Bureau? Before we go on with that, just to go back again, because you said this had become an interest while working in the non-profit sector. Had you done any academic work on the subject – a research paper? And if so, were there any financial and administrative issues that especially intrigued you? If so, that's quite unusual for someone who comes to USAID to work. Most people in USAID have no appreciation of those issues.

FRITZ: Yes. So I didn't have to do any kind of capstone or a dissertation or anything like that. We had comprehensive exams at the end. But I did do a research paper in my financial management course on looking at the financial management and fiduciary responsibilities of nonprofit boards.

Q: Okay, it's an unusual background for someone who ends up as a democracy officer in USAID. Few understand anything about that subset of issues.

FRITZ: When I started at USAID, local currency was a big issue, and the agency was getting beaten up because we weren't tracking local currency the way we tracked U.S. dollars. The Inspector General would come after us saying, "Well, no, you have to track local currency because it's still part and parcel of the U.S. government's assistance." USAID would respond, "No, we don't have to because the funds were not appropriated to us." I was assigned to draft a new local currency policy for the Agency. I got a stack of IG reports and audit reports and had to come up with a policy on local currency and how we should manage it so I came up with some ideas but I really had no business working on that because I did not have enough background to be sufficiently informed. I thought financial policy was something that really interested me, but I realized pretty early on it didn't.

Q: Where was this office located? Was there a chief financial officer for the agency? And were you operating out of that office? Or who was the person, the chief honcho?

FRITZ: I think the chief honcho was Bob Bonifant. I worked for Wayne McKeel and Bob Kramer.

Q: Yes, I recognize those names.

FRITZ: It was in an annex across the street from the State Department -- not in Columbia Plaza, but on the other side. Now it's part of the George Washington University campus.

But the great thing about the PMI program is you rotate to different jobs during the two years you are in the program. Early in 1990 I was looking to do my first rotation and it was right as the Berlin Wall fell. There was a position open in what was then the Asia, Near East, and Europe Bureau (ANE) in the Office of Development Resources under the Office of Technical Resources. Jerry Hyman was a political appointee in that office, had no staff or anything, and he was leading democracy work for the Bureau. They were looking for a PMI to help him. So I was again at the right place at the right time.

Eastern Europe was already developed – these were not Third World countries. So the programs we were doing were not traditional development, and democracy programming was also very new. So you didn't have a lot of people within the Agency clamoring to do this kind of work. And so again, I was at the right place and the right time. I started working with Jerry and I knew immediately that this is where I wanted to be. I found my life's work. And it was just so fortunate that I was able to fall into it. Then I made the ANE Bureau my home base for the rest of my PMI program. I did other rotations as well. But I eventually came back to ANE and worked there until I went into the Foreign Service.

Q: Now, I know of two other PMIs who became democracy officers. And they may have been a little bit before you, but one was Jennifer Windsor and the other was Susan Reichle. Were they PMIs near the same time you were?

FRITZ: But after me.

Jennifer was one of the ones that I interviewed who asked me how I got this great job. And I was like, “Oh, I took this an unusual path. This is not going to help you.” I was in the second class of PMIs. There was one class before mine and we only had six in each. It was a time in which the Agency was not hiring at all so the PMI program was one of the very few entry points. We had very small classes of PMIs, but both Jennifer and Susan came after.

Q: It's interesting that you all went into democracy work, but I guess it was a new exciting specialty that was developing at that time.

FRITZ: In the early days, it was very, very interesting.

Q: Now, one of the rotations you did was up on the Hill. Is that correct?

FRITZ: Right. I went to work for Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey. I worked with his foreign policy advisor, Sharon Waxman, another great mentor. I was very fortunate to

have great mentors throughout my career. Sharon was one of them. It was fascinating to see how the Hill worked, how different it was from the executive branch, and to get back to the congressional side, because I really loved that. So it was good.

Q: And again, probably an important experience and knowledge to have later in your career, to be able to understand how the Hill works and how best to communicate with them.

FRITZ: Yes, especially with staffers, the role of staffers and how important they are in the work that we do and how knowledgeable they are, how much they stay on top of whatever their issue is or their agency, how very well informed they are.

Q: Right. And don't ignore them.

FRITZ: Exactly.

AID/Washington/Eastern Europe Program, Democracy Officer, 1991 - 1995

Q: Okay. So, then you were in the democracy office of the Asia, Near East, and Europe Bureau? Was there a technical democracy office at that time? Was it your home base as a PMI? And you were there for several years?

FRITZ: Well, different iterations. It was Asia, Near East, and Europe Bureau (ANE), then it became the Europe and Near East Bureau (ENE), and then it became the Europe Bureau. Then the Newly Independent States (NIS) Task Force merged with the Europe Bureau and I think the Bureau was called Europe and the Newly Independent States (ENI). It went through many different iterations. I was there until we joined with the NIS Task Force, and Gerry Donnelly became the head of the combined Democracy and Governance Office. I headed up the local government work in Eastern Europe so when we merged, I headed up the combined local governance team. By the time I left I was the deputy of the Rule of Law and Governance division.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about those early democracy programs that you were helping to develop in the early 1990s. I assume Washington played a major role.

FRITZ: Absolutely. We had the Mission for Europe in Washington that worked just like a Mission in the field, but we were not based in Eastern Europe. That was the first interesting aspect of it. Programmatically, the Support for East European Democracy (SEED) Act had been passed in 1989 and it included up to $12 million for democracy programming for Poland and Hungary. There was some sort of gentleman's agreement that those funds would go through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). So we made a grant to the NED. By the time I joined the Bureau, the first grant had been made. And we kept amending that grant to add funding, usually for the next set of elections in one or another Eastern European country. But the interesting thing was that this gentleman's agreement was with one member of Congress while another objected. So every time a Congressional Notification (CN) went up to the Hill to notify the next

tranche of funding to be added to the NED agreement, the objecting member of Congress would put a hold on the CN until Jerry went up and explained what we were doing, was told that they didn't agree, and but then they would lift the hold.

Let me take a step back. NED was established with four core grantees, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI), and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE). NED would bundle proposals from each of these four core grantees along with a number of direct grants it had planned to make to Eastern European nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These were part of each amendment we did to the original NED grant.

Q: So, they were even giving grants to NDI and IRI.

FRITZ: Yes. NED would submit a pretty detailed proposal or application for what sub grants they would make. "NDI would get this, IRI would get that. We'd make these grants for these purposes." Then we'd send up a CN and it would say, we're going to grant these funds to the NED for these purposes and subgrants. And as I mentioned, one Congressman was happy about that, but others weren't. And so the CN would be put on hold. Jerry would have to go up and justify why we were giving the money to the NED because they were getting their own appropriation. Every single time it was this back and forth, back and forth, and eventually the hold would be lifted and then we'd obligate the funds.

We knew that that wasn't a long-term approach to funding democracy building programs in Eastern Europe, but it was a good way for us to get our feet wet, to learn who the players were. As we were monitoring the grant, we would go out and meet—more Jerry, not me, but we'd go meet the partners and some of NED's sub-grantees. And it was really, again, a great introduction. If you think about it, in those early days there were elections coming one right after the other so our ability to respond at that point as an Agency was limited. We just didn't have any programming to respond to these. This was a really good way for USAID to support democracy building in Eastern Europe in the early days. That was the beginning. By the end of the first year, I would say we were well aware that we had to be designing our own projects and doing our own procurements. So we did. Jerry is very strategic and he was really great at giving us the strategic framework under which we would develop these so-called projects.

Now if you remember those days, the Agency had PADs (Project Appraisal Documents) and PIDs (Project Identification Documents) that were very thick. We "designed" six projects, the documentation for which were five to ten pages each max: civil society; elections and political processes; media; local government; rule of law; and parliamentary assistance. We also had an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Fellow, DeAndra Beck, who, when I was rotating to other jobs, was honchoing all of this. So I shouldn't take credit for this because really it was Jerry and Deandra. And then I supported as well. We just wrote up from the top of our heads and from what we learned in the first year through working with NED and its grantees. These were regional

projects that we authorized money through and then we started doing the procurements. The two that I could speak about in more depth are local government and parliamentary assistance. We put out a Request for Applications (RFA) for local government assistance and ended up making grants to a number of organizations. One was to the University of Southern California (USC).

Q: So you did an RFA that allowed you to select multiple implementing partners?

FRITZ: Yes. We had one for Poland, one for Hungary, one for Czechoslovakia (later the country split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia), and we had one for the Baltics.

Q: Okay. So, it wasn't one implementing partner for the region. It was individual implementing partners for countries. Okay. Sorry for interrupting. So one was USC.

FRITZ: So USC did a pilot in a community in a town called Szekesfehervar – it's a mouthful. Jerry used to call it Boston. USC was also working in Budapest at one of the universities. They were supposed to be training local government officials based on the lessons learned in the pilot municipality. It didn't quite work that way, but it was a nice idea. Unfortunately, their Chief of Party, a well-known Public Administration expert, only wanted to teach undergraduate students. In Czechoslovakia, we had the U.S. Institute for Public Administration as our implementing partner. They were working with state public administration agencies, which we didn't know much about. We learned pretty quickly that they were very old school, not interested in reform. They were bureaucrats from the communist system. Nothing really came of that program. It was not one of our more successful ones. In those days, it was a lot of throwing things at the wall and seeing what sticks, what works and what doesn't.

In the Baltics, our implementing partner was the International Executive Service Corps (IESC). President Bush had made his famous thousand points of light speech and shortly after that, I believe IESC was set up. And while initially they were focused on the private sector, they recruited volunteers with public sector experience to work with local governments in the Baltics. I wouldn't say that was one of our more successful local government programs. I remember going out to monitor one of the activities and found one of the IESC advisors sitting at a local government conference where he did not speak the local language and there was no English translation. He was totally lost and in over his head. A stand-alone short-term advisor with no international experience and no programmatic infrastructure such as interpreters, no matter how good willed, can't be expected to have much of an impact.

The most successful program was in Poland through Rutgers University. A disclaimer: I didn't have anything to do with the selection. Jerry and DeAndra selected Rutgers while I was out on rotation. Rutgers had a professor by the name of Joanna Regulska. Joanna was a Polish émigré. Her dad, Jerzy Regulski, was the Minister for Local Government Reform. They set up this Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FSLD), a local nonprofit organization in Poland. Rutgers would bring experts to come and help build their capacity. The Foundation had offices all over Poland that were providing training to

local governments. At that time Poland was going through a pretty significant decentralization reform. So I think that combination made it one of the best programs, one of the more successful ones with which I was involved.

Jerry and I would ask ourselves, “Why was that one so good? What made that so successful?” And really it was a combination of things. We had Joanna, who is just a dynamo herself, and she knew so much and was just so smart, well plugged in and committed. And then you had her dad, who was the minister of local government reform at a time when decentralization is happening, so the government's committed to it. They were able to find really good people to run the foundation and their training centers. The project had all the perfect pieces. And it wasn't the kind of thing that you could replicate.

Coming full circle, I finished my career in Ukraine where I served from 2016-2020. At that time Ukraine was also undergoing a significant decentralization reform. It was very much under the radar which was an advantage because nobody really was paying attention to and thus, undermine it (common in Ukraine at that time). I went for a briefing on the program with the contractor and one of their subs was FSLD, which was helping Ukrainian municipalities design economic development plans. How great is that – the organization still exists and now provides assistance to others!

Q: That's the poster child for localization.

FRITZ: Absolutely, absolutely. But you know, it's funny because we weren't pushing to directly fund them and, particularly in those early days, supporting it through Rutgers was the best way to do it, but it didn't mean that localization didn't happen just because we weren't granting the funds directly to them. So I think there are many ways to look at localization.

Q: Now that's a wonderful, wonderful example. I've interviewed a couple of other people who have talked about the importance of decentralization and local government in democracy. And yet, if one steps back and looks at what USAID has done and its priorities in democracy building, that very seldom jumps out as being one of the key priorities. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on that. Is it something that we need to look at more aggressively than we do, or perhaps it is now the norm to do it. And maybe it was just in my day that we didn't pay enough attention to it.

FRITZ: I don't know. When I started managing that grant in Poland, USAID had the Housing and Urban Development Office that, as you know, was very strong.

Q: And that's what they were focused on. Yes.

FRITZ: Well, not always. They had such a housing focus but there were a lot more resources going to local government more broadly, particularly in Eastern Europe. I think some programs were more successful than others. I think for some places, it's a way of bringing decision-making closer to the people in a way that is very tangible.

So when we were designing those projects and thinking about public administration, we focused on the decentralization and local governance aspects. But what happened? Initially, opposition parties made up of dissident groups won the first elections in these transitioning democracies. But they had no experience governing and let's face it, there was no roadmap for them on how to go from closed societies and economies to free market democracies. And there was a backlash in the next elections because life didn't all of the sudden get better for people. In many cases, the communists that were rebranded as social democrats were voted back in which caused a lot of hand-wringing in Washington. People were asking, "Oh my gosh, what did we do wrong? How did this happen?" We scratched our heads and Jerry opined, "Maybe we shouldn't have ignored public administration at the central level." Maybe we should have been focused on reform at the central level, because you had bloated bureaucracies that were draining the budget and were not so reformist. You had people who came into power that didn't know how to manage. Maybe we should have been helping them do a better job of managing. And maybe that would have helped them stay in power to advance reform. But 20-20 hindsight is easy, right?

Q: Right, well, it's probably a good field for future PhD research. Just another question on early democracy programming. The Latin American Bureau had started doing some democracy and rule of law work in the 1980s. Did you all in the Europe Bureau have discussions with the Latin American Bureau on any of their experience? Was there much cross fertilization across the agency?

FRITZ: Absolutely. There was something called the Tuesday Group of which Jerry was a member. I didn't go because I was pretty junior. The Tuesday Group included people from each bureau managing democracy programming so that was a venue for people to exchange ideas. And I remember when I was in the DG Center looking at some of the rule of law work that had been done in Latin America and some of the lessons learned in that sector. For example, one study that was done on rule of law programming in Latin America found that the most successful programs included not only judges but also prosecutors and courts. So although the State Department International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) Bureau usually focused on support for prosecutors, I made a special effort to ensure that we were linked up in advancing rule of law. So yeah, there was a conscious effort to cross-fertilize through that Tuesday group. And then, as the Agency learned and documented more and more through the Democracy Center, I think we definitely learned from each other.

Q: Okay. Now, when you started talking about local government, you said there was another area that you were heavily involved with at the outset?

FRITZ: Yes, parliamentary assistance which was implemented by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) with oversight by the Frost Commission led by Congressman Martin Frost. So as you can imagine, managing that program, you have to be very careful. But fortunately, CRS did a great job. One of the bigger programs was with Hungary. They went into each Eastern European parliament and they computerized everything with huge equipment drops. They set up a research service and all that, things

that they're really good at. And yeah, so it was an interesting program. It was very unique for USAID to do things that way, but it worked. And for what it was meant to do, it was a good program. The down side was that the range of programming was very limited because CRS was not really an implementing partner per se. And I think there were questions about sustainability and the ability of these parliaments to repair and replace the equipment as time went on.

Q: Who were some of the other major implementing partners across those early six areas? Do you recall?

FRITZ: Oh gosh, rule of law programming was implemented by the American Bar Association Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA CEELI). We granted funds to them for several years. Initially, we did a 632(a) transfer to the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) for media programming. However, that did not really work out because they tended to implement small efforts – a study tour here, a small grant there – rather than comprehensive media assistance of the nature that would really have an impact. So eventually we started granting funds to Internews and IREX. Internews was more focused on broadcast media while IREX was more focused on print media, at least early on.

Elections and political process programs were implemented by the usual suspects, NDI, IRI, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). For civil society programming, we made a grant to the German Marshall Fund which was already doing work in Eastern Europe, making small grants to civil society. Their key person was Deborah Harding and she was very well plugged into local civil society organizations throughout Eastern Europe. We granted funds to them to do more of what they were already doing. And that was also another great way of supporting democracy actors in Eastern Europe at the time. That was the best way for us to support civil society because, again, we were working out of the Mission in Washington. There was no way for us to get out there and really get to know the lay of the land in a way that they were already knowledgeable about.

Q: I'd always heard that there was a lot of interest from the U.S. in the early years of the Eastern European program, especially from the diaspora in the U.S. Did you see any of that from your perch on the democracy front?

FRITZ: Not really—at least compared to in the former Soviet Union where, for example, the Armenian diaspora was very active or in Ukraine. There was some interest from the Albanian diaspora and a little from the Lithuanian diaspora, some of which worked through IESC.

Q: Okay and it may have been less in the democracy programming. After the fall of the former Soviet Union in 1991/1992, a new office was set up. Did you remain on the Europe side throughout that period?

FRITZ: Yes, I was on the Europe side there. My understanding was there were some intra-agency battles going on. And for some reason, there was a decision way above my

pay grade to keep Europe out of the NIS which was a shame, I think, a real loss. We had learned a lot in a couple of years in Eastern Europe and we had programmatic vehicles that might have been helpful to getting assistance out to the NIS more quickly.

Q: Did they come and talk to you all about what you had learned? I know that early on they said we're not going to have a mission in Washington; they were going to operate out of the field, although they did still have a heavy operation in Washington.

FRITZ: Sure, so Gerry Donnelly was the head. Gerry Donnelly and Jerry Hyman had a great relationship. So they were definitely talking, but we were bureaucratically separate.

Q: Okay.

FRITZ: But we were separate until they merged.

Q: Right; they did merge in 1993 or so after Brian Atwood became Administrator.

FRITZ: Yes, they did merge. In those days, we had very small missions. There were maybe one or two people in each USAID Representative Office—we had AID Reps, not Missions – in the very beginning.

We don't work this way anymore, but I would set up my entire schedule from Washington and then go out to the field. I would meet with whoever was in the AID Rep Office and I would invite them to join me for my meetings but usually they were too busy. And then I would go out and meet with my partners. For example, I went out with FSLD staff in Poland to see several of their training centers around the country. I met with local government officials. I went to Szekesfehervar, Hungary more than once. We were a small staff so if Jerry went out, he would meet with my partners and vice versa. Between us, we tried to monitor all of our grantees. Jerry was covering elections so he was mainly going out during elections for election monitoring and to meet with our partners and some of the election monitoring groups that we were supporting. And so that was mainly his responsibility, along with civil society, and mine was local government and the parliamentary assistance.

Q: So, you really were a mission running the programs overseas. I know at some point, Poland became a regular mission. What was that transition and when did it happen?

FRITZ: I can pinpoint the moment of the transition -- in my mind anyway. I had gone out to Poland to design the local government and public administration follow-on program. Don Pressley was the Mission Director-designate and was in Poland learning Polish but had not taken over as Mission Director yet so he kind of engaged in the project design a bit.

Q: Was he actually the first to be called a mission director?

FRITZ: I don't know. They were USAID Reps in the beginning, but Don was definitely a Mission Director. I had designed this central government public administration program rather than a local government-focused effort. When I came back to Washington, I had to defend the project design at a Bureau-wide meeting. Peter Orr was the Program Office Director. I remember he proposed that the project should not be managed from Washington, that it should be managed by the Mission. And everybody agreed so the project went to the field to manage. That was when I realized that we in the Mission for Europe in Washington were no longer in the driver's seat. This is how development should really work, but I remember at the time being so heartbroken, like here was my baby that I had designed, that I had to give away. But it was a maturity thing, a learning moment.

Q: Do you remember the year that would have been? I am curious about how long it took before that transition?

FRITZ: About 1994.

Q: That's interesting. And then it began to change everywhere.

FRITZ: Then it changed everywhere.

Q: I know that Budapest became a regional center, although it had begun as a bilateral program. Was Hungary one of the first to graduate? Was there a timeframe for graduation?

FRITZ: So the original idea was that the Northern Tier countries—Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia—would graduate within three to five years. That's why the Mission was set up in Washington and why we didn't staff up too much in the field. We were going to be in and out in three to five years. I don't remember exactly when Hungary graduated. I know Poland was the first to graduate and I think it was 1999 or 2000. So it was more than three to five years. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, graduated early on. Slovakia graduated a little later because it had kind of a shaky beginning but those three were early on – but in more like ten to twelve years.

Q: You initially spoke of Czechoslovakia and then you just mentioned Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. Since you were doing local government work, did the split of Czechoslovakia affect your work at all? Or, was any of that local government work instrumental to the split, or would that split have happened regardless?

FRITZ: Oh, no, the split happened regardless but it didn't affect our work because we had actually been working with two different institutes of public administration, one in each republic. It was quite easy to manage the program after the split because of that.

Q: Okay. So, it was always quite separate then?

FRITZ: It was. The guy who managed the project was Czech. I remember the first time I went out, I didn't realize political sensitivities between the two republics. I had a conference in Poland in Krakow and then took a train to Slovakia, to Bratislava. I went to monitor the local government project in Bratislava, Slovakia first and then went to Prague, the Czech Republic second. And this was when it was still Czechoslovakia. Apparently it was a big deal that I went to Bratislava first. Luckily the people in Prague didn't give me a hard time, but the people in Bratislava were just so honored that I would start there.

Q: That's a nice example. Well, it really sounds very exciting. You mentioned the expectation being three to five years and it was roughly that for several of the programs. Were there discussions of criteria? Because I know ultimately the Bureau ended up picking EU accession criteria as being an important graduation factor, but I suspect that wasn't at the outset. Were there any criteria defined? And if so, were any relating to democratic indicators?

FRITZ: Absolutely. Yes, the Europe Bureau started pretty early on by funding Freedom House's Nations in Transit. One of the reasons we funded it was to give ourselves a way of measuring progress or backsliding. We were hoping it was going to be progress, but sometimes it was backsliding on these different democracy sub-sectors. So on the DG side, it was the Nations in Transit, but they had a different set of economic indicators that they were tracking as well. The Bureau Program Office, under Ron Sprout's leadership, developed the criteria for closeout. I am not sure that we had anything initially but at some point it became where the Northern Tier countries—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—were on different indicators when they graduated. Every year, we looked at how each country was doing on these indicators. I don't know when it came into effect—probably in the mid-90s.

Q: So, they helped to define what the criteria were?

FRITZ: And then it changed. It became where Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia were on different indicators when they joined NATO or maybe the European Union. So for the countries that still had not graduated, that's what it was up until when I left the Agency.

Q: Okay. Obviously, you were working on one of the highest U.S. government foreign policy priorities. Did you have many dealings with the State Department? I know there was a State Department coordinators office on the allocation of funds, but I'm wondering how much involvement you had with State on the democracy front?

FRITZ: Sure, so the Coordinator's Office, which is huge now, had about five people in it. So the discussions in those days were much more substantive and less nuts and bolts micromanagement. So it was definitely more, higher level discussions. Those were taking place between Jerry and the Coordinator and/or the lead democracy person in the Coordinator's Office. Because the number of people working there was so small, it wasn't at my level. I did have the opportunity to join a meeting with Ken Juster who was a Special Assistant to Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger. Jerry brought me with him

when he went to discuss the American Bar Association's CEELI program. So there were high level discussions going on about specific programming, surprisingly.

Q: Was there a specific issue related to the ABA CEELI program or was it just generically briefing them on it?

FRITZ: I think it was just briefing them on it. I don't remember there being an issue – I think I would have remembered if there were a big issue. They were very interested because the Eastern Europe program was high profile in those days and I believe that the ABA was very well connected politically.

Q: Similarly, when you were dealing with parliamentary reform and parliamentary strengthening and local government, did the embassies want to talk to you about your impressions of what was going on to help their understanding of the local situation? Or did state desk officers ask you about your perceptions of what was going on? I'm just curious because you were in a rather unique situation.

FRITZ: I would say not so much in those early days. A little bit. We were based in the State Department back then.

Q: Oh, that's right. Of course.

FRITZ: Again, we were in the State Department, so it was a lot easier. It was a lot more give and take. So I don't think there were special meetings to brief people, but of course we talked. There was a lot of just talking in the corridor about what was going on.

Q: Okay, I was just curious what it was like in those days. Was there any significant change from the George H.W. Bush administration to the Bill Clinton administration in 1993 and the arrival of Brian Atwood as the new USAID Administrator? Did you see changes in approaches?

FRITZ: Well, certainly democracy became an equal part of the development equation. And it became more important and better coordinated across the Agency. When Brian Atwood came in, they set up the Democracy and Governance (DG) Center, which was led by Chuck Costello. When Jennifer Windsor took over for Chuck – I think she started as the deputy director -- Jerry Hyman moved over to be Jennifer's deputy. There was an interest in bringing together within the agency, all of the democracy practitioners under one roof so that we could learn better from one another. And so I think we were elevated in terms of a respected part of development, whereas before it was, I don't think a lot of people within the Agency really saw it as development. And I think when Brian came in, it became much more a regular part of our development portfolios and approaches and so forth.

Q: Okay. But there wasn't any substantive change in priorities or anything that you noticed? Other than democracy being more important.

FRITZ: Yeah, no substantive change. Maybe more resources for democracy programming, so I guess that's substantive in a way but I can't point to one thing to say all of the sudden we started doing differently.

Q: Are there other things we should discuss? You spent five years as a Eurasia democracy officer. When Jerry Hyman went over to the democracy center in the Global Bureau, were you then the sole democracy officer left in the mission in Washington?

FRITZ: No, so by then the Mission for Europe had dissolved. And although all the other geographic bureaus had to move their staff into the Center, we were exempt. The Europe Bureau and the NIS task force had merged. When Gerry Donnelly became the head of that combined office, Jerry Hyman was the head of one of the divisions in the combined office -- civil society and media, I think. This was before the Democracy Center was created.

Q: So, once the merger of the Europe Mission and the new Former Soviet Union Office (NIS) took place in the new Europe and Eurasia Bureau, you saw some of the early work then in the former Soviet Union as well?

FRITZ: I did. I saw it from afar. Initially I was responsible for leading our local government work but I never actually got out to the NIS to see it. There was a local government program which had pilot cities in three locations in Ukraine and I think two in Russia including one in Nizhny Novgorod. I don't know how we thought we were going to make huge changes within countries of those sizes with five pilots. In Ukraine there was some early local government work that was done in Lviv, Kharkiv, and one other location. I never got to see it on the ground.

Q: You were overseeing the rule of law work as well then?

FRITZ: Not at that point -- it was just the local governance work. Subsequently, there was a merger of the rule of law and governance divisions and I became the deputy in that office. Interesting enough, that's actually how I ended up in Bosnia. I assigned each person in our division responsibility for overseeing our rule of law and governance programs in a particular country or countries. Nobody wanted Bosnia at the time because it was in the middle of a war. I missed managing programs (I was managing people now) so I took responsibility for Bosnia.

During the war, the State Department forged a peace agreement between the Croats and the Bosniaks called the Washington Accords. Because the United States was instrumental in negotiating that agreement, USAID focused its local government work on implementing it. The Washington Accords established ten cantons within the Federation. The idea was to get the Croats and the Bosniaks to stop fighting each other so that they could unify against the Serbs. The program was implemented through the International City Manager's Association (ICMA). I had been trying to get out to Bosnia forever and could never get approved by Diplomatic Security because there was an active war going on. I was supposed to go out to Kazakhstan for a TDY but at the last minute got approval

to go to Bosnia so I went to Bosnia instead. I flew into Split, Croatia and drove into central Bosnia to the city of Zenica in a low-riding armored sedan. USAID had a field office there with one American and one Foreign Service National (FSN), and it was they who came to Split to pick me up.

I met with some local government officials and talked about the kinds of assistance we could provide. I was travelling with folks from ICMA to start to get the program going. There was supposedly a ceasefire, but there really wasn't. There was shelling going on so I was a bit scared because I had never been in a war zone before. We heard that peace talks were going on at Dayton, but that it didn't look good for a settlement. People were thinking it was going to fail.

I got back to Washington, and a couple of weeks later – on November 14,1995 -- there was a peace agreement agreed to by all sides. And on December 14th, the Dayton Peace Accords were formally signed. Craig Buck was designated to become the Mission Director of a new USAID Mission in Sarajevo. He called to ask me to come out to head up the Democracy Office. I told him I was flattered to be asked but that I couldn't do it because I was not a Foreign Service officer, I was in the civil service.

I had, before then, decided to stick with the Civil Service after my two years as a PMI because I would not have likely stayed working on or been assigned to a Mission in Eastern Europe. Our missions there were very small with usually one FS-1 or FS-2 level Foreign Service Officer. I decided at the end of the PMI program not to go into the International Development Intern (IDI) program, which was an option, because I knew I wouldn't be able to stay working on Eastern Europe. I knew I would have been assigned to another part of the world where there were lower-level positions. So I decided to not do it.

So now Craig presented me with the opportunity to go out under a limited career appointment in the Foreign Service Office. Given the TDY I had just done to Bosnia, I was not sure that I wanted to go live there – I didn't know if it was something I thought I was capable of doing. I asked Craig if I could do a TDY to check it out and he agreed. So I went to Sarajevo for the first time in January 1996 and after that, agreed to do the limited appointment to work in Bosnia for two years. But it was in the middle of the big Reduction in Force (RIF) that the Agency was going through at the time. Thus, if I had been given a limited career appointment, I would have been the first to be RIFed. However, I would have had reemployment rights in the Civil Service so I would just have had to go back to Washington to work a Civil Service job. So I went out to Bosnia in May on TDY until the RIF was done and then converted in July to the Foreign Service under a limited career appointment. I was just going to do it for two years and ended up extending for a third year. I met my husband after a year in Bosnia and decided it was easier for us to stay together if I converted into a career Foreign Service position because he was in the USAID Foreign Service. When I decided to try to convert, which I guess was not that common because there was no real process for it at the time, between Human Resources and the DG Center, they made one up, and I converted successfully in July 1999. And yeah, that was it.

Q: Another well planned career move.

FRITZ: Yeah, right.

USAID/Bosnia, Democracy Officer, 1996 - 1999

Q: No, that's great. So, you were in the first group that went out to Bosnia and helped to create the Mission along with Craig Buck. When did Craig get there, and was he there for a couple months before you got there then?

FRITZ: Oh, absolutely.

He called me in December. I don't know if he actually went out in December, but I knew he came through Washington from Kazakhstan. I think he may have gone out in December 1995. And so I went out right after.

Q: A few months later. So how large was the Mission? How many people were there setting up? What was it like going to a country that had just gone through a terrible war?

FRITZ: You know, it was the best of times and worst of times. It was a small core group. So it was Craig, Gary Mansavage, a retired Foreign Service Officer, came out as a PSC to help get things running. People like Bill Granger, who was an experienced Executive Officer, came out as well. Jim Ahn, who had worked as a Controller for Craig in Kazakhstan also came out to get the Mission established.

Q: But it was a small group.

FRITZ: Small group to get things going. When I went out in January, the Mission was in one room in the embassy, just one big room with desk after desk lined up. No cubicles, no nothing. And I would say there were probably 10 people. It was small, it grew, but even then, when we eventually moved into an office it wasn't a huge Mission for the amount of money we were managing at the time. Our first office was in the old trade union building – Dom Sindikata (Union Home) -- which had been shelled and whose columns out front were crumbling. Thankfully, they weren't structurally required to hold up the building. But when you walked in the building every day, there was this destroyed column that was a reminder of the violent war that had taken place.

When I first got there, the Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART) was pretty big because they were still delivering a lot of humanitarian assistance. There were a couple of Foreign Service officers, Merritt Brody, who managed all the infrastructure programming, rebuilding roads and electricity and all that. Then Erna Kerst came out as the Deputy Mission Director and Mike Kerst came out to run programs in the economic development sector. Yeah, so it was a very small staff and eventually we built up, hiring local staff. Before I got back out in May, I had been working remotely with Gary Mansavage, who was helping to staff up the Democracy Office. So by the time I arrived

in May, we were interviewing and starting to hire people. In the beginning, we hired two FSNs, and that was it for a long time. Then I hired a local Personal Services Contractor as the Deputy Office Director – she was fantastic. And then eventually from there, built up the staff.

Q: And you were doing the democracy work. And what was the program? You said it started with working with the cantons on local government, but what else?

FRITZ: Yeah, that was part of it. I became an elections expert after three years there, because we had four elections in three years. The Dayton Peace Accords, which were signed in December, required elections to take place within six to nine months after Dayton was signed. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was designated to administer the elections. The State Department had appointed Ambassador Robert Frowick to head the OSCE Mission in Bosnia. In those days, the OSCE was basically seconded diplomats, still is to a certain extent, but not election experts. So we were tracking the organization of elections in addition to providing assistance to political parties. Larry Garber, who was now working for USAID but came from NDI and had quite a bit of elections experience, came out to Bosnia quite a bit to check in on the preparations for elections. We were looking at each other saying, "This election is not going to happen -- there's no way for this to happen by June 14 (which would have been 6 months after Dayton was signed." But we knew it had to happen by September 14.

We decided to bring in a group of election administration experts through IFES. I wrote up a scope of work for a small team of six people – the Director General for elections, an outreach person, an IT person, and a logistics person plus a few others. We basically hired this team that USAID paid for and embedded them in the OSCE under Ambassador Frowick's command. And they pulled off the elections by September 14. It was pretty hairy, because there was so much to do and trying to pull off an election in a war-torn country was pretty hard to do. But IFES did it. They were amazing. They pulled it off.

Q: Yes. And I really like the idea of embedding them in the OSCE mechanism. It sounds like that worked well? Do you have thoughts about making it less directly US?

FRITZ: It did work well at the time. I think there was a universal understanding that the OSCE did not have the technical expertise. The team that we brought in was so good at what they did. They were respected experts. So it made it a lot easier. Even though they were paid for by the United States, they were not seen as a USAID and USG team – precisely because they were embedded in the OSCE.

I think now the OSCE obviously has a whole lot more experience. In those days, OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) did election monitoring, but that's a separate arm of the OSCE and monitoring is not the same as administering an election. I think they have that now. In terms of a model for the future, I think there could be issues if, for example, we wanted the team to do something different from what whoever is leading the organization wanted. I think it could be difficult because you have

dual command, but given that we all had a common goal, which was to carry out the elections on a very tight timeline, it was a lot easier.

Q: Was there also a Bosnian authority that was involved with organizing elections, or was it an internationally run election?

FRITZ: Internationally run. By the fourth election we were training poll workers and helping to set up a Bosnian-organized election commission and poll workers and all that. My understanding is that it still exists today and administers elections for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Q: Okay. Was Ambassador Holbrooke involved at all in what you all were doing? Or did you have contact with him? And what was it like?

FRITZ: No, I didn't have any contact with him, unfortunately, or fortunately. No, I never met him. He definitely was very involved in Bosnia, but he was at the highest levels. I was in the nuts and bolts and the lower levels, making sure things worked at the operational level.

Q: So, you were there for three years and managed elections. Were we trying to do anything else on the DG front? Or, did the need for electoral support overwhelm everything else?

FRITZ: The elections were definitely overwhelming. We were doing, again, local government work. We were helping establish new institutions such as cantons which is a level of government between the municipalities and the Federation. That was an important part of our work. We also were working with civil society, with NGOs, helping to build civil society. The war started in Yugoslavia right about the time of the transition from socialism and communism to democracy in Eastern Europe so Bosnia never had the opportunities that some of the other countries we worked with in the region. Day to day, as we were implementing programs, we would be confronted with that aspect of their transition in addition to rebuilding after a war. So it was a dual transition that was happening. And while we did have to focus on elections, we started to help civil society to develop and grow and media was an important part as well, because the media was a tool for division in the country. We did a lot with the independent media that were not incendiary, that were not sowing divisions.

Q: Were there significant movements of people out of Bosnia afterwards? I mean, did Serbs and Croats leave or were there Serbs and Croats that remained within Bosnia?

FRITZ: Yes, those who could get out did, but a lot of people stayed. What really happened was a lot of population shifts within the country. For example, there are two towns next to each other, one's called Travnik, the other one's Novi Travnik. Travnik is mainly Bosniak and Novi Travnik is now mainly Croat. But they had been mixed before. And so what happened? If you were a Croat, you got out of Travnik and if you were a Bosniak, you got out of Novi Travnik. So you had these population shifts and swaps.

That's what made the initial elections so interesting and scary at the same time. You could vote where you currently lived or where you were from. Many people wanted to go back to see their houses, their apartments, their towns and this was an opportunity under NATO protection for you to do that. If you wanted to go vote where you came from, you could do that. There was a lot of hand-wringing and people were very nervous that election day would be fraught with renewed fighting. Some of the war was on a very individual – neighbors shooting at neighbors. So there was this concern that you'd see huge numbers of people coming and going and therefore greater opportunities for conflict.

Q: But it didn't happen?

FRITZ: It did not happen. I had this wonderful woman on my staff, a Bosnian Croat, who was a chess grandmaster in Bosnia. She did an analysis of these population shifts that had happened and what we might encounter on election day. We wrote several cables including her analysis on elections because she was just so smart and everyone was trying to anticipate what we might see on election day. Luckily, nothing happened in terms of major violence and the elections did happen and people voted, and it happened by the Dayton-mandated deadline. So it was, from those perspectives, a huge success.

Unfortunately, all the parties in Bosnia were at that time monoethnic. You had (and I believe still have today), for example, a Bosniak party, the Party for Democratic Action (SDA). If you're a Bosniak, you're also Muslim, so you're only going to vote for the SDA, right? Your political representation is religiously and ethnically homogenous and it's the same with the Serbs and the Croats. There was one political party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) that I had high hopes for but unfortunately, they've become hugely corrupt and not the multi-ethnic savior party that I had hoped they would become. It was the one party that was multi-ethnic and reformist and said all the right things but in the end, it didn't offer anything different.

Q: So today it remains the three. Okay, interesting. You mentioned the important work done by one of the mission's FSNs, a Bosnian Croat. What was the composition of the FSN staff and how much of that was taken into consideration in recruitment of staff?

FRITZ: You know, it's funny, we didn't take that into account. We advertised the jobs and whoever was good, we hired. So I think we were just fortunate that we got people who were multi-ethnic or were not only of one ethnicity -- Bosniaks. I think it'd be a lot harder today because Sarajevo has become much more monoethnic and inhabited primarily by Bosniaks. The other person we hired had an ethnic Serb dad and an ethnic Bosniak mom. Her dad was stuck on the Serbian side during the war. He had a garden in Pale and he went to get onions when the fighting started so she didn't see him throughout the entire war. A lot of people saw themselves as Yugoslavs, not one or the other ethnicity – that was what Tito was all about and tried to inculcate. It wasn't until the war that I think that changed. But before the war, what I was told is that people saw themselves much more as Yugoslavs.

Q: Very interesting. You also mentioned that the woman working for you, who was the chess grandmaster, had done this great reporting in cables. So I assume that the embassy really valued the USAID mission and its ability to work at the ground level and to write cables and to do reporting. I have always thought that USAID was in a great position to do that. And yet most USAID missions don't do it very much. Do you have thoughts on that?

FRITZ: Yeah, I think Bosnia was the high point in that regard. We had a great working relationship. I think it had a lot to do with the fact that we were a very small staff and so was the Embassy. Given the situation you couldn't have large numbers of official staff. When I first went out to Sarajevo in January 1996, people were living in the Embassy and there were quite a few still living there when I went out in May. I think Craig Buck was one of the first Embassy staff who lived in a house. But during the war, people lived and worked in the Embassy—and it was not a big building. Remember, Bosnia was a republic of Yugoslavia before that so we didn't have embassies in each republic. So it was a little bit weird in that people would come to country team having just rolled out of bed. Yeah, it was a little too much.

I think that, if you have smaller staffs, then you rely on one another a little bit more and that builds trust and cooperation. For the first election, we were not allowed to go into Republika Srpska (the RS). It was just too dangerous. It wasn't until later in my time there that we were able to travel to and work in the RS. The Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) went in first and then we gradually expanded democracy programs managed by my office to the RS. I did joint trips into the RS with some of my Political Section colleagues when we went for the first time to eastern Bosnia and it was a bit scary. Actually, it was probably the most scared I've been in any situation.

Q: And this is part of Bosnia.

FRITZ: It's part of Bosnia. Bosnia and Herzegovina includes two entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We were living and working in the Federation initially and then eventually we got permission to work in the RS. First off, we were exploring assistance related to the elections. I went with my Embassy colleague to meet with some political parties in a very small rural town, I think it was Han Pjesak which is northeast of Sarajevo. A little further east is Srebrenica. We had driven across the inter-entity borderline and we had a driver who was a Bosniak. Actually, we had a two-car convoy, so we had two Bosniak drivers. When we arrived at the political party office, we walked in and the drivers came with us inside, which was not what usually happened. Drivers usually stayed with the cars. There was a small waiting room or office just outside the conference room in which we were going to be meeting. I could see our driver was shaking. He knew what these guys that we were meeting with were capable of. And then I got scared. We were going into the conference room for the meeting. I knew our drivers would not be comfortable sitting out there, that they would feel vulnerable, so I said that they needed to come into the meeting with us. So they sat in the meeting just to keep them safe. I'm sure nothing would have happened, but they were scared. I was

scared for them because these weren't good people. While you don't know for sure what they had done during the war, you could make an educated guess and it wasn't good. We did not offer political party assistance to them.

But I did travel quite a bit with Embassy colleagues for that election. If one or other of us was going to go out, we'd grab the other one and say, "Hey, I'm going to go see so-and-so, do you want to come with me?" So it was a lot easier back then.

Q: That's a great story of collaboration in the way it should be. Each helping the other's perspective. I really can't imagine what it must have been like those days. Was there much communication among the USAID missions in the former Yugoslavia? There was a USAID mission in Belgrade. There was a USAID mission in Zagreb and a USAID mission in Sarajevo. Was there one in Slovenia?

FRITZ: No, we never had one in Slovenia.

Q: Was there much communication among the former Yugoslav countries?

FRITZ: During my time in Bosnia we did a joint retreat with OTI which included the OTI folks from Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia along with people working on DG programming in each place. I think for Serbia it was Kathryn Stratos who came from Washington. All of the OTI representatives were field-based. And we compared notes and shared information with one another at that meeting which we organized in Zagreb.

Before the war, there was a USAID Representative in Belgrade, Serbia, Mike Zak. During the early days of the programming in Eastern Europe Mike used to say, "Yugoslavia needs vitamin D – Democracy." And he was always trying to get Jerry Hyman out to the region and to bring programming with him. So Jerry did go out at least once and it was during this time that he actually had met with Radovan Karadžić, who was later convicted of war crimes. Jerry still has this doodling that Karadžić did during the meeting where he was explaining where the Serbs are and where the Croats and Bosniaks are. And it looks like somebody just scribbled a lot because he was very animated. I keep telling Jerry, he needs to send that to the diplomacy museum in the State Department.

There was no office in Kosovo because Kosovo wasn't a separate country at the time. Croatia had a small USAID Representative Office run by Chuck Aanenson. A lot of the humanitarian assistance for Bosnia was being run out of Croatia. In order to go into Bosnia you had to go either through Zagreb or Split (Croatia) and get accredited by the United Nations. So absolutely there was collaboration in the beginning and during the war. When Craig Buck was named Mission Director for Bosnia they became two separate missions. There was also a small program in Macedonia that started early on.

Q: Yes, I think it was run out of Croatia initially too.

FRITZ: Actually, I don't think so – Macedonia started on its own with a USAID Representative Office.

Q: Other donors. I assume the European Union was very big. Were there other donors there and was coordination an important part of what you had to do? Were there ever any dramatic differences of opinion on what should be done and how it should be done?

FRITZ: Yeah, so again, this is still pretty early days for democracy assistance so the EU's democracy assistance didn't come into play. They were a little bit behind us on most things on the democracy front. For example, there were several members of the EU parliament that were intrigued with how the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) worked. I met with them on my way back from Eastern Europe once and shared background on both the NED and on our democracy portfolio. Shortly afterwards they passed a law creating a European version of the NED.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were both very important on both the economic side and on rebuilding, but I wasn't involved in that.

I do remember a meeting at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to discuss elections assistance. There were a few donors, such as the German Stiftungs which are political party foundations that provide assistance to political parties similar to NDI and IRI. There wasn't a big interest in party assistance from all the people at the meeting – most were interested in learning about how planning was going for implementing the elections. Rather than take everyone's time to discuss political party assistance we decided to organize a separate meeting which I volunteered to host. The EU representative at the meeting objected and said it should not be organized by a bilateral donor even though there were no multilateral donors providing party assistance. That was an eye opener for me. So, I let the EU organize it, but it was just a weird kind of dynamic there.

I'm happy to say I've had much better experiences both in Kosovo and Serbia with my EU counterparts. We were able to collaborate in pretty important ways, particularly in Kosovo. My proudest achievement, probably of my entire career, involved collaborating with the EU in Kosovo which we can talk about later. I'm glad that early experience didn't foretell the future. So, no, other donors were not heavily involved in the sector at that time.

Q: Good. I'm going to sort of jump ahead only because I want to ask, since you spent these early, very intense years in Bosnia, how you managed when you later went to work in Serbia. Were there any difficulties for you in doing that? I'm just curious whether your early days in Bosnia affected your thinking at all?

FRITZ: So it's interesting because I know a lot of Balkan hands would not serve in Serbia if they had served in Bosnia and or Kosovo. I felt that to truly understand how the war happened, I'd have to serve in Serbia and to get a more informed perspective. It was something that I really wanted to do. And in a twist of fate, Mike Harvey who was

serving as Mission Director in Belgrade, decided to leave early so the position opened up just when I was finishing up in Kosovo. So I bid on it and I got it. It was one of those things that I thought was meant to be and helped me to really have a better perspective. I can't say it wasn't hard in some ways, but you get perspective and you understand where people are coming from. And it helped that the people that USAID hired to staff the Mission in Belgrade are all people who want democracy, who are tolerant of other ethnicities, and weren't the ones who started the war.

Q: So, you can see a positive side of Serbia as well even though you saw a lot of the negatives early on?

FRITZ: So yeah, absolutely, absolutely. It helped me to complete the picture. And I've met so many wonderful Serbs that on an individual level, it makes it easy.

Q: Okay. But it probably also gave you renewed respect for the history of Tito.

FRITZ: Absolutely. There are a lot of Yugoslavs who'd say that they missed Tito. I can understand why. I mean, he was a dictator, but he was a benevolent dictator. My deputy in Bosnia used to say that they had it good—they got to travel, they got to buy Italian shoes, and socially owned enterprises were much different than the more extreme form of a controlled economy that you saw in the Soviet Union. It was a nicer kind of dictatorship.

Q: That's all very interesting. You went out as an FSL and you said you met your husband there. Did you get married there or get married later?

FRITZ: We met through a fellow democracy officer, David Black. My husband, Mike, was serving in Ukraine and he was supposed to go to Uganda. David was in Ukraine at the same time. The Bosnia Mission did not have a Foreign Service Executive Officer (EXO) and was recruiting for one. The Personal Services Contractor (PSC) EXO that we had was having a hard time. The Europe and Eurasia Bureau was trying to recruit Mike for the position.

David called me and said, "My friend's coming to check out Bosnia. Would you show him around?" So I did and he ended up deciding to break his Uganda assignment for Bosnia. We didn't really hit it off then, but once he moved to Bosnia we lived near one another. He and I both had dogs and we both liked to run so I showed him places he could run with his dog.

Q: Yes. Okay, running with your dogs was the beginning. So anyway, you came back to Washington and you went to the Democracy Center, is that correct?

AID/W, Democracy Center, Team Leader for Elections and Political Process Division, 1999 - 2001

FRITZ: Yes, I went to the Democracy Center to head up the elections and political processes team.

Q: After going through so many elections then you became the team leader for elections at the Democracy Center.

FRITZ: Yeah, but it was just two years. We ended up going back out to Central Asia after that. When I was in the Democracy Center we drafted an elections manual. That was something that the agency didn't really have a lot of at the time – "how-tos" on democracy programming. We started sharing information and programming ideas at democracy conferences for DG officers where we also did trainings through short workshops. I led one on political party assistance to help DG officers understand what our policy for working with political parties was (that we work with all democratic political parties) using Bosnia and Herzegovina as a case study. How do you decide which party is democratic and or not? What if there are lots of political parties, do you have to work with all of them? How can you meet the spirit of the policy with some logistical challenges like that?

Q: How do you determine if a party is democratic?

FRITZ: Well, what was interesting was that we used their policy statements. But what we were challenged with was they could be "democratic" from a policy perspective but maybe their position on the war was problematic because they incited or at least accepted violence.

So that factored in even though you wouldn't normally talk about that or think about that, but we had to consider a lot of different factors. Interestingly, as a side note, one of IRI's partners in Hungary, was Viktor Orban, who is now not so much a democrat. In those days, he was part of Fidesz, a center-right political party at the time. He still is—that's still his party but it's not democratic anymore. Now look at him, he's an autocrat. Likewise in Bosnia, OTI—which was one of its first programs after it was established—partnered with Milorad Dodik, who is still the President of Republika Srpska. And he's calling for the breakup of Bosnia. So, here's somebody who in the early days was a good guy, a moderate democrat, who's turned autocrat.

Q: Since you just mentioned OTI and since I believe it did a lot early on in Bosnia, I should have asked you about OTI when we discussed your work in Bosnia. Did you have much to do with that program? And if so, could you say a word or two about it?

FRITZ: Yeah. Michael Stievater headed up the OTI Office in Bosnia. I think he was part of the DART, or working for one of the DART's implementing partners initially. So he had been in Bosnia for a while, working there during the war, and then moved over to OTI. We worked in the same office, and we tried to coordinate where possible. I would say we did a pretty good job. It was hard in the early days because OTI was still trying to figure out its mandate and sort of where it was going, not only with respect to DG programming, but also related to humanitarian assistance. So they were supposed to be in between humanitarian assistance and long-term development programming. The challenge, I think, was that they weren't in between. They were working in parallel with a

regular USAID Mission and program. So it became a little bit challenging. But I would say we did a pretty good job. There were two field guys and then Michael Stievater in Sarajevo. It was helpful to have those field offices who got to know the local landscape pretty well. They were kind of our intelligence gathering operation for our work as well. We definitely saw the benefits of having an OTI presence. They had a big office in Banja Luka, which is in Republika Srpska, which was a huge benefit to the Mission. In fact, that OTI office eventually became an Embassy field office and I believe it still is today. I think they brought something to the table that we didn't have, that by collaborating we benefitted. I wouldn't say it was all roses, but you know, we got along pretty well.

Q: Okay, that's important. I'm going to suggest that we pause now. When we reconvene, we can come back to Washington and what you were doing.

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Q: Today is June 6, 2024, and this is interview number two with Susan Fritz. And Susan, when we spoke last time, you were the team leader for the elections and political processes group within the Democracy Center in Washington. You briefly talked about preparing a policy paper on political party assistance. Could you say a bit more about that? Was there any controversy? Any issues with State? Did you have to sort out any issues with the Congress?

FRITZ: No, actually.

Q: I can't imagine it was a smooth process, but perhaps it was because the electoral work had been going on for a while.

FRITZ: From what I recall, we had an informal policy and mostly took cues from the party institutes themselves. We've already talked about whether parties were democratic or not and only providing assistance to those parties that espoused democratic ideals. Another aspect of the policy was the idea that you would pull back from political party assistance within a certain amount of time before elections. But it had never been written down or codified in any kind of policy. So I started with those ideas. We added that party assistance should never be financial, that it should be training and technical assistance. The process actually went better than I expected, and maybe because it was already being followed for the most part.

I met with the party institutes, National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute to get their input and feedback because obviously it would apply mostly to them because those were the two implementing partners that were providing political party assistance at the time. It took some time to figure out what needed to be in there, what didn't, what was a must do versus a best practice and things like that. And although I drafted the policy, it was in clearance when I left the DG Center for Central Asia so I have to give Michelle Schimp credit for carrying it forward and finalizing it. She may have had more issues, but it was pretty far along by the time I left. I had

expected the biggest hurdle to be the party institutes, but it was actually quite collegial and it was fine.

Q: And the two party institutes, (NDI and IRI) they collaborate quite a bit and they coordinate quite a bit in this polarized world. Is it fair to say that they work in tandem with one another, or have they also become polarized?

FRITZ: So, yes, I mean, they've worked well together with USAID, but I think it had more to do with the way we worked with them. That is, there was—and there may still be–something called the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening or CEPPS. When I came to the Democracy Center, we were implementing CEPPS I, and it included the two party institutes and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. All around the world, any Mission could use the CEPPS mechanism to provide assistance to political parties or election administration bodies and the like. The way the mechanism works is that the CEPPS partners have to sign off on each other's proposals to USAID. So before it got to us, there was an agreement.

For example, we would send out a program description that would say, we've got an election coming up in Mexico, we've got a million dollars, and we want to provide assistance to parties as well as electoral bodies. It would be a short two-page program description. When sent to the party institutes, we wouldn't say who should get what. Rather, they would come back to us and say, NDI is going to do this piece, IRI is going to do this piece, and IFES will do this piece and they had allocated the available funding between them. They all had to sign off on what they sent back to USAID.

I have to say that it worked 99% of the time. It worked really well because they hashed it out amongst themselves. There was only one time that I recall that it didn't, and they were arguing over Mexico about who was going to do what. We didn't have their proposal back, yet we got a lot of pressure from Congress to finalize it and get the money out the door. And I sat there saying, "Wait a minute, there's nothing I can do. Why are they going to the Hill if they haven't worked it out themselves?" So I went back and said, "Hey guys, come on, you need to work this out. If you want us to, we can make those decisions for you, but that's not how CEPPS works, it hasn't worked that way in the past." Eventually they came to an agreement and we were able to move on. But it made it easier for USAID because we didn't have to fight those battles or get in the middle of that decision-making.

Where they didn't always agree was not between the party institutes, but rather between the institutes and IFES if IFES tried to do something that the institutes felt was part of their mandate. IFES rarely would propose something that was not in their lane, but once in a while they would and the party institutes would shoot it down by not agreeing to sign off on their proposal. They would, again, negotiate it internally. So in a way it worked well. It was a unique kind of agreement, although it was not one that a lot of people within the Agency were comfortable with, especially the agreement officer. They weren't too excited about CEPPS II. But you know, for us from a programmatic standpoint and a diplomatic standpoint, if you will, it worked really well. And probably most importantly, the CEPPS vehicle allowed assistance to get out the field very quickly and oftentimes

elections are called with little notice so that is invaluable if you are trying to support democratic processes in a timely way.

Q: Yes, that's very interesting. I'm not sure I ever realized exactly how that works. Part of what is often done in electoral support is observation with international and domestic observers. I know IRI and NDI would support observer work. Did IFES also do observation work? How did they divide up observation?

FRITZ: So from what I recall, because IFES was usually working with the election administration body, it would be a conflict of interest for them to then observe, or I think they saw it that way so it was usually the party institutes that organized the observation missions. In the early days, for the first democratic elections in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, they were usually very big, expensive international election observer missions. And as time went on, both the party institutes and we realized that it's better to build this capacity within the political parties themselves. So they began supporting capacity building of political parties and civil society to monitor elections. NDI specialized in the civic side and IRI was more focused on the political party side as much as I recall. That was a lot cheaper and better development

In Eastern Europe, NDI fostered the development of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations or ENEMO. Once ENEMO was established, we began supporting them to monitor elections in one or another country in the region. What was nice is that the domestic monitoring organization knew the country well and would lead the effort, but they would have the support from observers from other surrounding countries.

Q: Good. So, a lot of local capacity building as well?

FRITZ: Yeah, for sure.

Q: I know that even before we had democracy and governance programs there was a group in Costa Rica that other Central American countries sometimes used for technical assistance. Are you aware of that or the extent to which we might have used strong democratic countries to help support others?

FRITZ: I'm not sure. What I think may have happened was that NDI and IRI brought in international observers from other countries in addition to including Americans – Congressmen and women and the like. I think they brought in internationals that they worked with in other countries, so I suspect some of those observer missions included people from Latin America who had the experience with democracy and democratic transitions that could be drawn upon.

Q: Okay. Sorry; I apologize for taking us on a tangent.

Are there other things that are important to talk about? I assume that the electoral handbook was relatively straightforward and codifying best practices? Or, again, any interesting issues?

FRITZ: We had some help from an outside drafter who helped to put on paper some of the information. Then we just edited it, finalized it, and put it forward. That was another effort that went beyond my two years at the Democracy Center. As you know, it takes incredibly long to get things cleared and finalized. But that one was not over the finish line by the time I left – I just moved it forward during my time. I can't take a lot of credit for it.

Q: Were there any specific elections during the period that you became involved with during your time in that office? Two countries jumped out at me as being ones that have had an interesting history with elections, one Zimbabwe and the other Haiti. And I'm just wondering if you had any specific involvement with either of those or any other countries when you were in that job, or were you more focused on managing the process?

FRITZ: I was managing the process. One of the things I did – it was very boring, but important – was to consolidate all the CEPPS files into one central location and to get better coordination between each person on my staff managing each region of the world. They were actually sitting in different parts of the Center, everybody had their own files, there was no cohesion to how we managed that program. One of the things I did is I made sure that we put all the files in one place, had people talking to one another more, so sharing experience from one part of the world to the other within our own staff. But, no, I didn't get to go to any elections during that time.

We had democracy officers in each of the places so we were supporting them and the work that they were doing. That's what was nice about CEPPS – that it was fast. When you had snap elections in X, Y, or Z country, it was something that a DG officer in the field could call us to field a team to assist as soon as possible. And it was a very flexible instrument because we had money already parked in it so we could move quickly -- which is actually another reason why some of the USAID Washington bureaucrats didn't like it because of the flavor of money going from one region to the other. But it was just a matter of swapping out one kind of funds for another. Because we had the money parked in there, we could move very, very quickly. And usually, the CEPPS partners wanted to get out there and assist so they move very quickly on their end of the process. Things went smoothly and quickly for most elections. So we were really supporting the field. It was not, it wasn't the kind of instrument where we were in the driver's seat and in terms of managing the assistance, it really was field driven and field managed.

Q: Right. Did all the missions use CEPPs or did any try to do bilateral agreements themselves?

FRITZ: Some Missions had ongoing CEPPS programs (it wasn't only for snap elections) that they could tap into for election assistance. And those Missions that had significant democracy funds could have stand-alone political processes agreements with the CEPPS

partners. But a lot of Missions did not have that much DG funding so this mechanism was useful, especially if they suddenly were allocated a million dollars for an election coming up. And so it was a mechanism that was better geared towards and more used for smaller countries that didn't have ongoing DG programs than the bigger ones in Eastern Europe by five to ten years into the programs. Most Eastern European countries, if not all, had their own standalone mechanisms by then. But I think the beauty of CEPPs was that it was fast and could be a quick response to a snap election.

Q: Okay. Now that's brilliant. Other things on your time in Washington in the DG Center?

FRITZ: No, it was still the early days of the DG Center and we were finding our way. I would say, we had great leadership with Jennifer Windsor. Chuck Costello, the first Director of the Center, had left already. By the time I moved back to Washington, Jennifer had moved up and Jerry Hyman had taken over as deputy. We had teams working on each of the areas of democracy assistance. We were trying to get the guidelines and handbooks and other resources for DG officers, because it was a fairly new area for USAID assistance. We were trying to give tools to the folks out in the field doing DG assistance. I think our team contributed to that. But there's nothing from that time that I can point to and say, "Wow, that was really exciting!"

Q: Did your unit itself have to coordinate with the State Department or was that done at different levels?

FRITZ: We were coordinating with State, particularly on snap elections, just so that we were circling back. Our DG officers in the field were obviously working with their embassy counterparts in the political section. And then we were working usually with both State and USAID desk officers for each country to make sure that we were lockstep, that we weren't getting ahead of State. As I'm sure you experienced, particularly in the early days of DG assistance, when a country was in transition, the State Department pushed hard for early elections. And usually we were trying to do the same initially, but I think we learned pretty early on, and earlier than State, that elections don't make a democracy and you needed to have certain preconditions in place before you could have a free and fair election.

That's one of the things we started to focus on in the Democracy Center – trying to get the message out that just because you have an election, without the pre-conditions those elections may not actually be free and fair or further a democratic transition. If you don't have independent media reporting, if you don't have the ability of civic monitors to monitor the elections, if you don't have a level playing field for all the political parties, these can all impact whether an election is free and fair and reflects the will of the people.

Q: Okay. That's very, very interesting. So, you were in that position for two years.

FRITZ: Two years.

Q: And then came time to bid to go back overseas. How did your next decision come about?

FRITZ: Well, so I got married.

Q: Oh yes, that's right.

USAID/Central Asia, Director Office of Democracy and Governance, 2001 - 2005

FRITZ: My husband really wanted to serve in Central Asia – that was his dream job. As a tandem couple, it's not always easy to find places to serve together which was really important to us. There was a deputy mission director position open for him and there was a DG office director position open for me. That was our first assignment as a tandem couple. We went out to Almaty to manage programs regionally for the five former Soviet Central Asian Republics -- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. And we were there for four years.

Q: And this was 2001 that you went out. I believe the mission opened in 1992 or 1993, so it was an established mission by the time you got there?

FRITZ: Definitely. It was an established mission, but the challenge was in overseeing technical officers – both PSCs and FSNs – in each country that both reported to me in Almaty and to their Country Representative in the country in which they were working. It was a kind of matrix management which can be difficult. They had two bosses, and sometimes that worked and sometimes not so much. But other than that, it was an established mission and those were established country offices and staff and so forth.

Q: Who was the mission director when you went?

FRITZ: Glenn Anders was the mission director when we first arrived. When Glenn left after a year George Deiken replaced him. And then in our last year there, George left early to go to India. So my husband, Mike became the mission director and that created some issues. Then I had to report through the Europe and Eurasia Bureau DG Office in Washington after that to address the nepotism issue.

Q: I was going to ask what your reporting arrangements were because obviously that's one of the challenges for tandem couples.

FRITZ: I reported to the mission director until the mission director was my husband, and then I reported to the DG team and E&E in Washington after that. It was just the last six months of our time there.

Q: Okay. Can you describe the DG program for Central Asia? Were they all umbrella projects that were then implemented in different countries, or how did it work?

FRITZ: Yes. We had, what I would call more of a civil society approach, more grassroots programming. We had a large, multi-country civil society program implemented by Counterpart. We had the party institutes, IFES, and Internews active in Central Asia at the time. We had a local governance program implemented by ICMA in Kazakhstan, but I don't believe it was active anywhere else. And ABA CEELI was also active in each country. We had some anti-trafficking work. And yeah, that's mainly it.

I would say most of our funds were concentrated in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, particularly towards the end of our time in Kyrgyzstan, when the democratic transition began. There was a democratic election with a reformer elected at the end of our time there. There weren't a lot of democracy partners or civil society activists in the other countries.

We did have human rights work going on as well, but it was very challenging. When I look back at my time there, I learned a lot and the experience changed my beliefs in democracy assistance and what can be achieved.

If you look at Freedom House's Nations in Transit democracy indicators, I think there's seven that they measure: media, local governance, national governance, elections, civil society, judiciary, and corruption. For the five countries I worked in for four years, only one indicator went up one year and that was for national governance in Tajikistan. The sad part is that I didn't even agree with the reasoning behind it. They had improved on national governance because the central government had more control over some of the areas of the country (it had recently come out of a civil war). I really believe in democracy as the best form of government possible and I believed at the time in our ability to help. But to leave after four years and feel like you didn't make a difference was really hard. It was a hard tour from that perspective.

It made me think a lot about the conditions you need to move the needle on democracy, when does it make sense for us to provide DG support, and what kind of assistance makes sense in a country under which conditions. Looking at it with 20/20 hindsight, I felt like we wanted democracy more than the people with whom we were working. There weren't champions like we had in Eastern Europe who, with a little support, moved the needle.

But in Central Asia we had authoritarian governments and most people have never experienced democracy. There was also a fondness for the Soviet Union under which these countries developed with the building of schools and hospitals, and all kinds of infrastructure. When the Soviet Union fell apart these countries weren't like, "We want democracy, we want to be part of the Western world." It was a very different situation. We did get a plus up of some conflict mitigation funding after 9-11 so we were able to do some community development work, very grassroots in the Fergana Valley, which is located in three of the Central Asian Republics. I felt like that work was maybe more impactful and more important than the other democracy work we had been doing.

Q: That's interesting and important. You can't push a string on democracy.

FRITZ: No, no, no. It was hard.

Q: Did you also have community-based partnership programs that brought together Americans and Central Asians? I know that these kinds of partnership programs in Russia were doing a kind of grassroots democracy development. I'm wondering if you had any of those in Central Asia.

FRITZ: Yeah, not really. I think that Peace Corps really played an important role in that way, linking particularly the youth that worked with Peace Corps with some of the State Department Public Affairs programs, the Muskie fellowships and the like. I am on the board of the Eurasia Foundation and learned yesterday that the head of business development had gotten his start running a youth camp with the Peace Corps volunteers in his community. He learned English through that, and ended up doing some of the educational programs through the State Department in the United States. He worked for me in the USAID Office in Kyrgyzstan and then eventually emigrated to the United States. I think these types of programs were much better geared towards the environment in which we were working and more impactful.

Q: Can you talk at all about how you coordinated with the State Department in Central Asia? It must have been complex with five different countries. Did you have to do a lot of problem solving with embassies?

FRITZ: Yes. Yes. Yes, to all those questions. It was challenging. It was very challenging. I talked earlier about matrix management. I won't mention the country or the ambassador, but we had a problematic employee who was a locally hired PSC. His main job was to review and provide for his country, input on implementing partners' regional work plans and to monitor the programming being implemented in his country. And he wasn't doing it, but he was a great assistant to the ambassador. This, as you can imagine, was problematic. I discussed the issue with the USAID country director and he fully agreed with me, at least when we discussed it. We decided that we needed to have a sit down with the employee, which we did. When the employee didn't improve we did not give him his step increase so he quit. The ambassador blamed me – the one and only time that an ambassador read me the letter that each ambassador receives when they are deployed to a country. It was humiliating.

I also had a problematic contractor in another country that was using the resources of the contract for their own personal use. Somehow it came to our attention that this was happening. We looked into it, the Inspector General (IG) looked into it and it wasn't big enough for the IG. I went out to the country and gave the ambassador a heads up that I was going to have to talk to this partner. The partner's spouse was a doctor and the Embassy didn't have one so I knew that was important to this ambassador. I gave him a heads up. The implementing partner did not quit so they didn't lose the doctor, but the ambassador wasn't too pleased with me. I thought I was diplomatic, but I learned later apparently not. So it was challenging. It was really, really hard. But you do the best you can, right?

Q: Yes. Were there other donors working in this space as well? Or, were we alone trying to push the string?

FRITZ: On some of the local government strengthening programs we coordinated with the World Bank because they were interested in decentralization. Other than that, it wasn't a crowded field. The Soros Foundation had some money for civil society but there weren't a lot of other donors out there doing this work.

Q: And you'd mentioned after 9-11 there was a big increase in your program. Was that also in the DG budget or was that in other aspects of the program? Just wondering if you got more and more pressure on you.

FRITZ: There was definitely pressure. We got a plus up of this conflict mitigation money which funded both DG and EG work at the local level. There was definitely pressure to program this new money and quickly. Initially we created an intra-mission working group to design a program under the leadership of Mike Harvey, who was the Tajikistan country office director. Mike led the effort, but the various offices also contributed. Once all the programmatic pieces were put in place, the conflict mitigation work was put into the DG office to manage. I believe there was a microcredit program that complemented the community development work but that was managed by the Economic Growth office.

Q: One of the questions I was going to ask you was which elements of the program you thought might have been most successful. But I think you've just answered that.

FRITZ: None.

Q: But I think that there's an important lesson here that people need to take more into account, that is to be realistic in our expectations.

FRITZ: For sure. The community development and civil society work is so foundational. And just trying to find partners that want it more than we do is important.

Q: Right. Is there space? Even then if a country is not committed to democracy, is there still space for things like the independent media? Can an Internews operate to strengthen independent media even if a country is not so committed to other aspects of democracy?

FRITZ: I think it's hard but doable. We had a situation in Kazakhstan where one of the partners that Internews was working with had criticized the president's son-in-law so he went after the Internews in a pretty public way. That was a difficult problem for us. We had to get the ambassador involved and he wasn't too pleased about having to do that. So I think it's really challenging. And it depends on the country, obviously, but in smaller countries like in the Balkans, the media can bleed over the borders, so you can do a lot more. And I think nowadays with the internet, there are a lot more opportunities outside of traditional media where you can have an impact. You can impact the information space in a way that wasn't available back then.

Q: Other things to say about your time there? It doesn't sound like your favorite posting.

FRITZ: No, but my husband loved it. Yeah, and you know, it's an isolated part of the world too, so that was hard. You learn something from everywhere you serve. Probably most importantly from that assignment, what I took away from that time living in Central Asia were the friendships, the friends that I made, the colleagues I had that I'm still friends with. I just organized a Central Asia get together a couple of months ago, and saw some of my old colleagues. I think because it was so far away and the countries were so undeveloped or underdeveloped, there wasn't a whole lot to do. You could ski, but aside from that, I think in those kinds of places, and I suspect you've experienced this as well, this is where your strongest friendships develop. And so I think that was probably the best part of Central Asia for me.

Q: Just one final question, were you able to talk to the DG Center about some of these thoughts as you were leaving and feeling the sense of frustration? Were you able to talk to other DG folks about this philosophically? Does it make sense to continue to try to push the string in countries like this?

FRITZ: I don't recall that I did. When the DG Center was created, the idea was that all the DG staff from all of the geographic bureaus would be housed in the DG Center but that was not the case for E&E. E&E kept a large part of its technical staff. So certainly we had lots of conversations in the DG office in E&E, but not so much in the DG Center as much.

Q: Okay. Anything else? Because then you went off to a somewhat unusual assignment.

Europe/Eurasia Bureau, Regional Democracy Officer, Bulgaria, 2005 - 2007

FRITZ: The way we had planned managing our tandem careers was that my husband would be the lead bidder on the first job after we got married and he was, and the next one would be for me. However, while we were in Central Asia, I had twins. At the time we were bidding they were two years old and by the time we left, they were three. And I said, ”You know what? I can't do this. I can't raise these babies and be here for them and have a high-powered job.” My husband's older than me so I said, “Why don't you go try to get a mission directorship somewhere and we'll figure me out after that.”

Mike became mission director in Bulgaria, and I became a regional democracy officer as part of the DG Team in the E&E Bureau. As you may recall, at the end of my Central Asia tour I was already reporting to the director of that office. Gloria Steele was the assistant administrator at the time, and she was our guardian angel. She really helped us to be able to stay together as a tandem couple. Gloria identified a Foreign Service job in the region that wasn't going to be filled. She moved it in Bulgaria, made it regional and reporting to Washington. The idea was that I would work as part of the E&E team, but obviously closer to the missions that we were supporting as a Bureau and be able to help missions design projects, evaluate projects, and provide mentoring to staff. Basically all

missions would have to do is pay my travel costs, which sounds great, right? But that was when there was a huge Operational Expense (OE) crunch just as I came into the job. I was concerned that I was going to be sitting there for three years with nothing to do because missions don't have money for me to travel. As it turned out, it was cheaper and easier for them to use me than someone from DC. I could drive to several posts in the Balkans. I also went to Moldova where I designed elections and political party programming. I went to Ukraine where I also designed a political processes project. I did most of my work in Kosovo (rule of law) and in Macedonia (local government), and a little bit in Serbia (civil society, political process).

I left Bulgaria six months early to serve as deputy mission director in Kosovo and then mission director in Serbia, so it was helpful to have had that introduction to those missions. But in the Bulgaria job I wasn't managing any people, projects, or money. I was concerned that this was going to be a career killer because that's what we do in USAID, right? That's how you move up. So I told myself that I'd just devote the time to family and, and that'll be okay. I can hang around for three years and do this work, which is really rewarding. Surprisingly, I got promoted out of that job. I think it was because I did a lot of mentoring. We weren't sending staff to training back then. I created a manual on how to monitor and document monitoring projects. We had a lot of new FSNs and so I helped them to learn how to manage the projects that they were being assigned to manage in a very practical way. It was a really great, rewarding position. My only regret was because I thought that there would be no OE, I would accept any mission request. So I was not in Bulgaria as much as I would have liked. I just kept thinking, "Well, this is going to end, this is going to end." But it never did. It was a very good experience and time in my life and career.

Q: One of the things I see on your CV that you did was an analysis of the USAID Bulgaria program as well. And I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit, because did that analysis lead to the graduation of Bulgaria? Could you talk about that whole process of graduation, closeout and criteria?

FRITZ: Sure. I was assigned to work with the former mission director, John Tennant—I think he may have been the first mission director in Bulgaria. John continued to have ties in Bulgaria and lived there. So John and I, along with Ivanka (Vanya) Tzankova, who was the FSN program office director, worked together as a team to set about looking at the impact of the program. The USAID program had been active for 17 years. We tried to look at the impact and try to distill lessons learned. We started with reading all the evaluations that had been done. The problem was that USAID wasn't doing evaluations then and the ones that we were doing weren't very good, so we didn't have a lot to go on, but we had some information. Probably more important was that we had the institutional knowledge of John and Vanya who had been there for a good part of the life of that mission. I think Vanya was hired maybe in the second year of the mission's life. And she's so bright and smart. John and Vanya remembered well the people and projects. So we went back to people that were part of our programs, like champions or just people who were knowledgeable about some aspect of the work we were doing and interviewed them. We asked them, "What did USAID do and how did we do it? Were our programs done

well? What kind of impact did we have? What could have been done differently or better?"

It wasn't a scientifically sound process from a social research point of view. But we did distill some good lessons learned. I think we were able to see where we had more impact. Some of our local government work was very impactful. In fact, one woman who we worked very closely with was the mayor of a small town in southern Bulgaria, Zlatograd. While our programs were active, she became the head of the local government association. Now she does local government training and evaluations of European Union projects. She was even the chief of party for a USAID local governance project in Kosovo and another one in Macedonia. There are people like that who have done amazing things. There was another woman who was part of one of ours that became an EU minister. So there are some really bright people that we were able to interview and learn from in terms of what USAID had done that was good and things that maybe were not so good. And then we drafted a full report that described the good, the bad, and the ugly. Separately, we extracted all of the good parts and distilled those into more of a puff piece. Both of these are available on the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC).

Q: Right. And I assume that some of the lessons learned are things you took with you as you went on yourself to become a mission director.

FRITZ: For sure. It's something I mentioned earlier in our discussion about the very first program that I managed, the local government program in Poland. Having a champion is just so important, like having somebody who wants it more than you, who we can give a little technical assistance to or maybe a lot and they can really navigate and run with it. That's so much more effective. And so I think the more successful work that we did in Bulgaria had that. I was really impressed with the democracy aspect of decentralization, which is a lesson I brought to Ukraine. The more people have a say in local decision making about the resources that their communities, municipalities, or cities are getting. And there's a real opportunity for people to experience democracy at a local level and to feel the impact of that in a way that's really hard to do at the national level.

Q: Yes. Just to go backwards for one second, is that something you think could have been done in Central Asia on the local government front, just out of curiosity?

FRITZ: Maybe. We did have a local government project in Kazakhstan which was at the oblast level, so it wasn't real grassroots. But I think it was impractical, because the country was so large. And so we were working with only three oblasts. Here's where it backfired on us. The champion we had in Pavlodar Oblast was the governor. And he was a reformer. He was really good and worked with us really well. We were giving him the technical assistance and the resources to reform his oblast but that became threatening to the central government so they removed him (oblast governor was an appointed position, not elected.) I think he may have even gone to jail and just like that, our champion was gone. So I think it works better in smaller countries, although in Ukraine we supported their decentralization effort, and I think pretty successfully.

Q: So did Bulgaria do the program, did the closeout happen while you all were there? Did Mike close down the mission?

FRITZ: He did. And Administrator Henrietta Fore came out for it. As did Andrew Natsios. I was on TDY at the time so I missed it. But it was, I understand, a great ceremony and a great way to mark the end of our presence there.

Q: Was there some kind of a legacy institution created there? I know that was done in a number of the Eastern European countries as they closed. Did that happen in Bulgaria?

FRITZ: Yes, but it was a legacy foundation that was created from the enterprise funds. The Bulgarian American Enterprise Fund was hugely successful. They made a lot of money. Originally when these enterprise funds were established in each country, there was not an expectation that they would make money. They were created to help spur economic development. But the Bulgarian one did make a lot of money, as did a few of the others. From the reflows from the investments they made they created the America for Bulgaria Foundation which is still active and funds projects. In fact, Vanya, the former USAID program officer moved over to head up their M&E work for many years and she just retired from there. So she brought the USAID experience to inform some of the Foundation's efforts so that was good.

However, the kinds of people that were on the boards of the enterprise funds were from the private sector, investment bankers and the like. But the people that you need to run these legacy foundations – which are nonprofit organizations – need to have a different skill set and background experience, if you will, different experience. I think that USAID has had some challenges because of that. When I was acting assistant administrator in the bureau, one of the challenges I was dealing with was that the America for Bulgaria Foundation was funding projects that didn't seem to fit with their mandate. What we had approved when we agreed that they could use the reflows to establish the Foundation was in support of private sector development. But the Foundation was supporting the ballet and other arts programs. They built a children's museum that did not seem to be financially sustainable – or at least had not developed a sustainability plan before they built it. But these legacy foundations are a nice way to continue U.S assistance after USAID has left, a way to continue U.S. support.

Q: Was there much DG programming in Bulgaria itself?

FRITZ: Oh, yeah. In Eastern Europe, there basically were two types of programs in I would say almost every country in the early days – Economic Development (EG) and Democracy and Governance (DG). These were not Third World countries. Literacy was high because they had good educational systems and health indicators were good because they had strong health care systems. So USAID didn't really focus on programs outside of EG and DG in many of these Eastern European countries. However, in the former Soviet Union, for example in Ukraine, there might have been targeted health programs to fight TB and HIV.

Q: Okay. Did you have much involvement with the embassy, and were relations good with the embassy itself? Did you engage with the Ambassador, John Beyrle?

FRITZ: I didn't. Obviously, Mike did. I did do a trafficking in persons (TIP) assessment together with one of the Bulgarian FSNs and we briefed the ambassador on it. Sometimes he would ask me about what was going on in the region, particularly in Serbia and Kosovo, because it was a hot issue at that point and he was curious. So if I saw him in the elevator, I would brief him. But that was, you know, just in passing, but nothing formal aside from the TIP report that we had done.

Q: Okay. Anything more on Bulgaria that's important to mention?

FRITZ: No, beautiful country, beautiful people. It was great.

Q: It restored your faith in USAID after your Central Asia experience?

FRITZ: I didn't lose faith in USAID – maybe in what can be achieved with democracy assistance. But, yeah, it was nice to be back in a country where you had more champions.

Q: Okay. Just a final question, since you were traveling around a lot, did you as a regional DG person have to consult with the embassies where you were going? Any challenges to that?

FRITZ: Yeah, in Kosovo I partnered with somebody from Washington on an assessment of a judicial reform program and I think we briefed the ambassador. In Serbia I think I consulted with the political section on a political processes design I was doing. And sometimes it just depended on the nature of the particular ambassador or DCM – whether they were very hands on or not. So I remember that many of the things we came up with had to be run through them in one shape or form, but mostly because I was acting more like an outside consultant almost, it was usually the mission staff that was doing that.

Q: Okay. But overall being a DG officer, one gets a lot more practice dealing with embassies so it's good preparation for becoming a mission director.

FRITZ: Yes, yes, and definitely.

Q: And so that's what you moved on to next. Now, how was the process of becoming mission director? Did the E&E Bureau say, we want you for this job and or did it happen solely through the bidding process? Was there any kind of a process?

FRITZ: Okay, I probably shouldn't share this with you, but this is how it unfolded.

Q: How it really works.

USAID/Kosovo, Deputy Mission Director, 2007 - 2010

FRITZ: Yes, this is how it really works. So now it was my turn to bid on jobs and I thought in order to get promoted, I needed to serve in another region. So Mike and I bid on jobs in Latin America where we were hoping to get assigned. We resigned ourselves to not being able to find jobs together. We were thinking we'd be in different countries and we'd sort that out, particularly with respect to the kids. And I think what ended up happening was for two reasons. First, Latin America was hard to break into, particularly at this stage in our careers. But second, our guardian angel in Washington, Gloria Steele, came through again. During the bidding process, she called and said that the deputy mission director in Kosovo had left early, so they didn't have a deputy—and this was midway through the last year in Bulgaria. She said, "Susan, if you go to Kosovo as deputy now, the mission director position in Macedonia will open up and Mike will get assigned that job. So hold tight. We'll assign you now and then we'll get Mike to Macedonia down the pike." So that's what we did. We had faith that Gloria could pull it off.

Kosovo was a danger pay post so I couldn't have the kids with me – they had to be with Mike. I went to Kosovo six months early and I would come back and forth every two weeks. Mike Farbman was the mission director and he was lovely. He allowed me to leave after half a day every other Friday. And it was a six-hour drive. I would drive back to Bulgaria, see my family for the weekend and then come back on Monday and repeat that every two weeks. So, for the first six months I was in Kosovo Mike and the kids were in Bulgaria. Then he moved with the kids to Macedonia which is less than 60 miles door to door but between Pristina (Kosovo) and Skopje (Macedonia) it's a two-lane road. It was very dangerous at the time because the road wasn't very good and drivers were aggressive. There were landslides pretty often in one section of the road, too. And you have to cross the border. But it was better than anything else we were considering at the time. I would leave at 5:15 in the morning to drive to Pristina, shower, get ready for work and start work at eight. I wouldn't go home every night. I would go home every second or third night, just because at night it was much more dangerous, particularly in the winter time. And so I would do that and it worked. We did that for about two years. So I was in Kosovo for two and a half and did that for two years.

Q: So, your main residence was in Macedonia, but then going back and forth to Kosovo. Wow.

FRITZ: I had an apartment in Kosovo since I was technically assigned there. And yeah, it made it easier for me to stay there.

Q: You were in both places. Wow. But you had been doing a lot of TDY work over the years in Kosovo, so you knew it well. Can you tell us what was the state of affairs in Kosovo at that point? This was now 2007.

FRITZ: Right. It was late 2007. United Nations Special Envoy for Kosovo Marti Ahtisaari from Finland had created a peace plan for resolving the Kosovo-Serbia situation. The UN had been running Kosovo since the end of the conflict and the Kosovars were getting tired of that. They were getting restless and wanted to run their

own country. Ahtisaari devised a peace plan, but politically it was not getting approved by the UN so everything was at a standstill.

It was a good plan. The basic idea was to carve out Serb-majority municipalities from Albanian-majority municipalities to give more local control for the Serbian minority in Kosovo. There were three Serb-majority municipalities that existed already in the north, just south of Serbia. They are probably 99, if not a hundred percent ethnic Serb. Ahtisaari created I think five new municipalities that were carved out of enclaves of Serbs in central Kosovo. I arrived in Kosovo in December 2007. On February 17, 2008, President's Day weekend, Kosovo declared independence. The United States blessed it as long as Kosovo followed the Ahtisaari peace plan. And so Kosovo did and they created these new municipalities. This is where my local government assistance and background, I think helped. I chaired an embassy working group on establishing the new municipalities. It was supposed to be co-chaired with the DCM, but the then-DCM didn't want to do it. So I ended up running this inter-agency working group on these new municipalities and, similar to what happened in Bosnia, they had to have elections but to first create the municipalities. They needed to create the organizational infrastructure because these are new municipalities being formed and they needed help with that. We had a local government project that helped stand up these new municipalities. But as you can imagine, the State Department and the embassy were very interested because it was very political. We also had Public Affairs, the Political Section, and our DG folks as part of this working group. We eventually got a new DCM that was more interested and took an active role in co-chairing the working group. We helped stand up the new municipalities and then helped support municipal elections including in the new ones. The whole effort definitely involved the interagency at the working level, but also at the mission and embassy management levels as well. I think we were as successful as we could have been. I wouldn't say it was a rousing success, but it was good what we were able to accomplish. There was greater Serb turnout for the elections than there ever had been since Kosovo’s independence. It was extremely low, but improved.

Q: And one of the challenges was trying to protect the rights of the Serbian population that remained in Kosovo ? Their minority rights?

FRITZ: Right, correct. it was to give them a voice that would have been lost if those municipalities remained majority Albanian. That was the thinking behind the Ahtisaari peace plan. We were just helping to implement that peace plan to give the Serb minority not only a voice in, but control over their own decision-making and resources.

Q: And I assume, although we won't talk about it now, that some of this generated important lessons that were useful when you eventually were in Ukraine?

FRITZ: It's a little bit different, but I guess you could pull some lessons learned from there. It was kind of a different situation, a much smaller country, much more political, much more transparent, and front and center in terms of importance to the Kosovars, to the Serbs, to the Americans, to the Europeans. So everybody was involved or interested.

Q: In general, can you say a little bit more about what the program was doing besides the support for that?

FRITZ: Sure. A big part of what we were doing was helping to reestablish the judicial system. The UN was running everything after the conflict in Kosovo. And before the UN came to run things, the Serbs were in charge. When Milosević came into power at one point when he made his inflammatory speech in Kosovo Polje, saying, that we (the Serbs) will never be taken advantage of again, basically empowering the Serbs to kick out all of the Albanians, the professionals, from the education system, from the government, from the health system. The Albanians ended up running a parallel system with their own underground schools. They were doing everything outside of the government system. And so when the UN started to pull back and the Kosovar Albanians started to take over there needed to be a lot of capacity building. That was a large part of what we were doing, a lot of capacity building, whether it was economic development or anything in the DG sector and local governance or anything really.

On the judicial front, there was a process for vetting all of the judges for a whole new judicial system. There was an application and vetting process that was taking place that mainly the UN was running, but it was running slowly so we jumped in and supported that effort as well. That was big. We were physically equipping court systems, refurbishing courtrooms, installing recording equipment so you could tape court proceedings.

We had a big education program, but not what you would think. It wasn't the soft side of basic education that USAID normally supports. It was infrastructure. Kosovar schools were running two and three sessions a day because there were not enough schools and classrooms. That meant some kids were going to school at night because that was the only time a day that was available. Our program either added classrooms onto existing schools or refurbished classrooms that weren't in shape to be able to be used. By the time I left, we were in the process of planning to build a brand-new school in Pristina. That was something that was hugely impactful. It brought down the number of class sessions from three to two a day or one in most places. I think by the time we finished that project, there were no more triple sessions in any school in the country. So that was, I think, a pretty important effort

We did a lot on economic development. Kosovar Albanians are pretty entrepreneurial and I think in the situation that they were in, they had to be in order to survive. It was very refreshing to see – I did not observe that in other Balkan countries like Serbia or Bosnia. There were a lot of ways in which we could support small businesses to market their goods or repackage their goods, find new markets. We did a lot on the agriculture side to identify new products that could be grown. I remember kiwis being one where there's a huge market and good climate, soil, everything that would make that a good crop for them. So we did a lot on that side.

And then because the Kosovar Albanians had to work outside the formal system for so many years, there were lots of issues with following rules or having rules, permitting and

following permits. A lot of buildings were built without permits. We were trying to help establish a rules-based governance system.

We provided a lot of support to civil society and media as well. My all-time favorite project, the one I'm proudest of, was in Kosovo. In terms of impact, it wasn't broad, but for those we did help, it was enormous. And the challenges we had to overcome were also enormous. It was the most rewarding thing that I've ever been involved in.

During the conflict, the Roma were seen as siding with the Serbs. They felt in danger being around the Albanians so they fled to the north of the country where the ethnic Serbs were. Unfortunately, they had fled to a UN Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp that was situated on a site where a mine had been so they were living on top of lead tailings which was sickening people, especially the kids. Another donor, I forget who it was -- maybe the Norwegians or the Dutch -- had built housing for the Roma in an environmentally clean and safe area also in the north, but the Roma didn't move there. And when anybody did leave this contaminated camp, other Roma would move in. So you had this challenge of first, this is an area of the country that the Kosovar Albanians didn't control because it was in the north. Second, you had a failed donor attempt to resolve the problem. Third, you had sick kids with lead coming out of their teeth and you can imagine how this was impacting the development of their brains.

Q: Why wouldn't they move to where the other housing had been built? It wasn't in a secure area or?

FRITZ: The new housing wasn't located near where they worked. It was in a more remote place than they were used to. The houses they built didn’t have land to grow family gardens which is something they did to supplement their food. I know, it sounds crazy that you wouldn't move to get your kids to a safer place, but they didn't. And you had this empty housing just sitting there.

Peter Duffy, our program officer, was the one who led the effort. He really wanted to tackle this. When I came to Kosovo as deputy mission director he brought it to my attention. We made a pitch to Ambassador Tina Kaidanow who was skeptical because she thought it would be a waste of money. Mostly due to Peter’s persuasive abilities, she finally agreed that we could put $2 million towards the effort with conditions – we’d need to get the UN to secure the IDP camp so that as families moved out to new housing, new people did not move in. This also would require that the departing family’s dwelling would be destroyed upon their departure. Second, we’d need buy-in of the community so that they would move into whatever housing that would be built. I don't remember how and why we ended up with Mercy Corps, but we did. I think they were already active in Kosovo so this was something that fit in their wheelhouse. But the problem was it was going to cost more than the $2 million that we had to do everything. I was responsible for donor coordination for our mission. I reached out to the head of assistance for the European Union who was keen to partner with us. And together we figured it out.

He was able to allocate five million euros. And, overcoming the EU's very strict procurement rules, he was able to basically sole source it to Mercy Corps' European sister organization. Between the two organizations, which were all Mercy Corps, they pulled it off. They found new land that the Roma would move to, that was safe. We were able to involve the UN police so the housing that existed in the camp was destroyed after each family moved and the camp was eventually closed down. The Kosovo government had blood chelation equipment that a donor had provided that they didn't know how to use. We brought in expertise so that they could start treating everybody but mostly the kids who had lead in their blood. We consulted with the community leaders to design housing in a style and place that they would move to. So it succeeded against all odds. It was a shame that those people ever ended up on contaminated land but we were able to do right by them and make it happen. And so like I said, I'm the proudest of that. It was mainly Peter's doing, he really pushed and he convinced Ambassador Kaidanow and she blessed it and we were able to pull it off. My small piece was helping the Europeans to get their money to the table and that was because I had a good partner who was willing to go the extra mile to make it happen on his end. He didn't break any rules, but bent them to make something good happen.

Q: Yeah, that's a wonderful story that bureaucracy can come to the end and do the right thing sometimes.

FRITZ: Yep, yep, absolutely.

Q: That's wonderful and a meaningful contribution. Did you mention that one of your responsibilities was on donor coordination? Just how did the director-deputy relationship work?

FRITZ: So when I first got there, the mission director was Mike Farbman for the first six months. And Mike was an economic growth guy. He assigned me the DG side of the house. I asked him if he would allow me to just use that time to learn from him. I told him that I was happy to be responsible for DG, but I needed to learn about economic growth as well as how a mission runs, the offices that I didn't engage with, the executive office (EXO) and others. He was great. He said, "Come to any meeting you want. I'm happy to explain anything to you. My door's open. Join any meeting that's on my calendar." And so I did. I also took that time in the first six months to go to each of the support offices and interview each person on the staff to find out what they did, how they did it, what the office did. That included EXO, financial management (FM), every office. And so that gave me a good grounding to have the broader perspective that helped me hit the ground running as a deputy. Patricia Rader came in after that and she wanted to do things differently. She wanted to be the outside person and have me be the inside person so that's how we divided things. Except I did get to go out and do donor coordination. That was my day out for the week. And it was great! I think that's what I'm best at—internal management. It wasn't such a steep learning curve. I'm an extreme introvert, so it played to my strengths. However, when I became a mission director, I had to be out front a lot more and I wasn't used to it. I hadn't had that experience. I think I did two

public events in the two and a half years I was in Kosovo. So that was something that was hard for me, very hard.

Q: Interesting. I know for introverts, it takes a lot of practice. That I know.

FRITZ: Yep, absolutely.

Q: Right. Well, that really sounds like a fascinating time to have been in Kosovo. I mean, you were there during one of the most meaningful times. I remember reading Craig Buck's oral history and he spoke about how pro-American the population was in the early days after the war. Was that still the case when you were there?

FRITZ: Absolutely. Craig left Bosnia when we were there to go to Kosovo, because that's when the Kosovo conflict had just ended. The Kosovar Albanians are very pro-American. They have a Bill Clinton street. I think they might even have a George Bush street. President Biden came as well while I was there. His son, Beau served in Kosovo so he came out when he was vice president. He knows the Balkans really, really well. And that was a great visit. We renamed the USAID parking lot the Joe Biden Pavilion because that's where we did the all hands meet and greet with the embassy staff. And yeah, they love Americans. If they could be a U.S. state, they would definitely become one.

We had enormous influence. There was a joke actually going around when I was there. Our ambassador at the time, Tina Kaidanow, was the head of the U.S. office that became an embassy once the country declared independence. Tina was a force to be reckoned with. She was perfect for the first ambassador in Kosovo and to help birth that country, to guide them through independence. The joke was that the President, Hashim Thaci, was coming through customs and they asked him, do you have anything to declare? And he says, "Hold on, give me my phone." And he calls Tina and asks, "Tina, do I have anything to declare?" Everybody knew she was running an awful lot, advising the Kosovars through their independence. And so that was a special time to be there.

I would say it's very different now. The country has really come into its own. But those early days, it was really birthing a new nation. One thing we did, and this was before I became the deputy, but when I was supporting the mission, we brought together judicial experts from the Kosovo and legal experts from the United States. We brought them out to Macedonia and helped them draft a new constitution to get them ready for a new country. And it was all very quiet. We didn't do the drafting. But we supported them drafting a new constitution for their country. We knew it was heading in that direction. And so yeah, that was an important piece of work. And it was two mission staff working very closely with them. One of them is now on the Supreme Court of Kosovo.

Q: One of the USAID staff. Okay, I was going to ask you then about the FSN staff and it sounds like you had a quite extraordinary group.

FRITZ: Yep. Great, great group. Gresa Caka is the FSN who helped on the constitution and she is amazingly talented. She was going to law school at the time. She was working

with John Allelo, who was a PSC at the time and has since joined the foreign service. While he was a PSC, John and Gresa were the ones who brought in the U.S. experts and helped manage this process and provided input as well.

Q: Well, it's a real success story.

FRITZ: I think so. We'll see. It remains to be seen. Going back to when we were helping to establish the Serb majority municipalities, our local staff were all ethnic Albanians. And I felt that we needed to have some ethnic Serbs on the staff. The only ethnic Serb was one of the cleaning ladies. And I had such a hard time working with the embassy human resources people to designate a position to be for a specific ethnicity. They said we couldn't do that. So we included requirements like you have to speak Serbian. A lot of ethnic Albanians, particularly younger ones didn't speak Serbian, older ones, yes. But we ended up hiring an ethnic Bosniak, which was good just to have a diversity of views. And she was excellent. She managed that portfolio working in those new ethnic Serb-majority municipalities. So anyway, that was a challenge. I was talking to somebody recently that was trying to hire an ethnic minority and I think it's a little bit easier today. But back then you couldn't just say we want to hire an ethnic Serb.

Q: What about your implementing partners? Was that a challenge for them as well? Did you have any provisions asking them to seek as much diversity as possible? Or did you just leave it to their judgment if it was needed or not needed?

FRITZ: We left it to their judgment. I would say that, you know, a lot of them brought in more expats because that was easier in a way. I think it was easier having expats, especially from the region. As I mentioned previously, the woman who was the mayor of Zlatograd in Bulgaria became the chief of party of the local governance project in Kosovo. I think that that was almost easier than trying to hire an ethnic Serb because there aren't that many in Kosovo and few, if any, with the requisite skills, and Serbs from Serbia aren't going to come to Kosovo because they've heard it's really dangerous for Serbs. So expats were definitely a better approach to staffing projects.

Q: Given the amount of time you spent in the Balkans, you really have some unique capabilities and understanding the region.

FRITZ: I love the Balkans. I mean, it is my passion. There are others in the agency, and I've actually tapped into that expertise. Some of the folks I worked with from OTI, Michael Stievater, Jason Aplon, Ray Jennings, these are people I worked with in Bosnia, one of the first OTI programs. When we were trying to figure out what to do to prepare for our work in these ethnic Serb municipalities being created in Kosovo, I called on them. Again, I had only ethnic Albanian staff. I couldn't send them to those places.

I reached out to Michael Stievater, called him to pick his brain. I think he was in Indonesia at the time. I told him, "This is what I want to do. We don't have people in these regions. We don't know what's doable, what's not. And we need somebody to help us figure out what we can do in the north." Initially it was the north. Then we did a

second assessment that included the new municipalities in the south. So we quietly hired these former OTI people, I think on a purchase order with a deliverable of a report to tell us what's doable, what's not, what are these areas like, what's the appetite for assistance, what's the openness for assistance in these areas. I would say people like Michael, Ray, and Jason are equally or even more expert on the Balkans than me. So there are people in the agency or who are somehow related to the agency. Michael now works in Ukraine for a USAID contractor. And Jason is working for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Geneva. Ray does a lot of work for OTI still. So there are other Balkans experts in USAID.

Q: Right, so a lot of that was embodied within the OTI structure?

FRITZ: Well, this wasn't part of OTI. This was outside of OTI. These just happened to be OTI contacts.

Q: Yes, right, but OTI helped to create the capability?

FRITZ: Right, yes, absolutely, absolutely, yeah.

Q: Okay, other thoughts on Kosovo. Again, it sounds like there were a lot of successes and in an environment in which there was strong collaboration with the locals. Since USAID is emphasizing localization so much now, were you working directly with any local organizations, or were you working through U.S. implementers?

FRITZ: At that point, it was through U.S. implementers. There was a lot of corruption in Kosovo. With independence came a lot of money. There was a huge concern about ensuring that our funds were managed well and not siphoned off. There was an interesting case of reverse localization. I don't know if we ended up doing this, but as I had mentioned the schools project, as we were building classrooms and schools through our implementing partner, the Kosovo government was doing the same, so it was a parallel effort. But when they saw our schools that were cheaper – we spent less money – and much better built, they came to us and asked, "Can we give you money to build schools?" I don't know if that ever happened, but I think because of corruption, money was probably skimmed off the top. Our implementing partner had engineers checking everything every step of the way and our own staff was doing the same. Our process yielded better quality school structures, buildings, and the government recognized that.

I understand the same thing happened with the Kosovo government giving USAID money for the credit guarantee program. So it's not localization, and it's almost a step backwards. On the one hand, it recognizes that USAID can use these funds better. It's not the best situation. You want the government to be able to do this but in the short term it is a way of getting assistance out there in a way that avoids corruption.

Q: And the country itself recognized this.

FRITZ: Yeah.

Q: Given their recognition of the problem, were you able to do any kind of anti-corruption programming? Or does that kind of programming have any results anyway?

FRITZ: Well, no, I definitely think those kinds of programs have results. We saw really great results in Ukraine, which also has huge corruption. I think it's harder in a country that small, where everybody knows everybody else. And you have a history of people working outside the formal system, because they were forced to. It's really hard to establish formal systems where people follow the rule of law and rules and regulations after that. So in a place like that, it's hard. I just think the institutions were young, people, the experience was undeveloped just because they worked outside the system and you didn't have people who had been long in the government, managing ministries and things like that. These are all new people. These make it even harder to stamp out corruption.

Q: Okay. Anything else on Kosovo? Because it's a surprising next assignment, not the logical follow on from Kosovo.

USAID/Serbia and Montenegro, Mission Director, 2010 - 2014

FRITZ: That was very logical for me. I think Gloria had moved on. But my other good friend, Mike Harvey, decided to leave Serbia early to go to, I think, Iraq at that point. And so that job came open just as I was bidding. I thought it was meant to be, and I bid on it. And I hadn't been excited to bid on Latin America earlier. I felt like it was something I had to do, but it didn't excite me. And I thought, well, that's just a long career. Things aren't as exciting midway through as they were in your first assignment. But when the opportunity to go to Kosovo came up and then Serbia, both of those posts excited me in a way like my first post in Bosnia. So I knew it was something I had to do. If the folks in Washington would allow me, it was something I really felt like I was meant to do. So I was lucky. I got assigned as mission director.

Q: As the mission director to Serbia and Montenegro, you also oversaw Montenegro?

FRITZ: And the close out of Montenegro.

Q: Before we start talking about the program there, was it difficult with your Serbian counterparts when you said you had come from Kosovo? Did that create any challenges for you?

FRITZ: No, not really. Before I moved to Serbia, a friend of mine – an ethnic Croat originally from Bosnia and living in Macedonia – invited Mike and me to lunch with one of the deputy prime ministers of Serbia. She had gone to Harvard with him and they had remained good friends. And so he had come with his wife to lunch. That helped me to get to know someone in the government in a more informal setting -- it was a very lucky break. And he was responsible for donor coordination so I ended up dealing with him a lot early on in my time in Serbia. And USAID was known as being a flexible donor that

delivered timely and quality assistance. So I didn't experience problems. I also speak Serbian, and that went a long way. And did my speeches in Serbian. I'm not good conversationally, but my pronunciation is good. I know what I'm saying. But I would read my speeches and that, I think, went a long way to easing my path.

Q: Okay, good. And you say Serbian. Some people would say Serbo-Croatian. How much difference is there between Serbian and Croatian?

FRITZ: Well, strangely enough, I was in the first Bosnian language class at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) because I needed a language for tenuring. Remember, I was going to do the Bosnia assignment and then go back into the civil service afterwards. But I decided to stay in the foreign service and had to tenure in a language. I had been studying Bosnian when I was living there so I went into Bosnian for two months to get up to the 2-2 level in order to tenure after I returned to the United States. We didn't have any materials because there was no such thing as Bosnian before the war.

But to answer your question, Serbian and Croatian are very close. Serbian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, and Croatian uses the Latin alphabet. Some words are slightly different, there's a, there's a word for it, but they're slightly different. So in Serbian, it's mleko for milk, in Croatian it's mljeko (with the "j" being pronounced like a "y"). They have a "ye" that's added to words. They understand each other. I understand that after the conflict, each country changed their languages. So the Serbs got rid of Turkish words, the Croatians eliminated Serbian words. And so they're more different now than they were at the end of the war.

Q: Okay.

FRITZ: But everybody understands everybody else.

Q: Okay. So, given the time, can you talk about Montenegro first and then we'll come back to talk about Serbia?

FRITZ: That sounds great.

Q: Because the Montenegro program also started later didn't it?

FRITZ: This is one of the things I wanted to circle back to. You had asked in the last interview whether it was hard to work in Serbia and I was talking about the staff. I forgot to mention that several of the staff in the mission had worked for OTI. OTI had a program in Serbia, but we didn't have a mission. OTI was working out of Hungary and supporting activities within Serbia from Hungary. When NATO bombed Serbia during the Kosovo conflict, those Serbian staff working for OTI (along with embassy local staff) moved to Budapest where they continued to work for OTI (and the embassy, respectively). So today we still have people within the mission who worked for OTI before Milosević was ousted and who were committed to democracy and change in Serbia. And, you know, it's always easy to work with people like that. Fortunately the

mission hired some of the OTI people and not only our staff, but some of our partners hired OTI staff as well. So there was a good starting basis when the mission opened.

Q: What had OTI been doing during that period?

FRITZ: I don't know everything, but I know they had a big information program, which supported an independent radio station called B92. It's since been sold and it's no longer what it was. But B92 in those days was both independent and anti-Milosević. And so OTI was helping B92 to expand its reach around the country and to get its information out all around the country. The transition in Serbia started with democratic elections which resulted in the opposition winning municipal elections. Eventually, Milosević was overthrown. But from what I remember OTI was mostly in the information space. I'm sure they were doing a lot more than that, but that was probably the most important thing that they were doing was getting unbiased information out.

Going back to your original question, at the time Montenegro was still part of Serbia. It did not secede until 2006. So OTI programming included Montenegro. And then when the mission opened, it included programming in both Serbia and Montenegro which continued to be managed by the mission in Belgrade after they became two different countries. We had an office and a small staff in Podgorica, Montenegro as well.

So in my Washington briefings before I went out to take up my post in Belgrade in the summer of 2010, I learned that Montenegro's budget for 2012 had been zeroed out. I had to go out to the mission and tell our Podgorica staff that we were closing in two years. I understand it was a rash decision by Raj Shah, administrator at the time. There was no looking at the data, the close-out criteria, or anything.

Unfortunately, we had two procurements underway, one an omnibus DG project and one EG. This was in August and we were finalizing two five-year multimillion dollar contracts. We signed the contracts because we had to obligate the money but then immediately had to amend them to make them two-year contracts, because we only had enough money for two years. And I had to shut the program and close down the office.

Q: Wasn't this unusual to do on such a short timeframe? Most of these closeouts were on a five-year scaling down period. Was this because of sudden budget shortages within the Bureau?

FRITZ: No, I think that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) was requiring USAID to graduate assistance in several countries. Raj Shah came to E&E, which was not his favorite region. I think he didn't understand that the work we were doing was also a form of development, but maybe different than in some of the poorer parts of the world. He asked E&E to name a country that could graduate. During discussions Montenegro came up and apparently it stuck. Nobody thought it was going to stick, but it did. And the budget was zeroed out just like that. And it wasn't based on anything from a DG perspective. They had not had an alternation in power. Still today, they have governance

issues, problems with political parties and the political system. So it was a rash decision and it was taken without any forethought.

Both the program and OE budgets for Montenegro were zeroed out. Our OE budget was provided by country, so much for Serbia and so much for Montenegro and they were not transferable to one another. We closed in 2013 because we had to spend the money down, we had to close out the project, we had to close the office. There were things we had to do, but we needed the money to do it, including a closing ceremony in 2013. But we had no OE for Montenegro in 2013. It was really hard to manage the closeout because there had been no forethought or planning. It made it so much more difficult. The Bureau did yeoman's work in sweeping up money from odd places here and there to allocate to us for a closeout ceremony and to offer our foreign service nationals some training, some help in preparing resumes and getting them ready for life after USAID. So that was not the way to do things. We lost so much in doing it that way.

My former deputy from Kazakhstan went over to work for INL in the State Department. INL came in and started making grants to all of our DG sub-partners in Montenegro after we left. In a way it was good because they were able to pick up where we left off but if the goal was to close the U.S. government assistance program, that's not what happened. It was USAID that closed. And we encouraged INL to build the capacity to make grants, basically replacing us.

Q: No, very counterproductive move. Did the ambassador squawk a lot about this premature closure? I'm just curious how State reacted.

FRITZ: She wasn't happy. Nobody was happy. Moreover, the State Department Coordinator's Office did not agree with the decision to close out Montenegro, so they did everything in their power to continue assistance through other means. Nobody was happy.

Q: I have forgotten to ask you questions about the coordinator's office. The E&E Bureau worked closely with them, including heads of the office like Bill Taylor and Tom Adams.

FRITZ: And Larry Napper before that. I think Bill may have been just the NIS Coordinator. Anyway, yes we had had the coordinator's office and by that time, it had grown much bigger than it was in the early days. In the beginning they had maybe a total of five people. Now they have parallel staff to the E&E Bureau. I would say in Kosovo, they were not much of an issue. We kept them informed of what we were doing, but we were pretty lockstep with the embassy. It wasn't an issue in Serbia because we worked well with the DCM. We teed everything up for him to make decisions. But, as I said, in Montenegro they weren't happy with the closeout decision. Nobody was happy with it. Maybe Raj Shah was happy, who knows?

Q: I hope. Okay, well, that's a sad story. I'm going to suggest that we stop for now and then we'll come back and do Serbia.

FRITZ: Okay.

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Q: Today is June 13, 2024, and this is interview number three with Susan Fritz. When we finished up last time, you had been assigned as Mission Director for Serbia and Montenegro, and we covered the Montenegro portion of that work early on. If you have any final thoughts about Montenegro, please offer them, but otherwise let's go on to Serbia.

FRITZ: Yeah, let's do Serbia. So, Serbia was not in a much better place in that it was a challenging assignment because I came in at the high point of the budget. The Mission had received about $50 million a year when I arrived. By the time I left four years later, it was about $18 million.

Q: When did the program start? Was it right after Milosević left?

FRITZ: Yeah, yeah, the mission came in after Milosević departed. And so it was much later than the rest of the Balkans, but as I mentioned earlier, OTI came in before the mission was established. And before Yugoslavia broke up, there was a small USAID Representative office in Belgrade headed up by Mike Zak, though I don't know how much funding there was and what the programming was like.

After Milosević, the main program was a grassroots community development program across the country. And there were something like five implementing partners, each one geographically separate from the others. And they were doing community development work, small grants to basically involve people in democratic processes at the local level. The program was called Community Revitalization Through Democratic Action (CRTA). And it was a lot of money -- I want to say something like $40 million which was a lot of money for the country's size. So it blanketed the country with a lot of small projects that were supposed to build goodwill after we were seen as leading NATO to bomb Serbia. So it was really important. The masterminds behind that program were very smart because by the time I came in, anytime I traveled, people talked about their experience, our partners and beneficiaries, people involved with us or maybe just people that I just came across. They remembered when USAID built a small bridge, a road or a green market with stalls and refrigeration -- just small projects that engaged citizens to decide on which projects would be done. We provided the money to finance what they prioritized as citizens. Everywhere I went I saw plaques with USAID logos all over the country. And that was a good way, I think, to start in a country like that where we were seen as the aggressors.

Q: Okay, so by the time you were there, the relationships with the U.S. and USAID was seen in a favorable light.

FRITZ: Yeah, I was pleasantly surprised that because we delivered and because we were fast – even though we don't have that reputation within the U.S. government – compared to other donors, we were the "go-to" donor and we were well-respected. Our Serbian

government interlocutors appreciated us and came to us and asked us for assistance, which I really didn't expect. And civil society, too, and some other partners that we had been working with for a long time, yes, but it surprised me that we had such a good working relationship with the government. And as I came to appreciate more after I left, our ability to work in the country was so much easier compared to Ukraine, where the registration process for USAID projects takes months. In Serbia, we just updated our list of partners, sent it to the government each year. It was very easy to engage and we were very well-respected. It was easy for all donors; it wasn't just us. But as a lead donor that can deliver, that bought us a lot of respect and goodwill.

Q: Okay, great. I interrupted you to get that background, but you were talking about the budget being at its high watermark when you arrived.

FRITZ: Yes. So, we had $50 million. That was cut in half within two years and then reduced even further, so we had to quickly reduce the portfolio, downsize programming. And then, we didn't have clear direction from Washington as to where the Mission was going. And if you remember how the decision to close Montenegro came about, you can imagine there was a lot of concern that we could be next, or any mission in E&E could be next, particularly in the Balkans.

Q: And this was budgetary reasons, or was there something with regard to the relationship with Serbia?

FRITZ: It was purely budget. Well, I would say purely budget, and there was a push from the USAID administrator at the time to close missions. And I think because we weren't doing traditional development, we were ripe for the picking, if you will. And if you travel to Eastern Europe, if you travel to the Balkans, you say, oh, why is there an assistance program here? But quite honestly, a lot of the most important work we were doing was on the democracy front. And so there was a really good reason for us to be there. And you look now, there's been so much backsliding in all the countries in the Balkans. I think the budget cuts were short-sighted. They've come back up since then. But we had to plan for the eventual closeout because we were maybe scarred from the Montenegro decision. And so we started doing some scenario planning and the budget was so uncertain as well. We said, "Okay, if we get this much, this is what we would do if we get less or more, or we're zeroed out in two years from now, this is how we close out the Mission." And we actually put those plans together.

Q: I did look online and found that it was around this time that the European Union put Serbia on its candidate list for EU membership. And it seems odd that we would be cutting the program at the same time that they were beginning to discuss accession to the EU. Was that considered by Washington at all? You would have thought we might've wanted to accelerate the program then to help.

FRITZ: Well, that's one way of looking at it, Carol. But I think decision makers in Washington saw it as, "Oh, we can pull out because the Europeans are here." We argued that the European Union is not a development agency. They have a lot of money that they

make available but they make the acceding country get their systems in place before they release those funds. Usually the first program they establish is for agriculture support and those funds go through host government systems that have to be certified. There's an assumption that the countries will be able to manage the assistance. Quite honestly, we knew differently. We knew that you needed to build up the capacity before you do that, but that's not how the European Union operates. I think they're better now, but in the early days, it was just a lot of money out there, but without the absorptive capacity. What we've seen over and over again, and I saw it very distinctly in Serbia, was that we could develop the capacity for these countries and these institutions to then absorb the European Union funds, particularly host government institutions.

Because we had been working with civil society and media for a long time, they had the capacity. When I went back to Serbia on a six-month PSC after I retired, some of our local partners were getting direct funding, so the localization process did happen. We started that process when I was in Serbia. I don't know if you remember that Raj Shah wanted us to put, I think it was 50% of our funds through local partners. The way we had approached it from Serbia was that we put the administrator's directive aside and did as much as we thought could be absorbed responsibly. In the end it added up to 50%, but not because we said we will do 50%. We did it smartly.

In terms of Government to Government (G2G) assistance, we worked with a regional development agency to provide economic development assistance to small and medium enterprises. We started by getting them ready and certified to be able to absorb funds and manage them. We had a really great FM office and our controller worked with the NGOs that we had supported through U.S. implementing partners, whether they were media related or civil society more broadly to prepare them for receiving funds directly. Again, when I came back, I learned that we have granted even more funds directly to local organizations. So that process has progressed, but we started it back then and it was successful.

I think one of the challenges of localization is that when we move from funding programs through big U.S. organizations with higher overhead costs, to directly funding the same activities through local organizations, we're not going to spend the same amount of money for the same program. We were nervous about overdoing it, giving them too much money. It wasn't only a concern about digesting the money, managing the resources and implementing the programs, but also not creating a large organization with lots of staff that can't be sustained after USAID funding ends. I think that's a risk that we need to pay attention to in localization.

Q: A very important point. You were doing this scenario planning. You had a lot of different issues that you were trying to grapple with, localization being one of them, as well as selecting the priority sectors and work. But just on localization, when you went back later, have these local organizations become more sustainable over time? Do they have multiple resources that they're tapping into?

FRITZ: Yeah, definitely. They have become more sustainable. One is an election-related organization that monitors elections, including electoral laws, and they advocate for more democratic approaches to elections. They are called the Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA). They now receive direct USAID funding. When I came back to Serbia, I met with them and they were very appreciative of not only the funding, but also all the organizational capacity building we provided. They commented on how helpful it was to go through the USAID certification process to be able to receive funds directly, even if it was painful at times. They said handholding and support from the controller's office really helped them. But the funding side is more challenging particularly for DG organizations. Where is that funding going to come from?

Q: To go back again for a moment to the work the controller's office was doing, was there a special unit within the controller's office that focused on doing these? Because that's what they had in the Russia mission, an internal audit unit that did that.

FRITZ: No, we used our financial analysts who were part of the controller's office. We had two really strong financial analysts and they were the leads on it and they were excellent.

Q: Okay, that's the same as Russia; they were financial analysts in the controller's office.

FRITZ: We didn't staff up for localization. And here's the thing. Because we didn't know which direction we were going in terms of funding increasing, decreasing, or saying the same, localization actually helped our mission in two ways. One was as our funding was going down, it addressed the issue that I was talking about earlier about not giving too much money to nascent local organizations, but also within the staff, we were trying to build skills for direct assistance, for consulting, for mentoring, things like that, skills that they could use outside of USAID if they if the mission closed. So we thought through some of that in a way that furthered our mission, but also thought ahead about how can we help these folks get jobs if we were to close.

Q: Okay, that's super. So as you were doing this scenario planning and basically re-looking at the strategy for the mission, did you have to prepare something for Washington or were you just doing this on your own?

FRITZ: We were just doing it on our own. We decided that we needed to, and it was a really helpful thing. It was reassuring to staff that we were thinking through the options. We had an excellent senior team and we brought in Bill Granger, a retired, very experienced EXO. Bill was really helpful in teasing out from us what that could look like programmatically and financially and so forth and, and put together the plan for us. It was really reassuring to us and staff that we had something that we thought through, what made sense so that we weren't doing everything on the fly. Going back to Montenegro, nothing had been thought through so that we wanted to avoid that. It was a really good way of thinking ahead and getting ready for whatever might hit us.

Q: And so how did you define the priorities?

FRITZ: Well, again, the biggest need was the DG side, the biggest gaps if you looked at the Freedom House Nations in Transit gaps were on the DG side. Economically, Serbia was doing much better than politically, so we prioritized DG. But we felt like we couldn't do DG programming alone, that that wouldn't sell in Serbia, so we did keep some economic development work through the central regional development agency that we assisted. We had had large agriculture and competitiveness programs. We had a lot of money going into both of those programs that we phased out. And we had had a local economic development program previously and worked with some of the local offices of the regional development agency. So we decided to focus on economic development, but by directly funding the national regional development agency that worked with the regional development offices around Serbia. We still had a hand in economic development, but more at the local level.

On the democracy side, one of the areas we prioritized was judicial reform because we had been working in the area for a long time. Also, the EU was just getting its feet wet with developing programs in the judicial sector. Here is a good example of collaboration. And so we had had a successful, actually quite a nice program with the misdemeanor courts, which was the level of the judicial system that most citizens came in contact with. We were doing things like automating the case assignment system, cleaning up and scanning all of the paper files, and making the intake system more transparent and welcoming. We actually had a good judicial strengthening program before that, but when the EU came in, we were working with these misdemeanor courts which are all over the country. So the EU saw that program and said, "Gee, that needs to be done with all the courts in the country." They had money so they asked us to design their program for them. We hired an expert to work with our DG staff to design the program. I would say we were half successful. My EU counterpart was all in, but I wouldn't say the EU bureaucracy was all in.

USAID works with multi-year, three- to five-year contracts or grants. We incrementally fund those contracts or grants. That's not how the EU works. When they design a program, it's only for two years maximum and all the money is obligated up front. And then it takes them forever to actually spend the money. Or by the time they get the program up and running, it's been so many years that they have to redesign it before they can start implementing it. So what we were proposing was very different than the EU bureaucracy was used to. We designed a $20-$25 million program to work with all the other courts around the country. It was nearly a "copy-paste" of what we were already doing with the misdemeanor courts so it wasn't anything very risky or unique, untried. It's something we've done all over the Balkans.

The head of the EU in Serbia wanted to push the envelope. He had an ulterior motive. He was managing way more money than us with about half the staff. If he could change the way they did things, it would be enormously helpful to him. The maximum length of program they could do was, I think, four and a half years, so that's what we did. We proposed a four and a half-year program. However, when it hit the EU bureaucracy, they

said, “No, it can't be that long.” I remember distinctly my EU counterpart brought in representatives of all the EU member states to review the program that was being proposed. I was shocked to see nobody wanted to see a four-year program, they didn't want to see that much money. So it wasn’t only the bureaucracy that rejected it. I think in the end it was like $12 million over two years. It didn't end up being what it could have been, but it was a good way of us working together. And I don't know what happened, but I'm hopeful that they were able to follow on that two-year program with another one so that it ended up with maybe a four- or five-year program to complete what needed to be done. It was an attempt to collaborate in a real way with another very important donor. And it was worth the effort for us to try. It didn't end up as good as I wanted it to be, but it's interesting.

Q: Did they actually think that you could do capacity building more quickly, or was it just that they didn't want to make commitments longer term? Is it more of a financial thing or a naivete about how you do capacity building?

FRITZ: I don't think it related to timing of capacity building. I think it was just a very different approach, not wanting to make financial commitments that far ahead. And they don't incrementally fund projects so maybe a concern about tying up resources. Maybe they do now, but back then it wasn't in their toolbox.

Q: Okay. Those are important points, but actually really fascinating that you all worked that closely with the EU and that they asked you to design a program for them.

FRITZ: Yeah. And I think some member states didn't like that, actually. That was another piece of it – I didn't get warm and fuzzy vibes from them. That's my own interpretation.

Q: You've referred to some policy reform work that you all did related to the World Bank's "Doing Business Report" that you did some work on labor law and construction permitting. Can you talk a bit about that and how you started?

FRITZ: We had an economic policy reform project that was focused on the business enabling environment, so we did continue that work when we downsized because there was still a big need for reform in that area. The contractor, which started about the same time that I arrived in Serbia, came in with their work plan which was not pushing the envelope at all. I pushed back asking them “What are the biggest constraints to doing business?” They pointed to construction permitting and labor law, which were not part of their work plan. They said that it's too hard, high risk, low probability of success. Thinking that we may have only four or five years left in Serbia, or maybe not even that much time, I thought (and asked them), “Do we really want to make a difference or do we want to just work at the margins?” I told them that I had their back and that we at least needed to try to tackle these two reforms. If they didn’t advance by year two, we would pull back. But we had to try to really make a difference in these key areas that could change the business enabling environment. And so they did, and they did a great job.

The contractor started with a lot of analytical work. We got to the point where we needed to identify champions in the government. It was different for each reform. On labor law, we had to be very careful because it was so politically sensitive. Advising a country that it needs to raise its retirement age because its pension system is not sustainable is sensitive. Telling them that they need to close the gap on all the reasons that people can retire early – all that needed to be tightened up, but USAID couldn't come in and do that. We could do the analysis. We could say this is what the European Union standard is, or what many European Union countries of your size do. We could bring people together. So we quietly brought the labor unions together with the government and businesses for tripartite discussions. It wasn't a public thing. I wasn't really involved. It was our implementing partner quietly analyzing and then organizing and informing these discussions so that they could come to an agreement on whatever was politically feasible. So that's the way that process worked for the reform of the labor law.

We had a dinosaur as the Minister for Infrastructure. Construction was a hugely corrupt sector, but there was a lot of potential. At the time, you didn't see any construction going on. And for a country that came out of a war and so many years of neglect from the communist system, it was falling behind on infrastructure compared to other countries in the region. Construction could be the engine of growth for a country like Serbia. That's the analysis we did, but we couldn't get anywhere with the Minister who was just stringing us along. So I went to the ambassador and said, "We really need to get to the prime minister and have him help us on this. If we don't have the political will, we need to pull back because we're going nowhere right now. We're wasting a lot of money." He brought me to one of his regular meetings that he had with the prime minister. I made the pitch and he said, "Yes, it will be done." And it was. The parliament passed a new construction permitting law. Now there's a lot of construction going on in Serbia. On the down side, there is also a lot of corruption in the sector so it didn't pan out the way I think we would have liked to have seen but it was an engine of growth. Certainly, it's achieved that.

Q: Right and I do think that's a sector that probably has corruption in every country.

FRITZ: Yeah, probably. I may be naive, but yeah, you're right.

Q: So, in the first example on labor law, the team did a lot of analysis and brought different interest groups together for dialogue. Champions evolved out of that and then led the process for change. So, it was two completely different techniques that were used, but both successful.

FRITZ: Yeah. And I give so much credit to our implementing partner. Joe Lowther, the chief of party, was phenomenal, just so smart and a great leader and was able to navigate two very different types of reforms successfully. I give a lot of credit to Joe and his team, his deputy chief of party was really great too. So they really did this in a way that I credit them.

Q: Was an evaluation ever done of the program? Because it sounds like a really very interesting case study.

FRITZ: So I don't know that an evaluation was done. Joe shared with me after I left Serbia a nice write-up of the success story but I think that was the contractor pulling that together. I don't think USAID did that. I'm sure we touted our successes, but you know, on the labor law, I think we had to be careful too. We didn't want to take credit for something that's fraught with criticisms on all sides. But it was good that it happened. I think that's one of those cases where USAID can quietly stand in the background and take credit internally, but not really tout it.

Q: Right, but I think there's some important internal lessons from how you all did it, particularly in doing it in a very quiet way and allowing people to debate those issues internally without a lot of public attention. In your CV, you mention evaluation in the mission. Did you all do some special efforts on that front as part of your contingency planning, not knowing what the future would be?

FRITZ: No, we did an evaluation of our elections programming. Honestly, my memory is terrible, so I can't point to much other than to say that it was a time in the agency where we were starting to improve our internal capacity for evaluation and to develop tools. Missions were being encouraged to do more evaluations and we were being given the tools to do them better. I think we were just part of that process. When I arrived in Serbia, we had done an evaluation of our agriculture program, which was a really good program. The evaluation came back very negative and I didn't feel like it was fair or that there was a lot to back up some of the opinions that were expressed in that evaluation. I would just say that when we went into the next evaluation, we were very careful from our side to do it better, to draft a better scope of work. We learned on the first one that we asked too many questions, so for the next one we reduced them. Now that’s common guidance in the agency, but in those days, we were winging it. That’s one of the things we did for the elections evaluation and shared that tip with Washington. Raj Shah touted our evaluation in his annual report that year. But that's about all I can remember from the process.

Q: Right, those are important lessons. Your CV also talks about offices located in Belgrade, Niš, Novi Pazar. Were these OTI offices or were these different USAID offices? Or project implementation offices? Were there any direct hires assigned outside of Belgrade?

FRITZ: So these were offices set up to monitor the first program, the country-wide community development program. I think we had four or five offices around the country. So we had one up in the north in Vojvodina. And then these three in south Serbia. When our funding went down, we decided to focus our economic programming in the more depressed regions in the southeast and southwest. Ethnic Albanians populate the southeast and ethnic Bosniaks populate the southwest. Both of those ethnic groups and regions were being ignored by the central government. They are very difficult to get to, especially Novi Pazar. And the infrastructure is just awful. We were concerned about

instability if you have dissatisfied, disaffected ethnic minorities in an economically disadvantaged region in a country that has a history of ethnically driven wars.

When I first got to Serbia we had the Niš Office south of Belgrade, another one in Vranje in South Serbia, the ethnic Albanian region, and one in Novi Pazar, which is in the Sanđak region where Bosniaks live. As our programs moved further and further south, we closed our Niš office because it isn't that far from Belgrade. But the other two offices were in places that are very hard to get to, so we kept them open as long as possible. We closed them by the end of my time, which was a hard thing to do because of the terrain of the country, the focus of the program, and for a lot of other reasons. We had eyes and ears on the ground, which the embassy also really appreciated. Anytime anybody from the embassy went down to these regions, the FSNs staffing each of the offices were the go-to because they knew what was going on in the regions. So they informally supported other parts of the embassy.

Q: Okay; so they were staffed with FSNs and were formal offices doing program management and oversight?

FRITZ: Oh yeah.

Q: It's interesting because USAID doesn't often have those kinds of subunits although I suspect there's great value to them.

FRITZ: Well, I tried to open up a field office in eastern Ukraine for almost two years and I know it was worked on for another year after I left and then Russia's all-out war started, It's impossible to do now with the embassy infrastructure and, you know, the security requirements, you couldn't do that today, but we were lucky that it was done at a time when you could. They were a legacy that we really benefited from. I was heavily involved in trying to open up that field office in Kramatorsk in eastern Ukraine. I spent a lot of time on that and it just inched forward. And I had the ambassador's support. We had $120 million in new programming in eastern Ukraine which was a six-hour train ride from Kyiv, which was the reason we needed this field office, to better monitor our programming. It was taking too much time and then the war happened. It is much harder to do today.

Q: Okay. You've mentioned the ambassador some, but I wonder if you could talk a bit more about relationships between USAID and the embassy more generally in Serbia.

FRITZ: It was good. The relationship was very good. I think in smaller posts, it may be easier, but no, it was very good. We had a good working relationship with the political section, the economic section, well, it was PolEcon together because it was so small. Public Affairs as well -- they were one of the only other agencies that were implementing assistance programs. We also had INL and the Department of Justice (DOJ), that was a little bit harder. It was a little bit harder to coordinate with DOJ. But yeah, we worked well with the embassy, the ambassador. Both ambassadors, I think appreciated USAID for what we brought to the table. And during the summer of my third year I was the

acting DCM between DCMs and that gave me a good opportunity to see some of the other work of the rest of the embassy in a way that I don't normally see it. So yeah it worked really well but we had ambassadors that respected what we did and so that helps.

Q: I assume they were career ambassadors as well. Did you have VIP visitors to Serbia while you were there? Any secretaries of state or others?

FRITZ: No, there was always the Kosovo dialogue going on. So, there were always people from State coming in for that, but that never really involved us. It was more on the political side so we didn't get involved. That was the big issue and continues to be.

Q: Yes; we had talked about this a bit before, whether going directly from Kosovo to Serbia created any challenges for you. I think you indicated that you managed it, but I'm just sort of curious.

FRITZ: No, you know, it's interesting. Just comparing the two, there used to be, or probably still is, a weekly DVC between Embassy Belgrade and Embassy Pristina. The idea behind it was to get everyone on the same page and to have a U.S. position, rather than taking the sides of the countries in which you are stationed – which I think is easy to do when you're working in this part of the world. What's interesting is that USAID was so heavily involved in Kosovo because we had a lot of money and we had our fingers in everything. Any big issue, whether it was energy or anything else – issues that were important to the embassy and important to the United States, we were involved. So we were an important part of that country team and that DVC. On the other hand, USAID was not usually included as a DVC participant from Belgrade. Sometimes we were included but we didn't have much of a role because the work that we were doing did not have a lot to do with the Dialogue between the two countries or even contribute to the Dialogue, even indirectly. There was just nothing. For example, I told you about how we were helping to stand up the new municipalities in Kosovo. That was a big deal for both country teams. We weren't doing anything like that in Serbia. So it was just a very different relationship between USAID and State and just the nature of our program, the nature of the country. Again, we participated, we were part of it, but it was in more of a listening mode than anything else.

Q: And were there any DG programs related to conflict resolution or, you know, Search for Common Ground or any groups like that working in Serbia?

FRITZ: No, no, not at the time.

Q: That's interesting. I'm going to ask a question and you may not want to answer it so we can just delete it from the transcript when it comes. But you had mentioned last week that you were an introvert and that it took time to learn how to play the external role. And I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about that transition that new mission directors have to make. Any advice you might have? I ask because I had seen in the past Myers-Briggs profiles for USAID mission directors. And there were a surprising number of introverts who became USAID mission directors. Any thoughts on that subject?

FRITZ: I think part of my challenge as well was the fact that I was a DG officer in closed spaces, so you don't do a lot of events in those kinds of environments, right? As I was coming up through the ranks, I think I did one event, it was a community development event in Central Asia when we did the conflict mitigation program in the Ferghana Valley. So I didn't get a lot of experience there. And then I went to this regional job where it wasn't my role to do any of that. Then I went to Kosovo where I was the inside manager, not the outside manager. I didn't have a lot of opportunities moving up in my career. So my advice to an introvert would be to seek out those opportunities or jobs that give you that. Or even if your job doesn't have those types of components, talk to your supervisor about creating those opportunities. When we had these big community development programs, a lot of times we were looking for people to represent us to go out and cut the ribbon, to "spread the wealth." We let anyone do the ribbon cutting for us – embassy political officers, economic, anybody who wanted to get out and see the country, see our projects, see our work, because there were too many for us to have the mission director do all of them. So make it a conscious effort to take advantage of those opportunities and to push for them as well because sometimes they won't come up. If I could do it over, I would build that into my own professional development plan to seek out those opportunities and to push for them and be conscious of making that happen as I was moving up through the agency. The training that USAID did at the Federal Executive Institute (FEI) was enormously helpful. They did the specific training, I don't know if you did it, but there's the one where they videotape you and then everybody critiques you.

Q: Yeah, no, I never did that, but I've heard people say that it was very valuable.

FRITZ: So that was helpful. I learned the things that I shouldn't do, like play with my papers that were in my hand. But also, I couldn't tell how I was coming off, and I actually received positive feedback. Even though I was a mess inside, I seemed confident when I was speaking. So it was helpful both ways, because I needed a little bit of that confidence boost. But then I learned these other little things that I was doing that were distracting. So that was a good training that I would encourage. Even if you can't do the FEI training, missions sometimes bring in training—that would be another thing to push for in your mission. And practice makes perfect—the more you do it, the easier it becomes. The other thing that I realized, too, for myself was if I got a speech two days before, if I had two nights to practice it, I was so much better than if I only had one night to practice it. So that it just came across much more naturally. It was just a whole lot better.

Q: Okay. That's all good advice. Did you have any other training? Was there any kind of training to go into senior management either for deputy director or mission director? I think they're doing some of that now, but when you were there, was there any kind of special training?

FRITZ: No, no, there wasn't. The FEI senior course was seen as preparation for mission directors so that's what I did.

Q: Okay. You were there for four years, and you said when you arrived, you were surprised at the pro-USAID and-American attitudes. Did that remain throughout the time you were there, or did it change?

FRITZ: I would say that the pro-USAID attitudes were quiet and behind the scenes. There were definitely parts of Serbia that were not pro-American. But the good working relationship with the Serbian government remained throughout the time I was there. I was shocked to see how things had changed by the time I came back in 2021. I left in 2014, so seven years later. It was consistent throughout the four years I was there. When I came back in 2021 it had done a 180. The prime minister then is now the president, Vučić, and the prime minister now is a woman who worked under several USAID programs, Ana Brnabić. So she knows USAID, she knows us. She was always a good partner. I don't know what happened to her, but when I came back, she was saying some pretty awful things about USAID, that we were undermining the government, that we were trying to undermine her, all kinds of things that were false. We weren't doing anything like that. And I was shocked, but also hurt because I knew her personally. I knew Ana and I know that she knows we don't do that. That's not part of what we're doing in Serbia. So it was a shock to me, but nobody in the mission or the ambassador seemed to be too upset because it apparently has become par for the course. The United States is a punching bag. The kick in the head was that she came to our 25th anniversary event and talked about how USAID changed her life. And just a week and a half before, she was saying these awful things publicly about us. So it was just a really bizarre thing. I don't know.

Q: Did you have a chance to talk to her?

FRITZ: No, I didn't. I wanted to, but it wasn't appropriate. You know, you don't want to get out in front of the embassy on some of these things. And she's the prime minister now.

If she was out of the prime minister's office, I would have said, “Let's go have coffee.” People had told me that she had changed a lot in the intervening years, so I guess that was just evidence. So it's changed a lot. And the government has become more authoritarian. I think it's become more challenging for the U.S.-Serbian relationship. So that plays into it.

Q: But USAID remains there, right?

FRITZ: Yeah. USAID remains there. The budget's gone up somewhat, so it's more stable. We're in a much better place as a mission. And yeah, things are okay.

Q: And they're primarily working on DG-related stuff, I would imagine.

FRITZ: Yes, to the extent they can.

Q: Some EG.

FRITZ: Yeah, there's some EG programming, competitiveness and innovation work going on in the EG sector, but more money in DG.

Q: Okay. So, you were there for four years and then you were looking for an onward assignment? So, how did that process go?

USAID/East Africa Regional Mission, Mission Director, 2014

FRITZ: So Earl Gast had reached out to me and asked if I would be interested in the East Africa regional mission director position. You can tell by my resume I haven't served in Africa, so I was really nervous about it. He said, "No, no, we need a good manager. What this mission needs is somebody who can clean up some of our systems, the mission needs this, this, and this and you have those skills. So you would be good at this." I said, "Okay, I'll try." And so I went to East Africa. I left Serbia a little early, at the end of February and went to Nairobi in March of 2014 ahead of my family. We were going to be there for four and a half years, so that's what we were planning for. I ended up being there for four and a half months. I left Nairobi in early July and never came back. It was the most stressful thing I've ever been a part of. They had been without a mission director for nine months, which is one of the reasons I left Serbia a little early.

So I came in and things were just a mess. Our relationship with the missions we were serving was not good. We were trying to set up systems to be more responsive, to be more transparent, scheduling conferences and the like—the things that REDSO (The Regional Economic Services Office for East and Southern Africa) used to do. That's where we started. If you recall, the September before I arrived, there was the mall attack so the security situation in Nairobi was not great. When I arrived, the ambassador and DCM directed any agency with regional responsibilities to reduce staff. They asked each of us to come up with a plan to reduce direct hire staff because the security situation was getting worse. State did not want another unaccompanied post and they thought the only way to manage this was to reduce the number of official Americans. As the East Africa regional mission director, I was an easy target, but there were other agencies there that had regional portfolios as well. We came up with a plan over two years to reduce by I think it was 10 or 15 American staff. It was mostly by not replacing junior officers. I submitted my plan before leaving for the mission directors' conference in Washington. The DCM and ambassador were very grateful. Apparently, ours was the only regional agency to do that.

The three mission directors from Nairobi—Karen Freeman, who was the bilateral mission director; Andy Herskowitz, who led Power Africa; and I got a call from the DCM in the middle of the mission directors' conference. We were told that we needed to go down in American staff by 90% in two to four weeks. Andy and I were the targets because we both had regional operations. Karen was safe.

The conference ended right before Memorial Day weekend. I was going through Serbia to see my family on my way back to Nairobi. Andy got back to post first, started the process of interviewing each staff person in my mission to find out where they wanted to

go. We had a lot of junior officers who had to stay out in the field to get tenure and we had to find out each individual person's situation so that we could figure out where to help them get reassigned to, matching them to missions with empty positions or at least with the possibility of creating new positions. So we did that. Thank God Andy rolled up his sleeves and helped with the process, got it started. I came back on Tuesday and finished the process and we downsized the mission over about a month or five weeks. We got everybody out of there that needed to go and figured out what aspects of services stayed. All the service providers were providing services to Kenya and some of those had to stay. And then we parceled out other services where we could. For example, instead of having three regional legal officers in Kenya, maybe we keep one for the bilateral mission and put others elsewhere. And then trying to fit that with what fits with people's personal or professional development and plans and so forth and families. We got twenty-eight displaced foreign service officers relocated to a place they wanted to go. Only one had to go back to Washington because we couldn't get a place for them, but he could benefit from a tour in Washington. So I felt like that was the greatest success, but stressful.

So then I'm thinking, "Okay, I guess I should stay here for six months and help merge those remaining pieces of the regional mission into the bilateral mission. I didn't want to abandon the sinking ship. But I got the sense by July 1st, that I was no longer needed there and in fact, my presence could create some difficulties in the merger since in effect there were two bosses – two mission directors. And I didn't want to be somewhere where I'm not needed or wanted. I called Earl and asked, "What do I do? I can stay here if you want. I'm willing to stay here. I think six months would make sense. But if you don't need me, I'm happy to move on." And he said, "Yeah, move on. We'll just manage this with the deputy mission director." So that's what we did. I came back to Washington.

Q: Wow. I didn't know about this downsizing. So basically REDSO (the regional mission) was just subsumed under the bilateral mission then? Does it still exist?

FRITZ: I believe it still exists -- a modified form of it. I don't think it actually ended up being totally dissolved, but it's definitely a much smaller entity, but I believe it still exists. I've kind of blocked that out. It was such an awful thing.

So then, I was going to go on the human resources (HR) complement for the first time in my career and that made me very nervous. And I thought, "Well, that's what the complement is for. I'll figure it out." Right before I came back, I got a call from Paige Alexander, who became the political assistant administrator (AA) for the Europe and Eurasia Bureau. Margot Ellis was supposed to come in as her senior deputy assistant administrator (S-DAA), but Margot ended up staying with the UN an extra year or two and broke that assignment. Paige was looking for a senior DAA and asked me if I wanted to come do that. And I said, "Hell yes, I'll do it." That's what happened. I never ended up having to go on the complement, which was great.

AID/W, Europe/Eurasia Bureau, Deputy Assistant Administrator, 2014 - 2016

Q: It was the perfect job for you.

FRITZ: Yeah, it was a good home to come back to. And I had worked with Paige before. She's wonderful. It was a great opportunity. I was pleased that I was able to do that. You know that working in Washington has its pluses and minuses. I loved Washington. Before I went overseas, I didn't mind working in Washington. I always loved it. I didn't have the dread that I think some field people do, but it's also not that easy to do. It's a challenging job and you're not as close to the projects and the results of what we're doing, so that part's hard, but it was good. I was glad to be back in the bureau.

Q: So, was Paige Alexander the Assistant Administrator throughout the period that you were there?

FRITZ: No, she left. So she abandoned us to go to the Middle East Bureau. I think it was right after Christmas. So I was working with her for about five months before she left to be the AA of Middle East. Then I moved up as acting AA until about a couple months before I went to Ukraine, when Tom Melia came in. I was acting AA for the interim between Paige and Tom.

Q: Okay, so you were acting AA for an extended period of time. I was going to ask how you and Paige divided up responsibilities and whether you focused more on the Europe side? But, it sounds like you were acting AA for much of the time

FRITZ: Well, we did divide it up. Ukraine was front and center back then, because this was during the Maidan revolution and she had been following it. When I was in Serbia the revolution had just started, I guess. I wasn't focusing on it at all in Kenya. Ukraine was very political and at a very high level. So Paige was on top of Ukraine and we had a political DAA who also led things on Ukraine more on the working level. I took the Balkans and then of the Caucuses, I took Azerbaijan. That was my responsibility until Paige left and then I got up to speed on those other countries very quickly.

Q: Since you were overseeing the Balkans, was there still a program in Bulgaria or had it phased out or graduated?

FRITZ: Bulgaria had graduated when I was posted there. But that was also where one of the legacy foundations was established with funding from the Bulgarian American Enterprise Fund – it is called the America for Bulgaria Foundation.

Q: Right, and so you were doing some work from Washington with the foundation that had been created while you were there. You helped with the creation, but now you had to do some work related to its work?

FRITZ: Well, I didn't help with the creation of it at all, actually, I don't want to take credit for that. I don't know what year that happened, that transition, but it was the folks managing the enterprise funds in E&E, David Cowles and some others. They managed the transition, the process by which we approved transferring the money from successful

enterprise funds and putting them into some kind of legacy foundation. My understanding is that's not possible anymore. When I was acting AA we were trying to get Congress to agree to doing that with one of the other foundations, the enterprise funds, I can't remember which one, but they wouldn't approve it. But back then, the economic growth folks managed that process and the approval to establish these foundations.

Q: Were you involved with the issues with the Congress concerning the Russian foundation? I believe that Treasury was repaid for the original capital and then everything above that was to go into the legacy foundation, which I think was created, but never got off the ground.

FRITZ: Yeah, I think the record for the longest hold on a CN is the one for the U.S.-Russia Foundation establishing the legacy foundation. Paige did a lot of negotiations on that when she was AA. And quite honestly, it was not going anywhere, but the political DAA took that on when Paige left, and we still couldn't get anywhere, unfortunately.

Q: In a senior level job in Washington in a regional bureau probably took you into a fair amount of interagency work as well. Were there NSC issues that you had to deal with yourself? Or others that you had to keep the Administrator's office informed for their participation?

FRITZ: There was a lot of Kosovo work related to a coal-fired power plant they were trying to build. They have two, Kosovo A and B, and there's been discussions ever since I was in Kosovo many years ago for building Kosovo C. The World Bank was taking the lead on that and just wasn't going anywhere so there was interest in USAID being involved in that. But recall that we're now in the Obama administration. The president had just been at COP (Conference of the Parties) and the idea of doing this was not very popular, so we went back and forth and had a series of interagency meetings and got agreement that we should move forward on it.

Q: So, you beat up the environmentalists?

FRITZ: I don't like to say that because I'm an environmentalist, but it would be much cleaner. And for Kosovo's independence, it would be really important. And not only that, linking Kosovo's energy production with Albania's, which has a lot of dams that create hydro energy that would balance things out for both of those countries and it would make the grid more stable and the supply more stable. There's a lot of good reasons for it. I don't remember my other talking points, but those were some of them.

Q: Okay. I was just trying to tease you. I assume you also had to spend a lot of time with the coordinator's office as well in the State Department during this time or were you able to delegate that to others?

FRITZ: Yeah, we had a weekly call with the coordinator's office. It was challenging. I'll just leave it at that. Very challenging.

Q: In part because budgets were going down for Europe during that period?

FRITZ: We liked to joke back then that Russia saved us. So yes, as we were talking about earlier, the trend in the region was going down until the Maidan revolution and Russia's little green men invaded Ukraine. Then the region again became a priority again. The challenge was that we were trying to cobble together funds to help stabilize the financial system in Ukraine. Right after the Maidan, we were putting together three $1 billion loan guarantees. We have to put up an amount of money based on the calculated risk which changed over the three guarantees. There was no money for that within our budget. The agency cobbled together money from Afghanistan, from Iraq and I forget from where else it came. Initially, it was hard because there was no extra money and we had to pull together these loan guarantees. When the budget process kicked in, it got easier because I think people were more willing to accept higher budget levels and Congress appropriated higher budget levels for the entire region, not just Ukraine, but Ukraine got the bulk of it. So it breathed new life into the rest of the region.

Q: Historically, career DAAs have often been brought into broader agency debates about where the agency's going. Some administrators have used DAAs to ground truth issues and to identify morale and other issues. Was there any of that during the period that you were a DAA? Thinking about how the agency goes forward?

FRITZ: I can't remember a specific discussion about the agency in general, how the agency goes forward. But certainly we were involved in different issues, specific issues, and were brought into the discussion. I reported to the deputy administrator, Al Lenhart, and I've got to tell you, I don't think I've had such a high-level person pay so much attention to me and wanting to know my input on things. We would have one-on-ones periodically. He encouraged me – he said I was too quiet in those bigger meetings. I'm just not one of those people who's going to talk a lot. I think a lot. And I mull things over, but I'm not going to be out there, particularly if it's a brand-new issue. I'll think about it. And I may have some ideas a week or two down the road. I don't think on my feet that well. So I wouldn't speak in those meetings. He gave me feedback that I had to speak up in meetings, told me that I have valuable input, that they wanted to hear from me. I was shocked to hear that from the deputy administrator and that he even noticed whether I was speaking or not, but also, like I said, he asked for my input. We met from time to time and he asked for my input. And he encouraged me to provide that input at broader intra-agency meetings.

I also was part of the group that led the effort to overhaul HCTM (Human Capital and Talent Management). I participated in a number of off-sites with Deloitte that identified the areas of focus for that reform.

Q: Ambassador Lenhart had a military background. Is that correct? So he knew how much attention the military gives to training and preparing future leaders to perform well.

FRITZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I appreciated it. He was honest. He didn't paper things over. He was very straightforward. I needed to hear it.

Q: You had mentioned earlier that one of the reasons the Serbia budget went down was because the administrator, Raj Shah, was looking for places to close out missions. He wanted to focus more on certain development countries. Were you able to have further discussions with him about that? Or was he still there at this point? I can't remember how long he stayed as the administrator.

FRITZ: He stayed for a little while longer. I had a short discussion about Russia with him and briefed him on a topic for a National Security Council (NSC) meeting. He was going to a principal's meeting and he said, "That's great, but I don't agree with you and I'm going in with a totally different viewpoint" and left the meeting. I felt like Paige had a magic touch with him. He did listen to Paige and I don't know whether it was because I was not a political or that Paige has a way about her that she can convince people. I think she was just much better at it so he listened to her in a way that he just totally dismissed me. So that's the only conversation I had with him was on one topic. And he clearly didn't agree with the bureau and dismissed our recommendation. But other than that, no, I didn't really engage with him, except the East Africa mess which was before that. He was involved in the whole East Africa thing, but that's another story.

Q: Right. There were other big-ticket things during his time as administrator, for example, creation of the innovation lab and the food security initiative. From your platform in the E&E Bureau, were you involved in any of that? Or was that just something else the agency was doing?

FRITZ: So we tried to be, we kept saying, "We are here. Pick us! Pick us!" Anytime something came up that we thought would be good for Serbia, we tried to get selected to be one of the countries and we just couldn't get the attention of Washington. I don't know why that was, maybe we were too small, we were the wrong region. I remember feeling like Serbia had a lot to offer related to agriculture, so Feed the Future. Serbia also had good scientists. I thought we could be a good learning lab here but just couldn't get the attention. So no, unfortunately we weren't involved in that and in any of the special things that came up, the initiatives by that administration.

Q: Okay, Are there any things during that time as senior DAA that you'd like to highlight? It's hard to ask questions since there was so much going on during that time. It's hard to know what exactly you were involved with.

FRITZ: As you know, there are a lot of ongoing processes that are grinding, the budget processes and all that, where you're advocating for resources—that is what I was involved in. I highlighted the Kosovo power plant issue which was time consuming and ultimately, well, at that time successful, I think they pulled back. I don't think Kosovo C is moving forward anymore. For the Ukraine sovereign loan guarantees, Paige managed the first one and I think Jonathan Katz, our political DAA, handled the other two after she left, but I also helped. Those were big deals and hugely important for Ukraine and did

help stabilize the country. Those were all done from Washington in partnership with the mission and the interagency in both Kyiv and DC. We insisted on some conditions precedent, in areas in which our mission was heavily involved. Although we did everything to prepare them in Washington, they were actually signed in the field. But we managed the interagency process for making them happen and the budget to get the money and so forth.

On the legacy foundations created from the enterprise funds, those are a tough nut to crack and they're very different. The enterprise funds themselves were created at a different time and place with different USAID responsibilities with respect to oversight. That meant that I could only work at the margins. I helped a little bit on the Bulgarian one, but they didn't want our help nor saw any benefit to it so that was a lot more challenging. I wouldn't say it was a huge success, but yeah, that's about it. And I was only there for two years, too.

Q: Okay. So, you went off to a really exciting job. I guess you were in the right position to be able to identify that as a good possibility.

FRITZ: Yeah. Well, I'm ashamed to admit that. As you know, you're supposed to be in DC for three years so I was not even eligible to bid nor was I thinking about bidding. I was trying to find a good mission director for Ukraine and was coming up empty. I ran into Paige in the elevator one day and I said, "I can't find anybody for Ukraine. I don't know why. I would love this job." And she said, "Well, why don't you take the job?" I responded, "Because I'm not eligible to bid." She said, "Well, why don't you just see?" And so I said, "Hmm, okay."

You have to get permission to bid out of cycle. You send a memo to the deputy administrator to get approval to bid. I never got the memo back, but I put in my bids and the rest of the paperwork. I still didn't know whether I was eligible because of that paper, I don't think it was ever signed. But I got the job. So that happened. And it was a great way to end a long career in USAID. It was an important place where we could make a difference. We made a huge difference in Ukraine. We didn't have a lot of money to begin with, but huge money was coming down the pike. That's an exciting time to be in a mission to be planning for big important projects. We had a lot of money, but also a lot of good people as well. We had a great staff mostly there when I arrived and then more good people came in while I was there. So yeah, it was an exciting time.

USAID/Ukraine and Belarus, Mission Director, 2016 - 2020

Q: So, you went out in Summer or Fall of 2016?

FRITZ: Summer, yeah.

Q: So, it was before the U.S. election.

FRITZ: Yes, that was the more challenging part.

Q: Well, yes. We'll obviously talk about some of that because you were there at a very tense time as well. But perhaps we can start with some context. The Russian invasion, and the taking over Crimea, that took place in 2014, is that correct? But then there were the incursions in Donetsk and all that was going on before you went out, right?

FRITZ: So, 2013 was when all that happened. After the Maidan revolution Russia's invasion into other parts of Ukraine mostly failed. However, they remained in Donetsk and Luhansk and supported the separatists there, dividing those oblasts. That conflict continued by the time I got out there but it was very localized. Crimea was in Russian hands by then, so there was not a conflict there. Ukraine's a huge country, so you could almost forget about the war. You knew what was going on, but in terms of living in Kyiv, you didn't see evidence of the war front and center every day, the way you see it now.

We shifted a lot of programming to the east to supplement a lot of the humanitarian assistance that was going on. We had a big OTI program that was engaged in the east. Then we started transitioning from OTI and humanitarian assistance into more traditional development projects. Towards the end of my time there we designed one big DG project and one EG project, to pick up the strands of what OTI had been doing and to turn those activities into long-term development work, less one-off kinds of things.

There were issues that would pop up that crossed all our funding streams. For example, there was a water filtration plant in Donetsk that was in the government-controlled area. It served not only government-controlled areas, but also the separatist-controlled areas in Donetsk. The plant was getting shelled regularly. And so that was one problem. That's a humanitarian crisis, right, because people need water. That was one thing that the humanitarian folks in the UN were dealing with. Then there were issues running the plant which was built at a different time and place. And it wasn't maintained over the years so that was causing problems as well. But that is not a humanitarian issue. The plant was too big for the number of people it was serving, so it was expensive to operate. The separatists had to pay for the water they were getting, but they weren't, so the government-controlled folks running the plant would say, "Well, we can't run it without money." That was another issue. And then the fact that it was overbuilt was another issue. We did an analysis which showed that it would be better to build a new plant in a different place, much smaller, much more financially viable. But that's more of a long-term development issue. So we were trying to cobble together money from different sources to address the different problems that were the same problem that had different facets to it. And it was just very challenging. But our attempt at trying to knit together the different parts of USAID was through these two big projects that mission designed, with input from OTI and OFDA, for the regular mission programming.

Q: Right, that's an issue that many missions have to grapple with: how do you move from the emergency response to development?

FRITZ: And that's where we wanted to have the office in Kramatorsk to oversee now $120 million worth of programming. But yeah, we talked about that.

Q: Okay. So you, when you arrived, who was the ambassador?

FRITZ: The new ambassador came in about a week or two after I arrived, Marie Yovanovitch.

Q: Okay, so was she the ambassador most of the time you were there?

FRITZ: Yes, until she wasn't, until Bill Taylor came.

Q: So I assume you've read her book.

FRITZ: Yes, I have.

Q: Which was very good, except she talks a lot about what we were doing. But she doesn't mention USAID by name. I don't know if you noticed that.

FRITZ: I didn't notice it. She's good. I'll show you what I have hanging on my wall – just to tell you what kind of person she is. She had these stamps made from this picture taken at the USAID 25th anniversary event. That's her in the middle, I'm on one end and the minister responsible for assistance is the other person. In the middle of all of what was going on, she had these stamps made in Ukraine for each of the key staff that worked for her. You read the book, so you know her story. She didn't have a lot of time when she came back to Kyiv from Washington. That was a very thoughtful thing to do.

Q: And so relationships with the embassy and USAID were very strong while you were there, I assume. Was there good collaboration in working out how you develop this new strategic approach?

FRITZ: Yeah, I would say it was excellent. With the caveat of the assistance coordinator at post who was terribly problematic, not helpful. When I started working on Ukraine after Paige left and I travelled to Ukraine, they had Ambassador Cliff Bond as the assistance coordinator – he was excellent. He played a really useful role in keeping everybody coordinated in their lanes or kind of protecting the field from Washington. He just really played a much more useful role, and he's obviously a much more senior person. And then after that, when I came in, they appointed a more junior level person who had a hard time doing their job. And so that just became very challenging.

Q: And that was at post? So, it wasn't the coordinator's office out of Washington that was the problem?

FRITZ: No, it wasn't. But they were supposed to be working with the coordinator's office from Washington, representing them out in the field, if you will. So yeah, it was really hard. And then after her, there was another person who was more capable, but also challenging in different ways. But, you know, we were still able to manage and do our

jobs and didn't affect our relationship with the front office or the rest of the embassy. It just made it hard to accomplish different things.

Q: Right, During that period, Washington wanted to put in State Department coordinators at my post with a large budget. And I think many of them were not very effective.

FRITZ: Yeah, I agree.

Q: You've spoken about certain elements of the program, especially in trying to work in the east and build a development program out of what had been done earlier by OTI and through humanitarian mechanisms. But you were doing other, more normal work, in Ukraine. Can you talk about some of those major parts of the program? I know that there's a long history of doing work in health. I know there's a long history of working in the financial sector. And I suspect that you were also doing some important DG and anti-corruption work as well. So, any of those things that you'd like to talk about that you all were doing?

FRITZ: Sure, let me take a step back. We did a new strategy when I was there very early on and it was unique because we had the traditional objectives, a democracy one and an economic one. But then we created an anti-corruption objective and a countering Russian aggression objective, which are very unusual for USAID missions. But as we thought through why we were there, why are we working in the energy sector so much, for example? It wasn't the economics of it, that's not what drove us to work in the energy sector. It was to counter Russian aggression – they were weaponizing the energy sector – that was the reason energy became so important, why we worked in the sector, why we put so much money into it and why we did what we did in the sector. We helped to stabilize the grid so that they could disconnect from Russia and connect to the European Union. So it was kind of unusual that way.

Our work in the east was mostly countering Russian aggression, but it also included the work on energy. The anti-corruption objective was interesting. It wasn't part of the DG portfolio, where I think most anti-corruption work would normally reside. It was almost part and parcel of everything we did. Our health portfolio was part of the anti-corruption objective. We worked in Ukraine in the health sector for a long time, but as USAID health sector funding always is, it was very disease-specific. We had HIV-AIDS money and TB money, both of which were important but the overall sector was hugely corrupt. We had a fortunate opportunity with the appointment of a Ukrainian-American doctor as minister of health and she was a real go-getter. She wanted to clean up the sector and we saw a real opportunity to go in and help her do that. We obligated anti-corruption money into a health sector reform project that was implemented by Deloitte. We helped tackle some issues, but we didn't finish because COVID happened, but we got pretty far along in terms of helping to reform the pharmaceutical sector, which was a huge source of corruption. We helped to set up a new pharmaceutical agency that had new systems for purchasing drugs and that hired non-corrupt people and so forth. We helped them to save a lot of money and reduce corruption through that effort. We were in the process of

helping the ministry to right size health sector institutions, hospitals and the like, to save money and set up a new national health insurance system for Ukraine. Budget allocations had been based on the number of beds rather than the services provided. The system was bloated with too many hospitals. That only got so far along before the Minister left and COVID happened. We had been advising them to reduce the number of hospitals, but actually with COVID, you needed more hospital beds. So I think with COVID things changed in the world a lot. I don't know what happened after that, but at least the early work that we did was pretty impactful in terms of reducing corruption.

And then we had the more traditional programs in DG and EG. In economic growth we had a lot in the agriculture sector because Ukraine has a huge agriculture sector and a lot of opportunities there. On the democracy and governance side, we had a lot of traditional programming in civil society, judicial reform, a big decentralization program that was under the radar and I think had some pretty good successes and in a pretty challenging environment. We did media work as well and some work with parliament, which we did for way too long. I just felt like after 25 years, how much more can you work with the parliament? But the evaluation we had commissioned told us that everybody who we worked with loved it. So therefore, I guess we just continue doing it. Yeah, well, that happens sometimes.

Q: I assume your new strategy went into Washington. Was there immediate consensus on the more nontraditional objectives of countering Russian aggressive aggression and anti-corruption? Or was there a debate about that in Washington?

FRITZ: Well, you know, it was interesting because the agency set up a new strategy process and we were one of the first missions to go through it. We were actually partway through it when they set up that process. My replacement as senior DAA, Margot Ellis, and Lisa Magno, head of the E&E program office as well as others, had been helping us with the strategy. So it wasn't like we sent it in and, oh, what's this? We coalesced around these ideas and decided that they seem to be the right development objectives or strategic objectives for us. They were part of that discussion so it wasn't news to them. And ultimately, the bureau adopted the countering Russian aggression strategic objective for the E&E regional strategy. I think it just makes sense in this environment. I don't think there was a lot of pushback and they definitely were part of the process so it was easier.

Q: Okay, that's actually an important lesson. If you're going to be doing something that sounds a little non-traditional, it's best to involve people early on. So, there was an election in Ukraine during this period, correct?

FRITZ: Yes, that was interesting.

Q: And that would have been in 2017 or 2018, I can't remember, when Zelenskyy was elected. And was USAID providing support on that election?

FRITZ: We were definitely part of that. The previous president, Poroshenko, was the consensus candidate coming out of the Maidan, but he was an oligarch. In the beginning,

he was on board with the Maidan revolution and the reforms that civil society pushed for during that revolution. When I first got to Ukraine, it was really interesting. Civil society was sitting side by side within ministries helping to advance a new law to reform X, Y, or Z. That was very common. You had a coalition of NGOs called the Reanimation Package of Reforms, kind of an unusual name, but they were side by side with ministry staff. Then at some point, Poroshenko decided that these civil society actors were actually looking to get into power. He came at the international community, criticizing us for supporting civil society, saying "You're just supporting those who are going to run for office in these next elections." There were some within civil society that decided to run. We couldn't control that. But going back to the relationship, it soured between Poroshenko and his administration and civil society somewhere, I would say, towards maybe within a year, year and a half of his time as president. So our ability – and the ability of civil society – to work on some of these reforms became more and more difficult.

Yes, we did work on the elections. We worked with political parties through NDI and IRI. We helped on election administration through the IFES. I talked earlier about ENEMO, a regional body of election monitoring organizations around Eastern Europe. I believe we funded ENEMO to monitor elections. So yes, we were heavily involved in supporting the process.

I think a lot of people were surprised when Zelenskyy came into office. It was a bit challenging because he was not supported in Kyiv. He was a populist, popularly elected populist president. Most of the USAID staff are intellectuals living in Kyiv – they were not happy. Not only were they not happy, but also they thought USAID should not be working with the new president. I heard murmurings of this and ended up setting up informal discussions once every couple of weeks for anybody who wanted to talk about the election and the results. They asked questions like, "Why are we working with him?" And I said, "He's saying all the right things. He's the democratically elected president. And until he says or does anti-democratic things, we're going to be working with him. It's U.S. government policy and if you cannot abide by that, I suggest you go work somewhere else because right now, that's our policy and we will be working with him, with his team, with his staff." And we did. By the third meeting people were very, very upset. It was the last meeting we had about it, but it was the hardest. People were crying and saying that they had fought on the Maidan to speak their own language, to not be beholden to Russia. They really thought because Zelenskyy was a Russian speaker, because he had ties to an oligarch through his TV show, that he would be pro-Russian. People were seriously worried, enough to cry about this. Looking back now, it's surprising that that even happened, given where we are today in Ukraine, but it did. And it was a difficult turning point in the mission, from Poroshenko to Zelenskyy. And most surprising to me because as I mentioned earlier, Poroshenko by that time was not a reformer.

Zelenskyy brought in a lot of good people, a lot of young IT people. We've had a lot of success, or USAID has had a lot of success in bringing government to the people through IT applications, like government services. Dia is "government in a smartphone." It's an app that everybody can use to get government services. We helped with that through the

Eurasia Foundation. We had really good people to work with that he brought into his administration.

Q: It's really interesting that the local staff had such strong views. Is that something that you discussed with the ambassador and with the embassy? It sounds like you handled it really well.

FRITZ: I don't know about that. I'm sure I mentioned it to the DCM because I had weekly one on one meetings, usually with the DCM. The ambassador would join when she had time, but she was really busy. It was mostly with the DCM.

Q: Okay, that's really fascinating how you handled them. That's not the kind of thing anybody gives you training on when the staff reacts that way. Did any of the FSN staff leave?

FRITZ: No.

Q: Did they see early on that he was doing some of the right stuff?

FRITZ: It took some time. Quite honestly, I think the war changed their mind on Zelenskyy. I think it took that long.

Q: Okay. So you were there during one of the more chaotic periods in U.S. foreign policy. I don't know if we want to talk about this today or whether we want to do it at a fresh session.

FRITZ: Well, we're getting to two hours. So maybe a fresh session might be better.

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Q: Okay, today is June 17, 2024. And this is interview number four with Susan Fritz. Susan, last time we'd begun to talk about your time in Ukraine and had a very interesting discussion. You had mentioned you went through a revision to the strategy and you mentioned a bit working with the Poroshenko government early on. That strategy had included a lot of reform elements. And then there was an election in Ukraine in which Zelenskyy came in and you mentioned the concerns that your own Ukrainian staff had about his election. Was it easy to go forward with this strategy with a new host country government? Or did you have to make adjustments?

FRITZ: Let me take a step back before my time, before I arrived in Ukraine. At the time of the Maidan, the mission had just started a new strategy but everything changed with the Maidan. Previously we couldn't work with the government so our strategy was more of a civil society kind of strategy, working at the grassroots because those were the people we could work with. And the mission had a lot less money. The mission had put that strategy aside but we hadn’t really devised a new strategy and we had not gotten additional funding yet. But we sort of had a plan that we were working against and that's

what I came into when I arrived. And then as you know, we developed a new strategy in about 2019, when Poroshenko was still in power and we were transitioning then to the new government shortly thereafter.

What happens in Ukraine and a lot of countries in the region when you have a new president or prime minister is that in addition to the top political echelon, a lot of the civil servants leave as well. It's a wholesale change in government so that could be a bit of a challenge. Towards the end of the Poroshenko administration we started running into roadblocks, particularly on anti-corruption reform. As I mentioned earlier, civil society was seen as a political opposition. So we were already running into some issues by the end of Poroshenko. With the Zelenskyy administration, we saw new opportunities, at least some of us saw new opportunities to engage. I would say one of the main areas that he brought in good people was on the IT side. He brought in some young tech-savvy IT experts who really wanted to advance citizen access to government through IT platforms. And they developed what they call government in a smartphone, the Dia app. And so we were able to, through our implementing partner, do a lot to advance a greater appreciation for responsiveness by the government. We helped to bring citizens and government together through this Dia platform by providing services more easily, making them more accessible and doing it in a way that reduced opportunities for corruption. So there were some opportunities too. It was challenging, but there were opportunities.

Q: But as I recall you saying that part of the new strategy was to counter Russian aggression. Hadn't Zelenskyy, as a Russian speaker, campaigned that he would be best positioned to mend fences with Russia? Did that raise questions about your strategic focus on stopping Russian aggression? Or, were our efforts so subtle that it would not have been noticed?

FRITZ: Well, as I talked about earlier, some of it was just putting many more resources into upgrading the grid, getting it prepared for detaching from the Russian grid and attaching it to the European grid. Some of the work in the east that OTI was doing and some of the early development work that we were doing in the east, that needed to be done no matter what. I would say that there was a bit of a challenge because of the change in Ukrainian government representatives in the east. It was new people, new priorities, and that was much more at the granular level because we were out there working in each of the government-controlled areas of those oblasts. And then new governors in the surrounding oblasts like Mykolaiv and elsewhere wanted our assistance as well. So that part of the transition was a little more difficult, I would say, but not impossible. It's just that you have to get to know new partners and new administrations and everything kind of comes to a standstill and all that, which I'm sure you've experienced as well.

Q: Okay, because we tend to think about political transitions only in terms of U.S. ones; we sometimes forget that there are ones in the countries where we work as well. I know that another part of the strategic approach was to build a portfolio that could be adapted as changes occurred in the country. How did you approach this, both strategically and operationally?

FRITZ: Yeah, so it was both. I would say when I first got to Ukraine, as I think I mentioned earlier, the mission was on sort of a downward path budget-wise. There were some that were thinking that it would close. What I found when I came out were very small – I would even call them boutique – projects, a million dollars here and a million dollars there. And they were very narrowly defined activities. To go from about twenty-five of those activities with maybe a total budget of I think $20 or $30 million to $180 million dollars a year was going to be difficult. And we weren't going to be able to do it by doing more of these boutique activities which also don't pivot easily. So if an opportunity came up in another area, we just couldn't do it because we couldn't get ourselves together to get our contracts in place and the like.

I'll give you a good example. One of the legacies of that approach was a contract we had with Deloitte to do customs reform. We thought customs reform was going to go somewhere because the former president of Georgia, Misha Saakashvili, had been appointed governor of Odesa Oblast. He chose customs as an area that he was going to reform and he brought in a very young dynamic reformer to work with him on that. We were still trying to get that contract in place when I arrived. When we finally signed the contract, Saakashvili had been removed as was his customs reformer. Poroshenko's guy in Kyiv running customs was very corrupt so there wasn't anything we could do with him. So I went to the ambassador and said, "This is a waste of money. We're not going to get anywhere. The reformers are gone and this guy who's heading up customs is a sleazebag." But she knew USAID pretty well and she was reluctant to let us cancel the contract because she knew how long it took to get it in place. Her thinking was that maybe today there's not a reformer, but maybe in a month or two there might be, or maybe a year from now. And how long is it going to take USAID to get an assistance vehicle in place? Eventually I convinced her that this was not a good use of our money. And so that was, again, a very narrowly defined boutique program.

Looking at some of the activities that we designed going forward, like the work that we designed out in the east, multi-dimensional economic development activities, multi-dimensional democracy governance activities, each with one contract, but multi-dimensional. And we said, "Okay, right now we're going to focus on these five oblasts in the east," but within the contracts, we said, "if opportunities come up elsewhere, we can move." Well, we barely got the contracts in place and there was a big opening in Mykolaiv. It was a little bit of a problem with the bandwidth of the contractors, within their own teams, but we shifted and said, "Okay, let's get OTI in initially, get them moving and then we can mobilize those contracts to come down and do some work in Mykolaiv in the south." We also made them multi-dimensional in terms of the kinds of things they could do. We made them flexible in terms of where they could work. And we had just great contracting officers who worked with us in the designs to figure out how we can make them as flexible as possible. The other thing I would say is we made these as big as we could thinking that if the funds didn't come through, we could more easily modify and reduce, but it's easier to do that, then to then add another component and another $10 million.

We did that early on in designing the energy activity. We started out with a small energy efficiency activity – maybe a couple of million dollars – and ended up with a new $65 million contract for a much broader energy security project that could pivot and meet the needs in the energy sector as they came up. The original design was much smaller, but I insisted that we add another $20-30 million to it. Everybody on the energy team was nervous going that big but I knew money was coming and the sector was extremely important developmentally and politically. We knew there was a lot of support on the Hill, and on both sides of the aisle. So we knew that the money would come at least for several years. And if we did some smart programs that had results that there would likely be more coming. So that was our approach. It seemed to work at least while I was there. It gave us a lot of flexibility. And I think Jim Hope would say that when he came in after me, that the mission was set up with some more flexible instruments that could pivot pretty easily.

Q: And that probably should always be done in these transitional situations, right?

FRITZ: Yeah, I think so. It should have been done earlier in Ukraine, but when I came out as acting AA on a couple of trips, I found an overwhelmed staff, overworked, really very, people were tired and they had just been through the Maidan and they knew people fighting out in the east – friends' kids or their sons and their daughters. I said, "We need more staff. We need to hire more local staff. We need more foreign service officers. We need the people to be able to manage these programs and we can't do one-off activities, a million dollars here, a million dollars there." We ended up staffing up, but the initial reaction I got from the mission was, well, no, we were downsizing so we can't start hiring staff. I said, "That was then, this is now. We're not downsizing anymore and won't be for the foreseeable future. So, if we don't want to work our staff to death, we've got to come up with more people and a smarter way of managing our programs."

Q: That's good. I think we sometimes forget that there have been successes on the policy reform front in Ukraine given all of the change and turmoil. I believe that may have included pension reform. Was that under the Poroshenko regime?

FRITZ: That was early on. And we did it jointly with the IMF and the World Bank. They provided the impetus because there was a lot of interest in shoring up the pension system. Ukraine was $17 billion in the hole when Yanukovych fled. Our reform didn't totally fix the problem but it did close loopholes and reduce the percentage of GDP necessary to pay out pensions. On the pension system reform itself, the work was very collaborative. We had the technical assistance that could help the government implement some of the reforms that both the World Bank and IMF were calling for and supporting with their financing. A second component was envisioned that would establish the possibility of private pensions like our TSP or 401ks but it was too hard politically to go into that second component. And you have to remember there was a banking crisis before that in which a lot of people lost their money so the citizen demand for it wasn't quite there. So we only did the first pillar.

Q: Okay. I believe Eurasia Foundation worked alongside USAID in Ukraine. Was it a significant program at that point in Ukraine? In Russia, Eurasia localized the foundation and spun it off. Did they do the same in Ukraine? Can you talk a little bit about how Eurasia Foundation was operating?

FRITZ: Sure. Before I got there, the mission had done a procurement for an e-governance program. It included e-procurement, e-governance, and open data. Eurasia Foundation won the cooperative agreement. Years earlier, Eurasia Foundation did spin off a local organization called the East Europe Foundation in Ukraine, and they also were implementing programs with USAID funding, including our parliamentary assistance program. And then they had some small pieces of other activities from time to time.

Q: So they were both operating then?

FRITZ: Yeah. They try not to compete for the same things. And let me take a step back. I am on the board of Eurasia Foundation, so I should be very transparent about that. The local spin-off, the East Europe Foundation, was implementing the Parliamentary Assistance Program. Eurasia Foundation, the U.S.-based organization, won the cooperative agreement to do the e-governance program. That program grew, especially when Zelenskyy came in, but even before Zelenskyy, we were making some headway on a lot of aspects of e-governance. It really advanced two and threefold, maybe even more than that, when Zelenskyy came in and brought in these young tech savvy IT people and they set up the Ministry for Digital Transformation, a ministry that's specifically devoted to advancing IT solutions to government issues. Eurasia Foundation implemented that program throughout the time I was there. It is finally wrapping up this year. Eurasia Foundation received a follow-on program to do similar work, but at a much greater scale, a lot more money.

Q: Well, that was fortuitous that you had that program started when Zelenskyy came in.

FRITZ: Yeah, yeah. I wish I could take credit, but I can't. My predecessors were really smart about that and we hired a really good FSN to manage that program. So yeah, that worked really well and fortuitous that we had a great partner. And while we didn't have a champion in Poroshenko, he did have a great tech-savvy, smart guy working for him that we could and did work with. We made some progress, particularly on open data. We also shored up the storage of the e-procurement platform called ProZorro, which we also supported the expansion of. That was a huge anti-corruption tool because it put all public procurements on this transparent platform. USAID put additional funding aside to enable the Ukrainian government with Eurasia Foundation to do similar programming in other countries around the world to help them put government in a smartphone. So the things we could do under Poroshenko, we did. And then we had more opportunities even after him. So yeah, it was good.

Q: Oh, that's good. Okay, we'll maybe move on to the elephant in the room, which is the degree to which Ukraine became a political issue in the U.S. during the period you were

there. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how that affected you all. And that would have been happening throughout 2019. Is that correct?

FRITZ: Right, it was spring 2019, it started to unfold. Let me talk about that part. And then there's an earlier part of the history with USAID. It was devastating to observe. I was not front and center. I didn't testify, but several of my colleagues did. All of us observed the very disturbing and upsetting way the ambassador was removed. Any president has the ability to remove an ambassador for any reason, so it wasn't that, but it was the lies around it, the made-up stories in the Hill newspaper. I remember somebody forwarded me an article from that newspaper and it was false. It was talking about what Ambassador Yovanovitch had or had not done. She was accused of bad-mouthing Trump, which she never did. She was accused of all kinds of things. And so you had the Hill newspaper, then you had the so-called reporters on Fox News repeating what was in the Hill newspaper, which wasn't true. And then you had Donald Jr. tweeting about our ambassador saying some pretty awful things. And for somebody like Masha Yovanovitch, one of the top-notch diplomats in the foreign service, someone with such integrity. She was very, very careful dealing with a difficult situation where you had the U.S. ambassador in Europe, the U.S. ambassador in Germany, you had Kurt Volker, you had the White House, you had people from all those groups trying to intervene related to U.S. policy in Ukraine and run our relationship with the Ukrainian government. That's the job of the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine. So she was trying to navigate that. It was horrible, but also fascinating to see how that just unraveled from a false story to being repeated and repeated and then all of a sudden it becomes true—watching lies become disinformation in real time. She had come back to the United States to accept an award, I think from the National Defense University. That's when she was told, "Wait. Do not go back to post. Cool your jets and wait for further direction." And finally, when she was given further direction, it was to go pack out and come back to the United States. We were all horrified to watch this happen to her. She did not come into the office that week. She packed up her things. She came to give a farewell speech to the embassy community. I'm getting choked up thinking about it now. I cried. I cried for her. I cried for our country. Just to see somebody like that whose name was dragged through the mud so viciously.

Most of my colleagues got called up to the Hill. Bill Taylor came in behind her as Chargé. I told Ambassador Taylor that the (only) silver lining of Masha's removal was that I got an opportunity to work with him. I had never worked with him before. I wish there were other circumstances under which that would have happened. But yeah, so they all went up and testified and yeah, so that was that. And it was gut wrenching, the whole thing. It was so upsetting.

Q: Did it affect your ability to work with the Ukrainians?

FRITZ: Less so for the USAID mission, just because we were working more technically. But certainly U.S. policy towards Ukraine. I think it was challenging for my embassy colleagues more so, but I wasn't in the middle of that. But the United States lost a lot of credibility, and that part of it did affect us.

Q: I was just curious how much confidence they would have in dealing with individuals on controversial issues given all that was happening. To what extent did this affect what USAID was doing?

FRITZ: So it did, but way earlier and here's how. The day I arrived in Ukraine to take up my position as the mission director, the DCM had reached out and said, "Hey, you know, there's an article in one of the local papers. It's written by a parliamentarian who oftentimes accuses us of things that aren't true. Can you just follow up on this? There's a story about USAID and she's talking about USAID and Burisma being close." Burisma is the oligarch-owned company that Hunter Biden was on the board of. So you know how it is, checking in, getting access to your computer, you're just getting oriented at post. I was meeting all the heads of the different sections and so forth. So I asked John Pennell, my deputy, to look into it. He wasn't aware of anything and talked to our energy folks in the economic growth office. After he followed up, he said, "No, nothing now. Apparently, we had a relationship last year but that has ended." So this was late July, early August in 2016 that this was playing out. Every year our energy program would have an awards program for, I think it was journalists that covered renewable energy issues and maybe local governments that did any kind of renewable energy projects in their cities. We had an agreement with Burisma that they would provide the awards such as TVs or something like that, nice prizes for this event. When John had checked with the economic growth folks they said that we were no longer doing it. But a couple of weeks later, John says, "Never guess what I've just found out. Apparently, we are still working with Burisma. And we're planning on doing this again in September." I said, "No, we're not. We're not doing this. Let's talk to the implementing partner and let them know we're not doing this. No way we can work with Burisma. This cannot be associated with USAID in any way, shape or form." So we did cut the relationship or our partner cut the relationship.

Unfortunately, Burisma had some pretty high-powered lobbyists who showed up in Kiev and did a full court press on me and on the DCM saying that Zlochevsky, the oligarch who owned Burisma, has never been convicted in court of any corruption so there's no reason for USAID to pull out of this relationship and blah, blah, blah. We stuck to our guns. I got a lot of support from the DCM. I talked to him about it before we pulled the plug and we agreed that it was the right thing to do. There was a lot of nasty blowback. They were okay to me, but the DCM took a big hit from these lobbyists. So that was our relationship with Burisma. The DCM mentioned it in his testimony and he said the story's out there already but nobody really followed up on it. It had nothing to do with Hunter Biden—our implementing partner established the relationship on their own. It never came to the surface or anything after that, but we did have that early on relationship.

Q: Okay, but you never got any pressure from Washington to do anything?

FRITZ: We let our Washington folks know in the Bureau. We kept them apprised of things in case they blew up. Fortunately, it didn't come back to bite us. It came back to bite others, but not us.

Q: Just another aspect of the politics of USAID, whenever it works in a high priority country. Did you have a lot of Congressional delegations (codels) that came to Ukraine? If so, could you talk a little bit about how you manage those codels. Were they bipartisan, or did they come separately?

FRITZ: So no, they usually came together. They were usually managed by the political section and then if there was a USAID dimension to it, we'd have a control officer for that meeting or that event. Usually they were interested in the military relationship, the intelligence relationship, and what was going on in the east so very rarely did we get pulled in. The most memorable codel was when Senators Amy Klobuchar, John McCain, and Lindsey Graham came out over the winter holidays – it was really cold. I think maybe they came over New Years. This was when Poroshenko was still in power. When they met with him, he invited them to go out with him to the front lines, but they had not brought that kind of gear. The control officer was running around getting boots and socks and all kinds of stuff. The ambassador accompanied the three senators to the east. We were left with the staff who didn't get to go on that trip and so we briefed and went out to dinner with them. We had regular briefings of a lot of high-level military from the United States. There was always a country team to brief them or State Department or the NSC. When Zelenskyy was inaugurated Senator Ron Johnson from Wisconsin, Kurt Volker (who was U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations) and I think the U.S. ambassador to the EU, Gordon Sondland, came out to represent the United States.

Q: Did Vice-President Pence go? Maybe not.

FRITZ: No, he did not. And so we briefed the three I mentioned when they first came out. It was a small group, like three, three or four of us who briefed them. So we did a lot of briefings, but not a lot of show and tell of USAID projects. I was most impressed with General Mattis when he came to Kyiv. He requested to be briefed by the broader country team, so it was a room full of people. He listened intently to each briefer, and asked each person if they spoke one of the local languages as well as other questions about their background. He is extremely smart, personable, and exuded leadership. Briefing him was a highlight of my time in Ukraine.

And then I did a lot of briefings when I came back to DC from time to time. There was a lot of interest on the Hill. I did a lot of staff briefings, which I grew to have a real appreciation for how smart a lot of those staffers are and how up to date they are on what's going on. They knew just as much as I did. And I was on the ground getting my hands dirty (literally with our agriculture work) overseeing all of our projects. They were very well-versed in what was going on in Ukraine and had a good understanding of the lay of the land.

Q: When you did have to do briefings and consultations on the Hill, was the focus often on what you were doing on the anti-corruption front? Was that absolutely a priority?

FRITZ: Yeah, that was absolutely. That was the biggest priority. Some interest in what we're doing in the east as well, but the anti-corruption part was front and center.

Q: Can you say a bit more about what we were doing on that front? And were there any elements you saw to be more effective than others?

FRITZ: Yeah, so I haven't talked about them as anti-corruption programs, but the big Eurasia Foundation TAPAS program -- the e-governance, e-procurement, and open data program that I described earlier – were all part of the anti-corruption work we were supporting. The e-procurement platform, Prozorro, closed opportunities for corruption in procurement, for skimming off the top. The Ministry of Economy estimates that to-date over $70 million have been saved since the establishment of Prozorro. Also, previously I spoke about our health reform program. Those were the two centerpieces of our anti-corruption work and I believe the ones that had the most impact. We had another project, Support to Anti-Corruption Champion Institutions (SACCI) that worked with the National Agency of Corruption Prevention (NACP) and with various government institutions to help them establish anti-corruption action plans. We also did a lot on judicial reform. I would say judicial reform and independence are more long-term prospects. There's a lot of old guard which is really hard to weed out as you're trying to reform a judiciary, but we were working in that space as well.

Q: Right, that's important. Were you doing any work with an anti-corruption commission or anything along that front?

FRITZ: We were. So there were four pieces to the new anti-corruption architecture established after the revolution: the Anti-Corruption Court, the NACP, the Special Anti-corruption Prosecutor (SAPO), and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) which was an FBI-like investigative body. INL was helping NABU and SAPO and we both helped stand up the Anti-corruption Court. We had different pieces of it, so we coordinated.

The NACP, which USAID was taking the lead on, was another interesting case. This was towards the end of the Poroshenko administration. SACCI was one of the projects that was slow in the procurement process. By the time that contract was just about set, we were getting ready to roll out the program with the NACP. I had gone to meet with the head of the NACP who was a Poroshenko appointee. At that point we weren't helping them at all. They were rumored to be politically targeting who they were investigating. Also, one of the conditions for one of the sovereign loan guarantees that we had provided to Ukraine was related to establishing an e-declaration system whereby public servants had to declare their assets. This would enable civil society and media to track whether a civil servant was getting wealthier than their salary would suggest. That system was supposed to be run by this anti-corruption agency, but the system had been dismantled. It had been created by the United Nations, I believe, and then dismantled by this anti-corruption agency led by a Poroshenko appointee.

We were sitting on a bunch of computers that were sitting in boxes in Odesa Oblast, where Saakashvili had been trying to reform the customs service. Before they were even able to get everything set up, Saakashvili and his advisor were sacked. So we collected

those computers that OTI was providing them. Before our SACCI contract with lots of resources rolled out, we thought, “Why don't we offer them to NACP and see what they do with them?” Ostensibly that was the purpose of my meeting with the head of the NACP. I had asked her, “How do you select people to investigate?” She said, “We act on accusations.” I said, “You don't have a risk-based system whereby you look at the most probable or fishy cases? She was very open about going after their political rivals and I was horrified. I said, “Well, thank you. This meeting has been very helpful. I'm sorry we can't provide assistance to you at this moment. This is not an agency that we want to work with, the way you're working, the way you're working both your declaration system and then how you identify who you're going to investigate or audit.”

There were several commissioners that ran this agency. There were some good people on that commission and they were quite frustrated that she was the head of it. They also were in that meeting. This was not something that I was going to go public with, but rather, we planned to quietly step away from this agency. I walked out of the meeting and was ambushed by media. I played it safe, saying we had a nice meeting, we just had discussion about what the agency's doing and just left it at that. By the time I got back to the office, one of the other commissioners had put on Facebook, “USAID cuts all assistance to the anti-corruption agency” and it became like this big hullabaloo. But we didn't change our decision not to provide assistance. Again, it goes back to what you were asking about earlier about these instruments that just couldn't pivot. We ended up doing some other anti-corruption activities, but it was really working at the margins. We couldn't work with our main partner. We simply couldn't work with them. They were not reformists.

Q: Right; that's an important thing to document. But I think picking some areas such as e-governance and procurement where you can have meaningful impact and it's not dependent on this political system is probably a valuable lesson. I suspect it is often easy to fritter away resources on politically ineffective central agencies.

FRITZ: Yes.

Q: What a fascinating story.

FRITZ: Yeah, it was an exciting time to be there. We did some really good work. We had impact. That's really richly rewarding when you can see the impact of the work and the funding that you put out. Not everything was a huge success, but we had enough of them that really inspired us to do more. So it was a great time to be there.

Q: I didn't ask when we were talking about the politically difficult period, if you were getting the support you needed from USAID Washington. Did they understand the stress that this was putting on the field?

FRITZ: Yeah. I mean, how could they support us? It wasn't really much. We just kind of circled the wagons, had the resident legal officer and our energy guys sit down and

document the facts so that if any questions came up, we were prepared. The bureau front office was aware but there wasn't really much they could do, unfortunately.

Q: Anything else on Ukraine that you would like to mention?

FRITZ: Not really. I did want to mention that I left during COVID, and that was a terrible way to end a career as I left in March.

Q: Right when COVID started then. Did you have to go through working virtually? Or did that begin later?

FRITZ: No. So what happened was the embassy was very nervous and by this time Bill Taylor had left we had a Chargé who was new to the region, was new to Ukraine, and it was a very hard position to put anybody in. She was doing the best she could. But then the crisis hit with COVID. The CDC representative at post told country team that it was likely at least one of us would die from COVID so they were kind of in panic mode which was not helpful.

The embassy health unit and I believe the CDC people went through our health records. My son, Cody, has type 1 diabetes, and my husband was at that time in his early seventies. So the health unit told me that my son and husband had to go on the next plane because they were high risk. At this point, there were no planes out of Kyiv. So we thought, "Okay, well my tour's up in July so I'll stay here with Kai (my daughter). And Mike will go home with Cody, and we'll follow in July." I was quarantining, working from home because both Mike and I had just come back from Germany on work trips. My kids were both seniors in high school.

On a Monday morning at about 11 o'clock, we got a call telling us that there was going to be a plane taking off at about three o'clock. I couldn't talk my husband into it. He was not ready to go psychologically. My daughter talked him into taking my son. And so they packed up and left. About two weeks later, we had another call from the health unit saying anybody with asthma had to go. My daughter and I both have asthma so we packed our bags and left.

We were fortunate to have a place to land. We have a beach house in New Jersey that was unoccupied since it was in the off-season, so that's where we went. I handed over my duties immediately to my deputy, Susan Kutor. She said, "You can't run a mission from New Jersey. And she was right. Although as painful as it was, I handed the reins to her. The kids did school virtually and I worked virtually from there. We got up at two in the morning every day until they graduated and I finished my tour. Basically I worked with the foreign service officers on their annual evaluation forms (AEFs). I backed up Susan where I could. I also organized virtual happy hours and tried to boost morale with things like that. And then I ended my foreign service career virtually at the end of July. The mission had a nice virtual send off. It was a hard way for my kids to finish high school, graduating virtually.

Q: I hadn't realized that the embassies were proactively asking people to leave.

FRITZ: Our CDC guy at post was extremely worried and I think communicated that to the Chargé. I think that just got people so overly cautious. The Ukrainian health system is not great either. There was concern that if anybody had a non-COVID illness or my son, God forbid, had some issue related to his diabetes, that there would be no place for him to go. You do what you have to do and you think you need to do for your family, so that's what we did.

Q: So, but that was managed post by post? It wasn't a worldwide policy to be directing people out.

FRITZ: Yeah.

Q: So did you then retire?

FRITZ: Yes, I did. I retired.

Q: It's hard to understand your CV. I think you retired and then you were back doing work at USAID.

Retirement from USAID, September 2020 and Post-Retirement Assignment to USAID/Serbia (2021 - 2022)

FRITZ: If you have any advice for improving it, I welcome it. I did the retirement course in August and September, and retired at the end of September. A year later I had the opportunity to go out to Serbia as a PSC acting mission director. There was a gap because the mission director who had been there got medevaced and his replacement hadn't even been named yet. It was a great opportunity to go back to a place that I served previously. I think it's very rare that you get to do that in USAID. I got to see some of the successes and some of the not so successful things several years later. So yeah, it was good. It was lovely to be back with the staff.

Q: What lessons did you learn from what you saw? Ideas about things that worked well or didn't?

FRITZ: So the starkest one was, you know, just driving in from the airport and seeing all the construction cranes. I was really excited thinking about how much we had done to help improve construction permitting. I'm thinking, "Great! The economy is finally booming. This is wonderful!" But once I talked to staff about it, I learned that they were totally negative about all the construction because they think it's illegal, that it's all corrupt. They said, "There's so much money being skimmed off the top. And it's all corrupt. The Belgrade mayor is corrupt and he's behind a lot of this." That was rather disappointing to hear. I had high hopes and the same thing happened in Bosnia too. I guess maybe I'm more of an optimist than I should be. I had left two years after Vučić had come into power and he said all the right things. I think he became Deputy Prime

Minister in 2012. I come back 10 years later and he's still in power. He did what Putin does, goes back and forth between prime minister and president. He was deputy prime minister when I was there, but he held all the power. Then he moved up to prime minister and then president and he went back and forth. He was in power in one way or another for 10 years. And the opposition just fell apart after he was elected. There isn't a multi-party system anymore.

Also interesting is that because of all the construction and the way the party in power managed things, there's a lot more pollution now. There was never an eco-movement of any sort in Serbia, but that had grown up around some of the building, some of the Chinese investments that have happened since I left. Chinese companies don't pay attention to the environmental impact of those investments. Some of our strongest civil society partners are very grassroots and are fighting for clean air or just measuring what's coming out of those factories and things like that. While awful to see the environmental devastation that's happening, on the bright side it's refreshing to see civil society and citizens engaging on issues that matter to them. Some pluses and minuses, but overall the authoritarian backsliding and decline in democracy indicators was sad to see.

Q: And that's even though civil society and people at a community level were able to be advocates and deal with the issues. But, the media and some of the other indicators of democracy had gone backwards?

FRITZ: Yeah, so most of the media is controlled by Vučić and his party and the ones that aren't are harassed, and life is difficult for those reporters. On the media side, there's not a lot to be optimistic about but they haven't completely closed.

Q: And they haven't closed down civil society completely?

FRITZ: No, but they make it hard. They make it hard for anybody who's not pro-Vučić, pro-SNS, his political party. I think the fact that there isn't a counterbalance to his authority and power from another political party, that he controls all the levers of power, that makes it hard for anybody to oppose him or to exist, really.

Q: I believe you have also done some other work, including a program evaluation in Kosovo and strategic assessment in Albania. Were you working directly for the USAID mission or were these through consulting?

FRITZ: For the Kosovo evaluation I worked directly with the mission. I did it pro bono as part of my monitoring and evaluation masters certificate. I signed a gift letter which enabled me to do that and give me some experience with doing evaluation. It was during COVID so it was all online. I know the Mission staff so it was nice to work with them again. I was really pleased because a friend of mine, the former Peace Corps country director in Bulgaria, became chief of party of the project I evaluated just as I finished that evaluation. Our friend Carl reached out to me and said, "Hey, I hear you did this evaluation. Can I talk to you about it?" I told him my impression and some of the things that I found and he implemented some of my ideas. I just saw him recently and he said

that it worked really well so that was really great. For Albania, I did a strategic assessment through a purchase order. It was a series of deliverables that I provided including the overall assessment at the end. I worked with one of the FSNs from Serbia on that assessment.

Q: Right. One of the reasons I asked is to see if you had sat at the other side of the table from the USAID officers? Any thoughts about being on the other side of the table? Did you ever say to yourself, I wish I had known this earlier?

FRITZ: Well, it's interesting. I'll give you a couple of examples. Being on the partner side on Eurasia Foundation board, you hear what USAID wants in terms of branding and how that minimizes our partners in a way that I think is not healthy. Before I left the E&E bureau to go out to Ukraine, Tom Melia came in as the political Assistant Administrator. Tom's mantra was that it's not USAID, but rather, it's USAID and whichever partner is implementing the program. He mandated that we talk about our partner when talking about programs. Instead of saying USAID did this, we'll say with USAID funding, so-and-so, whether it's Eurasia Foundation or whomever, and that was his thing. I think that was a good thing that Tom promoted that. That was not what USAID was promoting, but that was a Tom Melia thing – that we need to give credit where credit is due.

The other story I have, I'm not going to name the mission, but it was neither of those two that we just talked about. I had drafted an email and I asked my teammate who had never worked directly for USAID to take a look at it. He looked at it and said, "It's all there, but you're pretty direct. We usually use a lot of flowery language when we talk to USAID." I asked why. I'm a direct person so I don't sugar coat things. They were supposed to do X, Y, and Z. I was asking them to do X, Y, and Z and if they didn't do it, that's on them. He says, "You can get away with it because you're a former mission director." But it sensitized me a little bit to how we're viewed by our partners. And it's not on the whole very good. It's unfortunate because they are our partners and they're the way we get our work done.

Q: That's interesting. That's a good example of the importance of partners being able to tell USAID when things are not working and when there's bad news. Did you ever see that as an issue from either side, either as a contractor or working for USAID, where information could have come forward earlier than it did?

FRITZ: I can't point to anything. I do remember another example of the boutique project issue I mentioned earlier. We had a boutique project to help with privatization in Ukraine. I remember when it finally was put in place I tried to find a good government champion and I couldn't. So we agreed with the partner not to even get the project going, to cancel it. Subsequently, our economic growth people created a more flexible instrument to do privatization, but using task orders so that if something didn't move you didn't have to continue with it but you had the ability to start quickly when there was an opening. That's another way of creating a flexible instrument.

Q: Okay; that's important. In talking with you, I think you've probably been more willing to bite the bullet on programs that aren't working than a lot of people in USAID. I think that's something you should be proud of.

FRITZ: Thank you. I could never go up to the Hill and say that we're doing great work if we weren't. I felt that I had to be honest if I wanted to be taken seriously. If we're spending money for something that I know in my heart is not going to yield something positive, then I felt like it was my duty to end it. We had to do that. On the flip side, I think someone like Ambassador Yovanovitch would say, and actually did say, that all the work that USAID did many years ago on local government in Ukraine really paid off during 2016-2020 when decentralization took off. She thought that that could not have happened without the groundwork being laid many years before. She had seen those early local government programs when she was DCM in Ukraine much earlier. She thought that that was important. So maybe my approach isn't a good one, but I thought it was the most responsible thing to do.

Q: That's a good point. They may not succeed initially, but they ultimately will. That's why they want people with experience to make the judgment calls. Sometimes you make it that way, sometimes you make it that way. You had a fascinating career in that you spent most of your career in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Do you have any general thoughts about the democratic and economic transitions in those countries and the role that USAID played? Any concluding thoughts? Things you would do differently? Particularly positive results?

FRITZ: I think our greatest impact has been at the local level, at the grassroots level, our civil society work, local government and decentralization support, even media work, even though the media sector across the Balkans is in trouble. I think our work at the central level in these countries has been less successful. I think there are cases. We talked about some of them, construction permitting, labor law, and some central reforms. There are some but I don't think we capture them as well. I also think you have to remember that we went into these countries much later than the rest of Eastern Europe. We didn't put as much money into these countries so I think we have to be realistic about what could have been achieved. With the resources that we had I think we did pretty well. It's disappointing to see some of the democratic backsliding and sad to see some of that too. But there have been some successes and I'm pleased to have been part of it. It's a place that's near and dear to my heart and I hope part of what I've contributed has had an impact in each of these countries.

Q: Right, and in many of the USAID programs continue. So, it may be like your example in Ukraine that those seeds planted, the results you'll see a little further down the road.

FRITZ: I hope so. I hope so.

Q: Well, on that note, let's conclude. Thank you very much, Susan.

End of interview