

„Poland: fully engaged in Europe”

**Mr Radosław Sikorski, Foreign Minister of Poland
Paris, 22 March 2012**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years ago the first euro coins and bills replaced the franc as the legal currency in this country. In the very same 2002 the European Union concluded accession negotiations with Poland and nine other states.

Ten years later, the euro is in trouble and has sometimes become the butt of jokes. The markets are still figuring out whether the Fiscal Pact will deliver. Disenchantment with the European project is rising.

Some politicians are tempted to retrench into mini-EU coteries, or lower ambitions for the European Union altogether; either way, to put a brake to the European integration.

We believe we have to pull together and seize the opportunity in the time of adversity.

During our European Presidency, we Poles worked hard to infect fellow members with our passion for more European integration.

We have become a credible consensus-builder, a contributor to the EU agenda setting. We have passed the Presidency over to our Danish friends, but our desire to push integration forward has not abated.

Polish-French relations follow a long tradition and were fostered in various domains: military, political, scientific, artistic.

One of France’s finest literary figures, Victor Hugo, once said:

"Two nations among all others have for four centuries played a disinterested role in European civilization: these two nations are France and Poland. France dispelled darkness, Poland repelled barbarism; France spread ideas, Poland covered frontiers. The French people have been civilization's missionary in

Europe; the Polish people, its knight. Had the Polish people not accomplished their work, the French people could not have accomplished theirs.¹"

Still, as in any relationship, ours has had its ups and downs.

The Second World War taught us that sometimes promises made by allies are... just promises.

We are grateful, however, for the hospitality French people extended to political refugees from Poland after the martial law had been imposed. We remember your support for the "Solidarity" cause.

The "Solidarity" refugees experienced a sense of déjà vu when they came here. Back in the nineteenth century their forefathers, fighting for Polish independence, had received the same warm welcome.

Throughout history, Poles in France have contributed to the political, economic and intellectual life of their adopted home. Queen Maria Leszczyńska, Frederic Chopin, or Madame Skłodowska-Curie – these are only a few outstanding names to mention.

So it comes as no surprise that Poles treat Paris as a part of their own historical, cultural and spiritual heritage.

Today, as at any time in our relations, I dare say that deeds speak louder than words. It is crucial to put declarations of strategic relations into practice. For the sake of Europe.

I would like to address here the contribution Poland brings to this task.

We have three comparative advantages:

- our model economic transformation;
- our commitment to strengthening Europe's international identity;

¹ cytata za: Marek S. Korowicz: „*Dix siècles de relations franco-polonaises*”, Paris 1945, s. 33-34

- and dedication to shaping the EU's relations with our Eastern neighbours.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If all you can think of with regard to the Polish economy is the "Polish plumber," please think again.

Poland has become a success story.

The European Commission forecasts our country as the fastest-growing economy in the European Union this year, with 2.5 percent growth. JP Morgan is even more optimistic predicting growth of 3.2 percent in 2012.

The International Monetary Fund assesses Poland as the sixth largest economy in Europe and the 20th in the world in purchasing power parity.

Please notice that Poland has overtaken Portugal in the Human Development Index. We are ahead of Italy in the Legatum prosperity index. Yes, Italy.

In the last two decades we attracted 110 billion Euros in foreign investments, over 17 billion of it from France, and increased our exports tenfold.

How have we gained the trust of investors and consumers?

Already 15 years ago, we decided to set a constitutional limit to public debt. It is more restrictive than the one inscribed into the Fiscal Pact. This turned out to have been a far-sighted move.

Today the price of credit default swap for Poland is lower than that for France. Sorry.

The economic doldrums, in which Europe finds itself, have rekindled "*a renaissance of national prejudices.*"² Not only populists, looking for scapegoats, but respected politicians have laid the blame on EU enlargement.

It is a myth.

² cytat z *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

The eastward enlargement has stimulated growth, enhanced competitiveness, and fuelled the creation of jobs in France and other parts of Western Europe.

Poland is France's first commercial partner in Central Europe. The value of our bilateral trade has grown more than 10 times, from 1.3 billion euro in 1993 to more than 14 billion in 2011! It is catching up with France's trade with Russia.

Last year, French exports to Poland grew by more than 12%.

Three French car brands made it to the top ten of best-selling cars in Poland last year.

Over 1,200 French companies trade in the Polish market of nearly 40 million consumers. In telecommunications (especially France Télécom), manufacturing, energy, commercial retailing, construction, real estate and media. As a matter of fact, most of us seem to buy our groceries either at Carrefour, Auchan or Leclerc.

Ask an executive at any of the large French corporations, and he or she will mention Poland as one of ten most promising markets. French business leaders find that linking up with Polish small and medium enterprises increases the competitiveness of their exports to third markets.

So, neither has "the Polish plumber" taken jobs from his French colleagues, nor have we taken prosperity from you, but quite the contrary: we created more prosperity together.

And opportunities should multiply as Poland keeps up strong investments in infrastructure and launches a nuclear energy program.

This program is part of our planned diversified energy mix. It will give us more breathing space – literally and figuratively.

Poland has reduced its carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions faster than any other EU-15 country. Please take note that according to the United Nations, in 1990-2009 we reduced emissions by 32.1% of the Kyoto base year, while the old EU member states managed on average only a 12.7% reduction.

But as regards further reductions, please consider the specific nature of the Polish economy. We are still catching up with Western Europe. For us, balanced, sustainable growth means weighing the costs of economic development with the costs of environmental protection.

My country is also determined to tap into shale gas reserves. Please remember: for us, coal country, burning gas reduces CO2 emissions.

Total has partnered with *ExxonMobil* to drill gas wells in Poland. It has joined other companies in exploring new energy sources that will reduce Europe's carbon footprint as well as its dependence on external supplies³.

By the way, it would be a shame if *Total* were to profit from shale gas in Poland, but not in France.

Other French companies are involved in Poland's meeting our commitment to produce more than 15% of electricity from renewable energy by 2020. This year, GDF SUEZ will launch a 180 MW biomass expansion at the Połaniec power station, making it the largest biomass energy facility in the world.

Dalkia, France's largest wood-burning power plants operator, has also helped boost Poland's green capacity – and making a hefty profit while at it!

Ladies and gentlemen,

French concerns about the health of the euro zone are Poland's concerns.

We appreciate France's initiative and leadership in efforts to get some euro zone countries back on their feet. Your sense of responsibility for Europe, in tandem with Germany, is a Sèvres standard for others.

A drawn-out crisis would not only impair our growth, but, also complicate Poland's adoption of the common currency.

³ Polish Geological Institute: *"Unlike in France, Poland's shale gas deposits lie very deep underground, which means the risk of polluting ground water is very low"* (*Le Monde*, 07.06.2011).

My country's adoption of common currency, the euro, is not a question of 'if', but of 'when.'

We will join you this decade, not only because we are obligated by the Accession Treaty, but because we are convinced that the Economic and Monetary Union is Europe's tremendous asset.

The Polish Government has set the goal of meeting the most difficult fiscal criteria by 2015. Already this year, we aim to reduce deficit to 3%, and public debt to 52% of GDP. Still, whether we succeed will depend as much on our efforts as on the situation in the euro zone itself.

Mindful of a convergence of our own interests and the interests of Europe, the Polish Presidency helped to adopt the six-pack. The rules of governance it lays down are based on the Fiscal Pact, which we signed together with France at the last European Council.

Difficult times call for special measures. Deeper integration is a sensible way forward, which my country supports.

But deeper integration should not mean a two-speed EU.

The imperative for a closer cooperation of the euro zone members should not be a means of dismantling the European Union. Decision-making in this group cannot subvert step-by-step the decision-making among the "27".

Let me be more unequivocal: Poland says "no" to the institutionalization of "a new core and a new periphery" in Europe.

A European governance by minilateralism⁴ would in the longer run undermine – note – the Monnet method.

While austerity measures are no doubt necessary to restore health to Europe's economy, we must also lay the groundwork for growth. And, the best way to do so is by investing resources in common EU programs, and being creative at

⁴ Minilateralism is an approach to diplomacy that entails assembling the smallest number of parties necessary to have a positive impact on a given problem (Moisés Naim, 1996-2010, editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy*).

doing so. We can make the structural funds more effective and leverage them for research innovation.

More rather than less integration is also required to preserve the Schengen area.

Many people complain that the average European does not see the benefits of the European Union. Well, one of its most visible and tangible benefits has been the removal of intra-EU border controls.

Travel and business is so much easier for 400 million Europeans.

It is true that there is a need for closer cooperation between the Member States to ensure proper protection of the external borders, but this should be done in order to preserve the Schengen rules.

Take away this hallmark of the unification of Europe and the EU citizens, their confidence in the euro shaken already, will be left wondering whether the European Union amounts to much else.

Please, do not undermine public confidence in the integration project that has brought the longest period of peace in our continent's history and – indeed – great prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the words of President Sarkozy: *“It is impossible to imagine Europe as a political force, an economic force and one of the richest regions in the world without the capability to guarantee security on its own.”*

I could not agree more.

The United States cannot underwrite Europe's insurance policy indefinitely, not least when the American defence budget is shrinking.

I have recently come back from Washington. Our American friends have expressed a strong hope that Europe would finally pull its weight.

In the past, we engaged in sterile debates about the meaning of Europe's defence autonomy. Since Poland stood up for the transatlantic link, we got caricatured as the "Trojan horse of America in Europe."

Thank God, that controversy is over.

We welcomed President Sarkozy's decision to return to NATO's integrated military command.

Poland for its part has taken to heart the French concept of *L'Europe puissance*.

For some, a European defence at a time of shrinking military budgets seems a pipe dream. As a former defence minister I believe the contrary is true. The more we need to save, the more we should aggregate and specialize in defence spending.

A leader in the size of the military and the second-biggest defence spender in the European Union, France should remain a leader in the European defence policy.

If you do, Poland will stand by you.

And we will continue to be serious about defence. At a time when most European states are slashing expenditures, Poland spends 1.95% of its GDP on defence. This makes us the seventh biggest military spender in Europe.

We have taken part in operations on behest of Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy in areas far removed from our immediate neighbourhood.

We supported France during Congo, Balkan and the EUFOR Tchad/RCA missions. The Polish contingent was the second biggest contingent after yours. The Weimar Triangle Battlegroup will be ready to assume rotation early next year. Poland, together with Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia plan to establish the Visegrád Battlegroup, to become operational by 2016 under Polish command. We support the European Defence Agency in capability-development. Poland also contributes to Eurocorps and was invited last year to become its fully-fledged member.

In December 2010, together with you and our German friends we presented the High Representative Catherine Ashton with proposals aimed at re-energising Common Security and Defence Policy.

During our Presidency we persuaded all “27” to activate the Operational Headquarters for EU operations in the Horn of Africa.

EU permanent planning and command headquarters has long been a taboo until Poland, together with France and Germany, defied it. If we pull together, we can make progress.

The Weimar Initiative just as the French-British *entente cordiale* in defence matters, which will hopefully be open to other EU member states, are the pieces that can render Europe’s defence more credible.

But defence cooperation, both in the EU and NATO, will be a moot point if we do not show defence solidarity.

One of our commandments should be: “though shalt not jeopardize the strategic position of thy ally”.

In plain terms - we should think twice before selling advanced military equipment to countries which make no bones about their desire to build military capabilities to rival ours.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe cannot be whole, secure and democratic if we do not extend European cooperation to all European nations.

A prerequisite for this process is reconciliation.

France and Germany followed this path after the Second World War. Germany and Poland have done so recently. Now comes the time for a Polish-Russian rapprochement.

Towards this end, we have set up a high-level *Committee for Polish-Russian Cooperation Strategy*, bilateral *Centres of Polish-Russian Dialogue and Accord* as well as a joint *Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues*.

The *Group on Difficult Issues* is an unprecedented body in any bilateral relationship. Historians and other experts involved defuse sensitive, politicized issues which, like a ticking time bomb, could blow up reconciliation.

In 2010, the Russian Duma condemned the Katyn massacre and Stalinism. It has been a high time to speak the language of truth. This year we expect the first historic visit of the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Still, Polish—Russian normalization would not have gotten off the ground, if Russia had not learned that speaking to Brussels, or Paris, over the head of Warsaw would no longer work.

Thanks to it we can develop a closer neighbourhood cooperation. We have inaugurated a Polish-Russian youth exchange program and signed a local border traffic agreement to allow residents of the Kaliningrad exclave and the neighbouring Polish regions to interact more freely.

Last year, Polish exports to Russia increased over one-third placing us in the fifth position among EU exporters to Russia.

Yesterday, in Berlin, I attended the second meeting of Polish, German and Russian foreign ministers. We agreed to launch several initiatives in the Baltic Sea area and, specifically, the Kaliningrad Oblast. In this field, we would be very happy to have France with us, through the Weimar cooperation mechanism.

Poland wishes Russia success in its modernization.

But modernization should not be understood only as technological transfers or even economic development. Modernization means fighting corruption, strengthening of the rule of law, and of the civil society. Democratization.

As we have seen in the run-up to the recent elections, the Russian civil society is beginning to bloom. It is up to the new President of Russia, who has undoubtedly received a substantial mandate, to allow civil society to flourish

and open up the political system. We observe these events with hope, albeit without illusions, because we look at our neighbour realistically.

Russia's attitude casts a shadow over political systems in Eastern Europe. It is regrettable that the Russian Federation subsidizes the anachronistic governance model of President Lukashenka, while he abuses his citizens.

If repression continues, further sanctions may be necessary. Equally, we should generously extend the hand of friendship to Belarus - if political prisoners are freed.

Let me stress here that Polish-Russian normalization does not run counter to my country's support for the European aspirations of our Eastern neighbours. It complements it.

The Eastern Partnership and the soon-to-be European Endowment for Democracy are good tools to shape our neighbourhood. So is keeping the door to the EU open.

My predecessor as foreign minister, the late Bronisław Geremek, wrote that *"the pressure to set the 'borders of Europe' may only become fodder for populists, for these borders have been set by geography and history."*

Keeping that in mind, we are realists. We cannot coerce anybody to embrace EU norms and democratic culture against their will.

In a recent *"International Herald Tribune"* article my Czech, British, German and Swedish colleagues and I prompted Ukrainians to spell out whether they want to move towards the European Union, or not. Because if they do, they must not act at odds with the spirit of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

Today, just like in 2004 and 2007, some people juxtapose EU enlargement to EU's deepening. We have said over and over that this dilemma is false.

We have proven it so.

Poland, until recently "new member state" is today a reliable proponent of deepening. Our ambitions, however, are sometimes curbed by some "old" member states.

If the EU is to become a strong international actor, it must deepen and expand.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland's responsibility for the European project has not ceased once our successful Presidency was concluded.

As "Europeans by birth and by vocation," together with you, we want to shape the future of Europe.

As General de Gaulle put it during his visit to Poland in 1967 about our relations "*the success or misfortune - of one [country] has always been tied to the success, or misfortune of the other.*"⁵ So it is today.

Thank you for your attention.

⁵ « le succès ou le malheur de l'un ont toujours été liés au succès ou au malheur de l'autre »