ADDRESS TO THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION

Aleksander Kwasniewski, President of the Republic of Poland

I am very glad that the first plenary meeting of the Trilateral Commission, after last week’s enlargement of the European Union, is taking place in our country. There is a symbolic dimension to this fact and it is important to us. I know that among the participants of the conference there are many personalities who have made significant contributions to realise European unity. During yesterday’s session, you had the opportunity to listen to Mr. Georges Berthoin, who worked with Jean Monnet and who witnessed the proclamation of the Schumann Declaration in May 1953. I would like to thank you, Georges, for your participation and help in the great process of the unification of Europe. I would also like to thank you for your brave vision and consequence in fulfilling that vision.

On May 1, 2004, an act of historic justice was completed. The remnants of World War II and the Cold War were finally overcome, and the nations of our part of Europe returned to their place in the European family. The act completed on May 1st is also proof of European rationality, cooperation, community, assistance in making the chance equal and co-responsibility—these are the best guarantees of political peace and economic development.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have been to Poland, a country of brave people. This is proved by our history and our struggle for independence and civil liberties. Yet, I would like to emphasize that the Polish people are brave not just when it comes to defending values that are important for us. Fifteen years ago, the Polish people decided to initiate an in-depth transformation of the state and of the economy. Nobody had done so before: there were no case studies, guides or recipes. We decided to change from a centrally driven economy to a market-based economy. We decided to abort the socialist principle that the owner of everything is the state and the society, which means nobody. We decided to change our political and economic orientation from the east to the west.

Today, we can say that we made good choices and that we are successful. Poland is a country that enjoys 6% economic growth as well as a surplus in trade with, for example, Germany, which seems like a miracle. Poland is a country with hard-working, well-educated people who are hungry for success. Almost 2 million young Poles study at university. But at the same time, it is a country of unemployment, which is declining but still amounts to as much as 18%. We see the chance to improve the social situation in positive trends in the economy, accession to the European Union and foreign investment.

The economy today is our first and most important task. That is why I proposed to the political parties and members of Parliament to support a government headed by an economist, Marek Belka, who is well known to you here. You had the opportunity to meet the Prime Minister during your discussion Saturday. I repeat to my compatriots: Today, we don’t need elections. We need to cool down the political scene and not allow politics to interfere with the economy. I hope that in the end I will manage to convince politicians of this, in my opinion, much more stable scenario.

I know that transatlantic relations were one of the subjects of discussion, and I would like to give the Polish view on this. First of all, we disagree with treating the issue in a childish way. We don’t want to answer as a child asked "whom do you love more, mummy or daddy?" Poles do respect America and Poles do respect the European Union. Thanks to U.S. support, we joined NATO, providing Poland with
security. Thanks to the confidence of 15 European countries, we have become a member of the EU, giving us the chance for faster economic development. In both organizations, we would like to be a good, loyal and creative partner.

Secondly, as Poles, we note that the strength of Europe has always come from good transatlantic relations, and at the same time, the strength of America has come from its partnership with Europe. We see it probably better than others because for years we could just look at these relations. Today, we can shape them with others. Therefore, I do agree with what Henry Kissinger said yesterday: yes, Europe and America have a common destiny. This common destiny is responsibility for peace, sustainable development, the protection of human rights, and the stabilization of global politics.

At this point, it is necessary to say a few words about Iraq. I was asked about this recently by a Polish journalist since the past few days have been very tragic. The number of victims for us increased a lot in the last two days. We have lost not only soldiers, but also a journalist, Mr. Milewicz, who was a very famous war correspondent in Poland. And of course there is the question of public opinion, which from the very beginning of our presence in Iraq has been very divided. So, what is this sense of continuing our contribution and our presence in this very dangerous part of the world? My answer has been the same from the very beginning: we need to be in this difficult, risky fight against international terrorism. I think that today, especially, our presence in Iraq is important for success in this fight because to withdraw the soldiers—maybe it would be accepted by public opinion—would be a sign of our weakness and it would encourage all terrorist groups in the world to use all methods against us. That is the reason why I am sure we should continue our very professional work in the stabilization mission in Iraq. And, as I have said to all our partners, we will be a very predictable and loyal ally as usual.

Of course, the next question is how to solve this problem, which looks more and more intractable. In my opinion, it is necessary to have more political initiatives since we know what can be accomplished with military measures. But we have a lack of political initiatives. We expect very much from the Iraqi government, which should start its job before the end of June. We need a U.N. resolution as a sign of international solidarity in the struggle against terrorism, and we need an election in Iraq at the beginning of next year. We need peacekeeping forces organized under the auspices of the United Nations with the presence of some Muslim countries, especially from Asia and northern Africa. Of course, we need to stop all these very dramatic acts of humiliation of Iraqi prisoners, as we have observed in the last few days because that is a real shame on all of us. That is briefly speaking our position on Iraq and within Iraq.

My next point: A lot of personalities visiting my country ask me what Polish-European political relations will look like. What will we bring to the European Union? Our plan is to have a strong Poland in a strong, unified Europe. I believe that goals so far perceived as national can be realized in a better way in the Community. We appreciate the concrete help that we received from the EU. However, we are also aware of the fact that since May 1, we as Poles are going to be co-responsible for the European Union, and that will maybe be the main change in our psychology and mentality. From this day, we are not only members—we don’t only have our flag flying on the mast—but we have also started to be co-responsible for everything that is happening in the European Union and in our part of the continent. But we believe in the European Union. We don’t share the pessimism of some European politicians. We are much more optimistic about this Community, the future of the European Union, the position of the EU in global politics and economy. Of course, this is sometimes a little bit of a naïve approach, but it is a necessary one, especially because the wave of pessimism is strong enough in many political and intellectual circles and in public opinion in many European countries. That is the reason why we are ready to discuss the necessary consensus or compromise regarding the EU Constitutional Treaty. I hope that during the Irish presidency we will have maybe the finale of the discussions or a real, important step forward to find the necessary compromise in this case.
Those are all the remarks that I would like to deliver. Once again, I would like to thank you for choosing Poland and deciding to have the Trilateral Commission meeting in the centre of Warsaw. I would like to thank Mr. Peter Sutherland, and I am so glad to see such distinguished guests in my country: presidents, ministers, intellectuals, professors, business people and specialists. You are very much welcome and I think that after this meeting you will visit us again.

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