

Minister Radoslaw Sikorski at World Affairs Council of Northern California – San Francisco,
August 5th, 2009

The New Poland in a New Europe

San Francisco, August 5, 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak at the World Affairs Council.

This year a free and democratic Poland is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Twenty years ago in June the democratic opposition in Poland won a landslide victory in partially free elections. Earlier, at the beginning of the eighties, the *Solidarność* movement had formed a popular and peaceful resistance against imposed Soviet rule and a totalitarian system of government. As the former secretary of state Madelaine Albright put it – “a revolution of spirit (sparked by Pope John Paul II’s message of hope and human dignity) brought down the Berlin Wall, reunited Europe, and transformed the face of the world”¹. It led to the enlargement of NATO ten years ago and the European Union - only five years ago. *Changing the geopolitics of Europe* has become a field of Polish expertise.

Our peaceful revolution brought Poland and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe closer to the United States. We became allies and close collaborators in major security related endeavors. We were together in Iraq and are still side by side in the Balkans.

Responding to the September 11th terrorist attack against the United States, Poland rallied round with the rest of NATO to support the US rescue of Afghanistan. Poland contributes to the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaida forces with two thousand troops, who are providing security to 1,1 mln Afghans that inhabit the Ghazni province. Together with our allies we are determined to help the Afghan people in their struggle for a more secure and

¹ Dokładny cytat: „The pope’s visits – for He made more than one – sparked a revolution of spirit that liberated Poland, brought down the Berlin Wall, reunited Europe, and transformed the face of the world”. M. Albright, “The mighty and almighty”, p. 59.

prosperous future, while depriving the terrorists of their safe haven. The Afghan operation is a crucial test of NATO's credibility.

We are also advocating greater involvement of the European Union in the reconstruction and development projects in Afghanistan. It is in this field that the battle for the *hearts and minds* of the Afghans people will be won or lost.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Poland, and the United States have mostly had friendly relations. America supported Poland's quest for independence after the First World War. In fact, California was home to one of the heroes of Poland's struggle for independence - the great composer and pianist - Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Thanks to his acquaintance to president Woodrow Wilson and his advisors, he was able to advance Polish interests at the end of the First World war. He became Poland's first prime minister and foreign minister. He owned a farm in Paso Robles, which I'm planning to visit during this trip. President Roosevelt's caving to Stalin at Yalta is not something we remember fondly, but later America provided assistance to the democratic opposition.

When communism fell the United States supported Poland's newly regained freedom. America offered a stabilization fund for our currency and a trust fund for the privatization of our economy. I am proud to say that the first remained a stand-by aid and the second turned a profit, and was returned to the US Treasury. Many America officials believed in us, even at times when some of us did not believe in ourselves.

The first president of independent Poland, Lech Wałęsa, used to say: "we want American generals to be dispatched in Poland." And then he would add: "generals like: General Motors and General Electric". To my knowledge, both these "generals" have indeed found their way to Poland. Even though, some of them have run into trouble recently, they still had an important impact during the pioneering years of the Polish *capitalism*.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For over forty years of *Communist* economy Poland lost many opportunities to build its prosperity. Standards of living in Poland and other countries of Central Europe had significantly dropped relative to the rest of Europe. For instance, even after the Second World War Poland's per capita GDP was similar to that of Spain. By the end of Communism, we were four times poorer than Spaniards. Only now are we catching up. With an economy of \$650 billion, we are vying with the Netherlands as the worlds' 22nd and 21st economies. And we are weathering the recent downturn relatively well. According to the latest information from the IMF and the European Commission Poland may turn out to be the only country in Europe to avoid a recession this year.

To appreciate how surprising this is, we need to cast our mind back to the early 1990's. The economic situation looked far gloomier at the beginning of the transformation. During the first two years of resuscitating the ailing national economy and reconnecting it with global markets, the Polish GDP contracted by almost 18 percent; the inflation rate skyrocketed to 350 percent in 1989 and to 686 per cent in 1990; unemployment, which was formerly an alien phenomenon, soared and in the course of few years affected several million people. We learned how to deal with crisis *the rough way*.

Yet, at the same time Poland continued to build its democratic institutions. It held its free presidential and parliamentary elections. Private enterprise started to flourish as more and more citizens had taken their fate in their own hands.

The pace of the Poland's economic transformation has been impressive. It took us only a few years to turn the national economy around. In 1991 GDP per capita in purchasing power parity in Poland was 4,5 thousand US dollars; today it is 17,5 thousand. Only ten years ago Poland was ranked as 11th European economy; today Poland occupies the 7th place. Since the beginning of the nineties Polish economy has grown twice as high as the European average. With our effort and with the help of our friends, Poland has now become part of the West and is able to compete on international markets.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The central piece of the Polish model of systemic transformation was a combination of political and economic freedoms. They came together and have been mutually reinforcing. These are, I believe, important Polish contributions to the global debate on the relationship between modernization and democracy.

The relevance of the Polish experience is even greater in the light of the recent emergence of countries which have been able to combine undemocratic systems with spectacular growth rates. The economic crisis has made some of these powers even more assertive on the international stage. For some this can prove that there are different paths to modernization and there is no inevitable link between economic liberalization and democratic values. Therefore, it is said that democracy is losing its universal clout and the economic crisis can further accelerate its decline.

Well, we disagree. When key international institutions are under pressure and many of our assumption about globalization are being tested, we should redouble our commitment to democratic values. We should keep emphasizing the interdependence between security, peace, development, human rights and democracy. We should unequivocally denounce terrorism, ethnic and religious hatred and other forms of extremism. And we must not allow pessimism and the sense of vulnerability to determine our deeds.

On the contrary this is a good time to re-launch a Polish-American project, which was founded nine years ago in Warsaw called, the Community of Democracies. It would send a meaningful message to the world that democratic states are able to work together to help countries which are trying to strengthen and consolidate their democratic institutions. It is not about *imposing* democracy on others. Such a scheme would not work, for democracy has to be rooted in the indigenous cultures. It is about *solidarity* with those who seek to live up to the high democratic standards.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Rejoining the West was a priority of the Polish foreign policy after the fall of communism. The goal consisted of two practical tasks: joining NATO and the European Union.

The enlargement of NATO meant that Poland and the other former *captive nations* rejoined the family of free peoples. Europe was reunited and the groundwork for peace and prosperity on the continent strengthened.

Today, NATO needs to adjust itself to new challenges. Difficulties with generating forces for the mission in Afghanistan, lack of adequate reaction to the war in Georgia last year, indicate that there is room for improvement in enhancing our ability to make swift decision and to execute them efficiently.

We think that the debate about the New Strategic Concept launched at the latest NATO summit is an opportunity to address this. Poland advocates ensuring balance between tasks arising out of Art. 5 of the Treaty of Washington, which refers to both defence of the allies on their territory, and the external missions of the Alliance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Poland's Membership in the European Union has given us a new historical departure. And I don't mean just the increased opportunities to catch up economy with the rest of Europe, although these are significant. For example, within the current financial perspective (2007-2013) Poland is receiving net transfers of 80 bn euro from the UE, for projects in infrastructure, environmental protection, academia, agriculture and business. In 2006 alone, 32 thousand of Polish students participated in academic programs at universities in other EU countries. I don't want to complain but, by comparison, only 25 participated in the programs offered by the Polish-American Fulbright Commission, which is the biggest academic exchange program with the United States (2008/2009)". Above all, membership in the EU has given us a sense of participation in the largest economy on earth and the feeling of co-authorship in the greatest integration project in human history, involving 500 million people. We are also able to launch programs such as Eastern Partnership, which extend the benefits of economic integration to our eastern neighbors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have welcomed the new American administration with optimism. The world needs America as a leader who is eager to listen to allies. An honest realization of the fact that the United States cannot meet these challenges alone and the world cannot meet them without America constitutes a good starting point for renewing the transatlantic partnership. The European Union is ready to work closer together with the United States to advance our joint interests and common values.

Together with America we are ready to reach out to other global and regional actors and to international institutions in efforts to tackle the consequences of the economic crisis, to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, to combat poverty and inequalities between different parts of the globe. We keep our focus on issues like Iran and its nuclear program, the Middle East, North Korea and other hot spots. An effective multilateralism that brings to the table all those who are willing to work out practical solutions to problems, should be the main principle guiding our actions.

We have discussed our priorities with the American leaders. We have done it in the framework of NATO and the U.S. – EU relations, and bilaterally. Both the President and the Prime Minister have met with President Obama. I had the privilege to talk with Madam Hillary Clinton as one of the first foreign ministers received by the new Secretary of State. We look forward to the visit of a high US representative for the ceremony commemorating the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the second world war.

Poland believes that the European integration is the best response to challenges we face in a rapidly changing, multi-polar world. We don't want the European Union to become a "super-state", but we do want it to be more effective. We support building a more federal Union, which is able to play in global fields of competition as one of the strongest players. At the same time, we want a more democratic union. I am sure that a Union, which is able to take its fair share of responsibility for global affairs, is compatible with interests of the United States.

A few weeks ago, the former Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, was elected President of the European Parliament – the only directly elected body of the European Union. This is not just a success of the Polish government and diplomacy, but a symbolic overcoming of the old divisions of Europe.

It is a hallmark of Polish foreign policy to promote a greater engagement of the European Union in East Europe and to support pro-Western aspirations of our neighbours. Following both our heart and our mind, we hold on to historical ties with countries in our region. We advance the legacy of the Solidarity movement in a quest for freedom and democracy for all.

We welcome America's involvement in developing the Eastern Partnership. US participation would send a signal that the US remains committed to the democratic transformation and the modernization of the post-Soviet space.

All European Union countries agree that Russia is of key importance. However, we should bear in mind that the West needs good cooperation with Russia as much as Russia needs this kind of cooperation with us. Poland is very much engaged in developing an open and pragmatic relationship with our Eastern neighbor. We have already accomplished quite a bit. We have established a political dialog on the level of prime minister and foreign minister. Our government was instrumental in restarting negotiations between the European Commission and Russia on a new partnership and cooperation agreement. We have also opened Russia's door to join the OECD. There is a dense network of cooperation between particular ministries and local authorities. We have even started discussing difficult aspects in our history, such as the extermination of Poles in the Soviet Union in the 1930's and the Katyń massacre.

We would prefer that the relations between the West and Russia develop on the basis of common values and shared interests. However, it is up to Russia to decide whether it embraces this approach. If not, we should build our cooperation on a premise of complying with common rules of the game either in the political or economic fields.

Energy security is of course a special concern. Poland is a reliable transit country, and substantial consumer. Equally, we would like to see Russia as a reliable energy supplier which does not utilize energy for political ends. Here, a close cooperation between the United States and Europe is crucial. Not only should we speak to our Russian partners with one voice, but we should coordinate our efforts to diversify the sources and transportation routes of energy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Poland is committed to uphold and further Europe's alliance with the United States. Indeed, when it comes to security, we regard America as a *European* country. We advocate a permanent and active American presence in Europe be it political, military and economic. We see such presence as compatible with the advancement of European integration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the face of economic turmoil the world needs a guiding and reassuring force. The European Union and the United States, acting in renewed partnership can provide such force.

In 2004, a great Pole and great American doctor Zbigniew Brzeziński, wrote: "Together, the United States and the European Union represent the core of global political stability and economic wealth. Acting together, America and Europe would be globally omnipotent" (The Choice, p. 89). Well, for some these words may sound over ambitious or too self-confident. But they should inspire our thinking about goals which we – as the transatlantic community – want to achieve. You can always count on Poland to be a voice for greater transatlantic cohesion.

Thank you for your attention.