

Wystąpienie Min. R. Sikorskiego na konferencji CSIS “America, Poland and Central Europe: Common and Colliding Strategic Interests”, 4 listopada 2009 r.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be speaking at the CSIS again. I would like to congratulate the Center and the Polish Institute of International Affairs for organizing this timely event. I hope that this cooperation will be a long-term endeavor, and I am sure that it will be highly instrumental in fostering debate on issues concerning Poland, Central Europe and the United States.

In a few hours I will meet with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. We will discuss a number of topics on the international and bilateral agenda, and launch Polish-American consultations within the framework of a strategic dialog envisaged by the declaration on strategic cooperation of August 2008. Contrary to what some may assume, Polish-American cooperation and America's engagement in Central Europe is most definitely alive and well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Stability, democracy and prosperity in Central and Eastern Europe are of course in Poland's vital interest. We believe that the most effective way to achieve these goals is to support our neighbors' efforts to modernize their economies and democratize their political systems. We also believe that the European Union should continue to act as a transformative engine in the region, by encouraging profound changes based on European values and standards. This was the motivation for our creation of the Eastern Partnership.

Our long-term goal is to create in Europe an inclusive space of cooperation of both East and West. It should promote productive forms of relationship that discourage outdated formulas of geopolitical rivalry that in the past have plagued the region with bitter competition and made it a source of global destabilization.

Russia should be offered an important role in bringing about this new type of cooperation. We would like to see not only a Europe that is closer to Russia, but also a Russia that is closer to Europe.

However, this is for Russia to decide. There are two major trends shaping Russian thinking about Russia's future and its place in the world. One is unfortunately stuck in the past. It is

derived from imperial traditions and revisionist instincts, portraying Russia as a great military geo-political power, exerting its domination in the region and trying to reclaim its old spheres of influence. We saw actions inspired by this way of thinking in the South Caucasus a year ago.

No-one benefited from that conflict, which has become a source of instability and incited mistrust in relations between Russia and the West. We cannot allow this to happen again.

However there is another vision. This is the vision of Russia as a modern democracy that guarantees its citizens their civic rights and open participation in political processes. This is a vision of Russia that is a constructive member of the international community, open to dialogue and fair cooperation with other countries. Such a Russia is still proud and self-confident, but it rejects nostalgia as a driving force of its foreign policy. It defines its domestic and external goals in modern terms. As President Dmitry Medvedev said in his article entitled “Go Russia”, “Today is the first time in our history that we have a chance to prove to ourselves and to the world that Russia can develop in a democratic way. That a transition to the next, higher stage of civilization is possible. And this will be accomplished through non-violent methods. Not by coercion, but by persuasion. Not through suppression but rather the development of the creative potential of every individual”¹. Such a vision, if fulfilled, would send an extremely positive message to Europe, and especially to Russia’s neighbors.

Polish-Russian relations have improved significantly over the last two years. We have restored a political dialogue between our heads of state. The recent visit of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to Poland on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War encouraged this process, and helped us to make significant progress in solving a number of bilateral issues. We are developing our economic cooperation, civil society contacts, and regional and trans-border ties. Thanks to these developments, Polish-Russian

¹ Additional citations:

Speech at Expanded Meeting of the State Council on Russia’s Development Strategy through to 2020, President Putin; February 8, 2008:

“The desire of millions of our citizens for individual freedom and social justice is what defines the future of Russia’s political system. The democratic state should become an effective instrument for civil society’s self-organisation”.

“Our choice is clear. Russia is a reliable partner for the entire international community in resolving global problems. We are interested in mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas – in security, science, energy, and in tackling climate change”.

relations have reached the full level of normality. In the words of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, they “take a shape appropriate to the relations between two big, European nations”.

We are satisfied with these achievements of Polish-Russian dialogue so far. Given the historical background, this is not an easy accomplishment. I should also emphasize that the improvement of our relations with Russia did not come at the expense of our cooperation with our East European neighbors.

Embracing Russia and supporting its cooperation with the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions serves the security and prosperity of the Continent. The United States and Europe have a strong interest in engaging Russia in solving global problems. The “reset policy” and enhancement of the strategic relationship between the European Union and Russia create a framework conducive for such collaboration.

In Poland, we do not perceive this as a threat. On the contrary, as a neighbor we have every reason to wish for better cooperative relations with Russia. We are comfortable with Washington and Brussels fostering their ties with Moscow. We say this openly, offering only one piece of operational advice to our allies: the more you talk to Russia, the more you should talk to its neighbors. This will ensure transparency and trust.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When it comes to Polish-American relations we do not confine ourselves merely to security, Missile Defense or regional issues. Strengthening the values of democracy, liberty and the free market is in the DNA of Polish-American cooperation. We have much to offer each other in furthering our common values. We have the technology and *know-how* to make valuable contributions to our American friends.

The Polish experience in making the transition from dictatorship to democracy underscores a strong bond between security, development, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. It contradicts the notion that democracy is not the answer in times of global crisis, when developing countries feel that they have to choose between freedom and growth. Building on the legacy of the Solidarity movement, we can credibly argue that it is possible to both have liberty and to be on the path to prosperity. The performance of the Polish economy, as it continues to grow amidst the harsh conditions of the crisis makes this case even more compelling.

Almost ten years ago, then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the late Professor Bronisław Geremek, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, initiated the Community of Democracies – an organization of global reach devoted to the protection of democracy.

I have proposed that to mark its 10th Birthday, the Community of Democracies should reconvene in Poland to discuss how to efficiently promote democratic governance today. We need to consider creative ideas that would allow countries from different parts of the world and with different cultural backgrounds to meet their democratic aspirations. We must do this in a cooperative and empowering fashion, that avoids a static, one-size-fits-all approach. It will be another Polish-American enterprise, a partnership that can make a difference in supporting those who want to strengthen the democratic institutions and culture embedded in their heritage.