

Recreating Transatlantic Partnership: A liberal illusion?

First of all I would like to thank the Atlantic Council of United States and the Embassy of Poland for inviting me to give this year's Geremek lecture. I have always been a great admirer of Professor Geremek – a man who had the courage to stand up to communism early on in his career when few dared to voice their dissent. As you know, Geremek was an internationally renowned intellectual. He combined his deep knowledge of history with keen interest in contemporary politics. Looking at the world today I cannot escape the impression that we are witnessing the return of History and of geopolitics. I am convinced that having Geremek with us would have helped us in making sense of what is happening.

1.

- Please allow me to begin with a short trip down memory lane: In 1991 – over 23 years ago, communism was collapsing across Central and Eastern Europe, and the USSR was just emerging from the Yanayev coup, which was intended to preserve the Soviet Union but achieved the exact opposite.
- At the time a young Polish prime minister, a former academic who, as a result of his pro-democracy activities was then forced to become a truck driver in the 1980s, stood here at the Atlantic Council and spoke to you about his country's aspirations to build democracy, a functioning market economy and rejoin the western family of nations. In fact it was here that the Polish PM openly called for NATO membership for Poland for the first time. You looked at me then with some skepticism and I can't say I blame you. I would have done the same.
- Although this politician may have looked unconventional to you, Americans are known for being open-minded, and you heard me out. You took my message seriously, and you have continued to do so with many others since then.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Today, two decades on, I am now a former prime minister. I am no longer as young as I used to be. But I am also quietly fulfilled, because Poland has achieved most of what I spoke to you about back then, in 1991.
- This year we celebrated a quarter century since the beginning of our transition. We marked 15 years of NATO membership, and 10 years of being an EU Member State. Our economy has grown continuously since 1992. That is one of the longest uninterrupted periods of growth in economic history.
- In no small part as a result of our economic success, our voice is increasingly heard. You need look no further than our former Prime Minister Donald Tusk's appointment as President of the EU Council for confirmation that Poland's standing in the EU is strong, and getting ever-stronger. .
- In other words, we no longer aspire to join the West. We are the West. Although it may sound like it, I am not here to gloat and toot my own horn. I am here to thank you. None of

what we achieved would have been possible without America's unwavering support. I can repeat what I said to you in 1991 word for word: "America's commitment opened the door to democracy in Poland." I am well aware that we can enjoy our stability and growing prosperity thanks to America's investment in the security of Europe.

- So, we have a clear success story. We had many grand and happy occasions to celebrate this year. So perhaps we can just congratulate each other and ourselves, pat each other on the back and feel good. Perhaps I should leave it at that.

2.

- But I cannot. Alas, when we look a little closer, it is clear that we do not have much reason to feel so pleased with ourselves.
- When I spoke here in 1991 we all believed that the West's global leadership role would go unchallenged. It seemed that the biggest test facing us would be the successful incorporation of the former communist states. This was not easy, by any means. In 1991, the Polish economy was entering the second year of transition marked by a deep recession, the political system was far from stable, Soviet troops were still on Polish soil and the Soviet Union itself has just experienced a military coup. But I can say with some pride today that we pulled through. We asked, we got, we joined the family of liberal democracies under the protective umbrella of NATO. We were convinced that the values we were embracing were the values of the future.
- But it turns out we joined the West at a time when its global role has been eroding. Meanwhile, the threats to our security and our way of life are becoming ever more apparent.
- The threats to the West from Russia in the east and ISIS in the south are clear for all to see. But the challenge is in fact greater even than it may at first appear. That is because our liberal-democratic model of government is no longer seen around the world as the one to emulate. In 1991 I said to you: "the American model of market economy is now accepted as the only sensible and acceptable political and economic system." Unfortunately I could not say the same today.
- The Chinese and the Russians speak openly about the superiority of so-called soft authoritarianism (whatever that is) for achieving economic growth. More worrying still, many states around the globe, some even in the EU, appear to be agreeing with them. Professor Geremek warned of the crisis of the democratic model as early as 2004. 10 years on, we can only confirm that he was correct, yet again.
- Of course, most worrying from our point of view is the change of geopolitics in Europe, as precipitated by Russia. This annexation, this violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, is nothing less than a declaration of war upon liberal democracy.
- I am sure many of you heard the words of the Siberian rebel volunteering in Eastern Ukraine with the same trepidation as I did. For those of you who are not familiar with his words, you are in for a treat. He said: "People say we are in a foreign country, but we are not. This is our land. This war is not just material, it is spiritual. It is a fight against the values of the Western world."

- And what values is he promoting, is Russia promoting? The values of authoritarianism, ethnic nationalism, and a conservative version of orthodoxy - all of them meant to serve a narrow nationalistic agenda.
- And it does not stop there. What is happening in Eastern Europe will reverberate everywhere, not just across Europe. Look no further than the recent protests in Hong Kong if you have any doubts about that.
- Our transatlantic community of values is being seriously tested. As you know some renowned academics, adherents to the theory of *realpolitik*, put the blame for the crisis in Ukraine squarely on NATO's eastern enlargement. They argue that Russia was provoked into invading Ukraine and that did so for defensive not offensive purposes. They see the world as if it were still run by the 19th century concert of Great Powers with their respective spheres of influence. There is no space for democratic will or self-determination in that perspective. It does not matter what Ukraine wants, what matters is what Russia wants, because it is bigger and we, the West, should respect that.
- I recall this argument here also because it stands in absolute contrast to what Professor Geremek and other dissidents in Central and Eastern Europe stood for. Their vision of a Europe whole and free, of a world in which nations have the right to choose their alliances is now called by some a 'liberal illusion'.
- Ladies and Gentlemen, liberal illusion or not, I am convinced that the world we fought for is more fair and just than the world of spheres of influence, and that its values must be defended.

3.

- With this in mind, it is time for us to act strategically. When we are presented with a unique opportunity to deepen our relationship by removing barriers to trade and investment and integrating our markets we must take it. We simply cannot allow an opportunity like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) pass us by.
- Completing TTIP is taking longer than we would have liked, and is requiring compromises from all involved. But now is not the time to bicker about exceptions and ring-fences. TTIP is needed to boost our economic growth but it is also vital to solidify our alliance at this difficult time.
- Despite some dragging of feet in some parts of Europe, the EU managed to agree on a negotiation mandate. 28 Member States, all with different political and economic interests and priorities, were able to come together on that. Surely it is time for the U.S. to get its act together and pass Trade Promotion Authority for the President?
- Going forward, we cannot allow squabbles about investor-state dispute settlement to get us off track. Germany, which as you know is having a huge internal debate about ISDS at the moment, is trying to impose its position on the rest of us.

- But there really is no time to waste on petty arguments. Until recently, we in the West could rely on our unparalleled dominance in the global economic system. However, this is increasingly being challenged. China has its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The BRICS are in the process of setting up their New Development Bank, the clearly stated aim of which is the challenge the global economic order established at Bretton Woods 70 years ago. They are also planning a reserve currency that could pose a challenge to dollar's dominance.
- I will leave it to you to make up your mind what kind of substantive improvement these new institutions will make to global governance.
- We no longer have the luxury of there being no credible challenge to the West. The challenge is out there and it is growing. We thought China was a threat to our cyber security. It turns out that Russia is just as dangerous, with extremely sophisticated attacks coming out of there.
- We mustn't let ourselves be swayed by fairytales of Russian humiliation. As Anne Applebaum put it brilliantly in her Washington Post column, the crisis in Ukraine and the challenges within NATO are not the result of Western triumphalism. They were caused by our failure to react to Russia's aggressive rhetoric and her blatant aggression on her neighbour. A neighbour, I might add, whose security and territorial integrity Russia herself had pledged to safeguard and respect in the 1994 Budapest treaty. We are no longer dealing with just aggressive posturing. We are facing concrete aggressive acts. Let us not be caught napping again.
- It is time to act. Much has changed in the two decades since I stood before you last. But the call for unity that I made then is still relevant. Pierre Moscovici recently called on us to "recreate the hope in the European project" I agree with this call but I would take it further – we must recreate the hope in the value of the West and the transatlantic project - 'the land of the free and the home of the brave'

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