

POLAND , POLISH AMERICANS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Remarks made by Dr. Thaddeus V. Gromada, Executive Director of the Polish Institute of Arts & Sciences of America during a panel sponsored by the American Council of Polish Culture (Youth Leadership Conference) and the European Division , Library of Congress on June 25, 2004.

It is difficult to fully understand and appreciate what occurred on May 1, 2004 when Poland and nine other nation states of East Central Europe, were admitted into the European Union as equal members of a supra-national community that numbers over 450 million people. But there is no argument that it is truly an historical landmark which will have profound unpredictable consequences.. Europe finally ended conclusively the artificial Cold War divisions of East and West and achieved a political , economic unity that has eluded it for over a millennium . But it took two suicidal World Wars precipitated largely by exaggerated nationalisms , the Cold War and America's intervention in the turbulent 20th century, to help bring about the desired European integration. Finally, the views of the great Polish historian and the first Executive Director of the Polish Institute of Arts & Sciences of America, were vindicated. It was Oscar Halecki who as early as 1950 in his brilliant book "Limits and Divisions of European History" systematically developed the thesis, that "Eastern Europe as distinct from Russia, is no less European than Western Europe, that both alike are integral parts of a great European community of people with the same spiritual ideals and the same cultural tradition." He argued against the commonly accepted Leopold von Ranke's thesis that only the so-called "Romano-Germanic" nations formed a cultural unity that can be identified with the history of Europe and pointed out that ignoring East Central European nations contributed to the distortion of European history.

But already there are concerns about the price that will have to be paid to be part of the European Union which offers its members peace, security and prosperity. What has made Europe so vital, creative, and attractive in the past , was its pluralism and diversity; variety of culture and languages, folk traditions, differences of national consciousness, ways of life, etc. Will this creative diversity be sacrificed for European Unity. Can a distinctive Polish National culture survive in this new environment in which nationalism is downgraded? Poland has already undergone a strong Westernization-Americanization process in the past half century, some of which was a form of rebellion or protest against the socialist realism of the Communist regime and abuse of the "sanitized" version of Polish folk culture. Recently a new trend is developing among the Polish youth which is both surprising and encouraging to me. There is concern among many young people about not losing authentic Polish culture within the European sea. They are searching for their Polish roots so that they can hold on to those elements that make them Polish. This was reported on National Public radio in April 2004 in an interview with members of the Warsaw Village Band. It seems that members of this Band which was founded in 1997 travel into Poland's countryside, particularly into the Mazovia region, where they seek out old folk musicians who have preserved the traditional music of the area. They work like ethnomusicologists recording and documenting village celebrations and then by experimentation and modern instrumentation create a music called "hardcore folk" This

Band is now introducing their music in Europe and is gaining acceptance and popularity in front of non-Polish audiences. Poles should remember the words of Oscar Halecki, a supporter of the European Unity movement, “In order to be loyal to the larger European community, one need not become less Polish, less patriotic.”

Some circles are suggesting that Poland must now choose between the European Union and the United States. This is a false choice. Poland as well as most Polish Americans see the European Union and the USA as partners, not rivals; two branches of one great Western Civilization with common moral roots and values. Poland's entry into the European Union should not diminish her close political, economic and cultural relationship with the USA and with the Polish American community. Poland needs both Europe and America; and America needs Poland with Europe. Our policy for the future should be to keep Poland close to the United States; this means encouraging Poles to study in American universities, research centers, which are the best in the world. Poles will then have the opportunity to take American ideas and American relationships back to Poland. This is where the Kosciuszko Foundation has played an important role and can continue play an even greater role if it gets the support of the Polish American community. In spite of many obstacles from both sides, the Kosciuszko Foundation gave many Poles access to American values and know how by providing scholarships and fellowships to American universities, thus lessening their separation from the West during the Cold War period. So when in 1989 communism collapsed in Poland, Poland was able to make the transition to pluralist democracy and the market economy. Today, former KF grantees are serving in the government, corporations, and universities of Poland.

The Polish Institute of Arts & Sciences of America (PIASA) will continue in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski “to do its best” to enrich the intellectual life of both America and Poland, through cross-fertilization, exchanges of scholars, and systematic research and other forms of academic creativity.” Since 1989 PIASA has concluded formal agreements with PAU (Polska Akademia Umiejetnosci) in Krakow, PAN (Polska Akademia Nauk) in Warsaw, Naczelną Dyrekcję Archiwów Państwowych, Biblioteka Narodowa,, Fundacja Na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej (Foundation for Polish Science). In the year 2000 it held its 58 Annual Meeting (Return to our Roots Conference) at the Jagiellonian University and PAU in Krakow. For the past few years PIASA has been cooperating with the Polish Embassy in DC in sponsoring Book Exhibits at the National Conventions of the AAASS. Jointly we have created the “Ambassador Kazimierz Dziewanowski Dissertation Award” to be given annually for the best doctoral dissertation on a Polish topic accepted at an American University. Further prospects for serious collaboration are excellent; much will depend our will, energy, resources, and ingenuity. In addition, PIASA will continue providing cultural and intellectual nourishment to Polish Americans as well as to Americans of non-Polish origin by publishing books and its journal, The Polish Review, by maintaining a research center through its library and archives, by organizing conferences and exhibits, etc.

But it is now time for us to respond to a challenge that was proposed by Oskar Halecki, in his truly amazing book “The Millennium of Europe” published in 1962. He declared

that both Polish Americans and other Euro-ethnic groups in America are destined to play a significant role in promoting an even greater unity with diversity; a unity within Western Civilization that would construct a united EUROAMERICAN ATLANTIC COMMUNITY.. This Polish historian writing more as a philosopher of history, envisioned a United EuroAmerica that would not be based primarily on material, economic interests, but rather on spiritual, cultural values. Halecki was pleased to detect that that “America was evolving in the direction of cultural pluralism and away from the melting pot that encouraged complete assimilation” He recognized the predominance of English culture in America as a natural consequence of the English origin of so many American institutions and the numerous intimate contacts that many Americans had with Great Britain (beside the English included the Scot and Welsh nations). All of this, he considered helpful cultural conditions to the constitution of the Atlantic Community. But Halecki pointed out that “all the non-British peoples of Europe have an increasingly large number of men and women of common origin among the peoples of the United States and independently of the degree of their assimilation to the English nucleus and of their unquestionable loyalty to that country, they continue to have cultural ties with their original homelands which contribute to the natural foundations of the Atlantic community. This is true of those who immigrated from European countries far from the Atlantic Ocean and those close by”. Halecki also made reference to the ties most of Latin America and French speaking Canada have with Spain and France as another basic element in the constitution of a comprehensive Atlantic community.

So, I look forward to the realization of Oscar Halecki’s vision of a United Euro-American Community,” which will protect and promote the interests, values and cultures of our precious and unique civilization.”