

POLAND'S TRANSFORMATION AND ITS POLICY TOWARDS EASTERN NEIGHBOURS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here in South Africa, and particularly honoured to have participated in this very important conference on Poland-South Africa relations and our visions of the world.

What struck me most during this panel discussions is that despite the nine thousand miles that separate us, we share many similarities... of course not only the same place in the FIFA football ranking, it means sixty fifth and seventy second positions for, respectively, South Africa and Poland. Today, we have something more to be proud of. Both our countries took on transition and won.

For Poland, this includes Solidarity trade union with Lech Walesa overcoming communist authoritarian regime and Soviet domination in the 1980s; the radical reforms that created a free market economy, democratic institutions and political pluralism in the 90s; and, finally, accession to the EU as a biggest member state from Eastern Europe which recently was the only island of economic growth during global financial crisis.

For South Africa, the success of transformation includes the long struggle against apartheid headed by Nelson Mandela; the milestone of the 1994 election; a liberal and inspiring new constitution; the search for truth and reconciliation in the nineties; independent courts, vibrant press and economic rise in the first decade of the 21st century.

We may say, that both our countries succeeded at transition and have made it our trademark. Although we are still facing serious social and economic problems, like youth unemployment or inefficient public service, South Africa's and Poland's GDP per capita increased in last 20 years, respectively, 3 and 4 times, from around five thousand US dollars to 13 thousand and 22 thousand dollars. Both our countries share the characteristics of compelling investment destinations and attractive trading partners. We provide the stability of developed countries, combined with the opportunities of vibrant emerging economies, and cultural climates that foster growth.

Since the beginning of 1990s we have transformed our states and societies peacefully, with dignity, with all respect for neighbouring countries. Being dominated by another nations and states at the past, we would not desire to take a revenge and build our prosperity at the cost of another countries.

Poland established friendly relations with all independent states emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union, namely with Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Lithuania with whom we share our border on the East. Being aware of destructive power of any nationalism in Europe, taking into account not only the example of the Second World War but also the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, Poland has never played the card of its minority living abroad by formulating territorial claims towards its Eastern neighbours.

Moreover, Poland's foreign priorities after the collapse of communist regime were not only its own successful modernization and democratization of the country through its closest integration with the EU and NATO, but also allowing for this another East and Central European countries. Being cut off from our natural allies in Western Europe by the Iron Curtain in the aftermath of the Second World War, both Polish society and the government support very much so-called "open door policy" in the EU and NATO for their future members.

This policy has nothing common with establishing some "sphere of influence" which would create in Europe new lines, centres and peripheries. Poland's approach towards non-EU European countries based on their sovereign choice how they want to modernize themselves and be open for external assistance. Our experience teaches as that only a mix of self-determination and help of the Western countries with their developed economies, allowed Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and another today's new EU member states entered a difficult road of transforming itself into a democracy and a functioning market economy.

From the very beginning of the Poland's membership in the EU, my country promoted many initiatives towards all Eastern neighbours, including Russia, aimed at enhancing modernization and democratization processes in these countries.

Poland supported Russia's accession to the WTO, what was finally achieved two years ago. Polish government was also favourable towards establishing free trade area and non-visa regime between Russia and the EU within so-called four common spaces. Taking into account that in these last issues progress was very

law, in December 2011 Poland signed unique local traffic border agreement with Russia, which allowed one million Russian citizens from Kaliningrad exclave travel to northern part of Poland without visas.

In 2009, Poland together with Sweden initiated a new EU program, Eastern Partnership, dedicated to Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The main aim of this initiative was to support social and economic modernization in these countries by offering association, not membership perspective. This offer included free trade area and non-visa movement what was pretty much the same for Eastern Partners as well as for Russia.

While Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova were deeply interested in being associated to the EU, Russia decided to launch alternative project of economic integration, called the Eurasian Union. With this proposal Russia made a clear signal that the EU is not perceived any more as a Russian strategic partner but rather as a rival on the post-Soviet space.

To prevent Ukraine and other post-Soviet states from integration with the EU, Russia has used different political, economic and recently even military instruments, which are far away from fair competition. Before the Russian aggression on Ukrainian territory in February this year, most typical tools used by Moscow were sharp increase of crude oil or natural gas prices, and the embargo for some products.

Being impressed by Ukrainian pro-EU mass protests in autumn last year, Russia decided to use political crisis in this country for non-conventional military intervention in Crimea, February this year, ended with territorial annexation of this part of Ukraine. Although Russian minority living in this country was not persecuted there and their rights were quite well-protected by all Ukrainian governments, the Kremlin officially explained its *de facto* military intervention as a humanitarian action to protect Russian ethnic groups in Crimea.

Before presidential elections in Ukraine, appointed for May 25th, we observe the same non-conventional Russian intervention in another regions of Ukraine. Moscow supports pro-Russian paramilitary groups in the Eastern Ukraine, provokes ethnic tensions between Ukrainians and Russians, and discredits acting government in Kyiv. We still do not know what would be the final result of these actions, whether Russia will annexe another part of Ukraine or just destabilize this country completely.

Kremlin policy towards Ukraine enforces Western countries to impose sanctions against Russian authorities. It requires unity within the EU what is a huge challenge assuming different bilateral contacts with Moscow and national

interests of all 28 EU members. Poland, which in recent years conducted very constructive policy towards Russia aimed at enhancing political, social and economic ties, nowadays has to sacrifice its own particular interest with Russia for Ukrainian integrity and security of Eastern Europe.

Poland is open for every constructive solution of Ukrainian crisis which includes territorial integrity of Ukraine and sovereignty of its government. However, the situation in Ukraine depends in large extent on Russia's behaviour and implication of Western sanctions imposed on this country. So far Kremlin has not proved that its real intention is not to escalate conflict in Ukraine. This situation may change when Russian economy will suffer in larger extent from the sanctions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland and South Africa overcame the odds. We carried out fair and open democratic elections and created successful free market economies. One may say that we put our houses in order.

In recent time we have become regional leaders. It means that our responsibility reach out beyond our national borders. We have learnt lessons from our painful histories what is the value of democracy and freedom. Our successful transitions have convinced us of the importance of open cooperation with those who share our values. I am sure that Poland and South Africa being aware of their heritage are able to contribute substantially for global peace and development as well as help countries which are in need, like Ukraine. In this manner we are able to build our credibility at the world.

Pretoria, 14 May 2014