

Remarks of Marek Grzegorz Magierowski
Polish Ambassador to the United States
to the
Massachusetts House of Representatives
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Ladies and Gentlemen, most honorable representatives of the State of Massachusetts. First of all let me extend my gratitude for the invitation and this unique opportunity to address such a distinguished audience.

During my stint as Polish ambassador to the U.S. I've heard on so many occasions that Boston is the most European of all American cities. Admittedly, it's charming, even mesmerizing, undoubtedly pivotal in America's history. On the other hand, by European or Polish standards, it is still a toddler. The Royal Castle in Cracow was erected in the XI century. Whereas the construction of Boston's most recognisable landmark – Fenway Park – began in 1912.

I hope you appreciate this reference to baseball, but do not expect me to dwell for too long on it. Definitely, not my area of expertise. However, there is one name that comes to my mind whenever I refer to your favourite national pastime. And of course it's Stan Musial, an outstanding, unforgettable figure, a potent heavy hitter, one of the most famous Polish Americans in the history of this country. I wish he had played for Boston Red Sox, but he didn't. Stan Musial was loyal to St. Louis Cardinals for 22 seasons. Interestingly though his first game in the Major League was against... Boston Braves, on September the 17th 1941.

The list is endless. Polish Americans who, like Musial, have vastly and gloriously contributed to America's social, economic, cultural and scientific progress. From Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Kazimierz Pulaski who bravely fought for America's independence, to Pola Negri, an actress who gained notoriety as a femme fatale in Hollywood silent movies, or Maria Siemionow, a surgeon, who in 2008 performed the first facial transplant in the U.S.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is hard to find on the map of contemporary Europe a country or a nation which would be more enthusiastic about the deepening of friendly transatlantic relations than Poland. An attitude, which, quite obviously, has its roots also in recent history. American presence in Europe, both in political and economic dimension, has always been – at least in the view of a vast majority of Poles – a long-lasting guarantee of security and prosperity. From Lisbon to, well, West Berlin. This is what Pax Americana looked like for decades after WWII. We, the peoples on the other side of the Iron Curtain, never had the opportunity to savour this happiness, bliss and wealth. Of course, we were aware that not everything west of the Elbe river was rosy, still we realized how miserable our lives were at the time in comparison with our peers in Paris, Rome and London. We have always aspired to be as free as the French, as relaxed as the Italians, as self-confident as the British and as rich as the Germans. But, above all and invariably, we always wanted to be as American as the Americans themselves.

Today, according to a survey conducted last June by Pew Research Center, 93 percent of Poles hold a favourable view of the United States, the most America-loving nation across the world. Followed by Israel (87 percent) and South Korea (79 percent). I believe I don't need to tell you which country is at the bottom of this list, with the lowest approval rating amongst my fellow countrymen.

Interestingly, in Germany and in France these numbers – as regards America's standing – are way lower than in Poland. 57 and 52 percent respectively. It is partly a legacy of the Vietnam war, the anti-nuclear protests of the 80's, American military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and, last but not least, Soviet influence in opinion-making circles in Western Europe. I don't have empirical data for the following assertion, but I presume that if we asked a moderately educated citizen of a West European country, to whom we should give historical credit for overthrowing communism, the automatic answer

would probably be: Mikhail Gorbachev. Conversely, a Pole would most likely mention two names: John Paul the Second and Ronald Reagan.

In other words, we must not neglect this particular social background while addressing the perennial question: to what extent should Europe rely on America in terms of its geopolitical and economic future. Should we define this bond as ironclad alliance, indispensable partnership or marriage of convenience. Secondly, given the above mentioned discrepancy between Central and Western Europe in regard to the perception of America's role on the international stage, another crucial question arises: how can we render our approach to the U.S. more unified and coherent, regardless of our level of admiration or suspicion towards America.

And there is the third question, of fundamental importance for countries like Poland, Czechia, Romania, the Baltics and many others. More metaphysical than practical. Namely: what is Europe in the eyes of the American political and business elites. Where does it begin and where does it end? My impression is that the Iron Curtain still exists in the mentality of many decision-makers, historians, journalists, pundits on this side of the pond. And also millions of ordinary citizens. Again, if you asked a moderately educated, average American taxpayer, if he or she has ever been to Europe and what their memories are of that journey, the first association they would come to their minds would be Venice and not Cracow, it would be Notre Dame, not St. Stephen's Basilica in Budapest, it would be the Buckingham Palace, not the Royal Castle in Prague.

At first sight it's a fairly academic debate, but in my opinion it is tremendously relevant to the future of the transatlantic relationship. As long as we don't bridge this mental gap between Western and Central or Eastern Europe we will never speak with one voice as a political collective and our interests will never be the same. I will give two telling examples of distinct differences, which are somehow intertwined. First: energy policy. In spite of our countless and recurrent warnings about the danger of overdependence on Russian gas and oil, some of our partners in the European Union did develop an ominous addiction to Russian raw materials. For decades common European policy in this sphere was virtually impossible. Consequently, it was sterile and useless to even talk about, quote "Europe's energy policy" unquote, because there was no such thing.

Second: for many years the transportation system in Central and Eastern Europe lagged behind the highways, the railways, sea ports, terminals, pipeline networks in the West. Even after the collapse of the Soviet bloc it was more reasonable and profitable to invest in infrastructure along the west-east axis and not north-south. Now, in the framework of the Three Seas Initiative, we are striving to make up for this long-standing neglect. Rankling some of our neighbours who, erroneously, assume we are trying to drive a wedge between West and East and create a parallel political structure within the European Union. Again how should we, in this context, define the common European infrastructural policy. Make no mistake, we are not without blemish. We are still learning the mechanics of the European institutions, occasionally we are not solicitous enough about sensitivities and legitimate concerns of our Western friends. We do not fully understand each other because of history, our cultural roots, and our approach to EU-US relations.

John Paul the Second once famously said the Christian Church needs two lungs: the Eastern and the Western one. We may apply the same principle to Europe as political entity. In all likelihood the East and the West will never become one lung. Perhaps it is even healthier. The question is how we can make these two lungs breathe in unison.

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