

PRESIDENT GROMADA'S FAREWELL REMARKS

DELIVERED AT THE BANQUET OF PIASA'S 69TH ANNUAL MEETING JUNE 11,2011
IN ARLINGTON, VA. Mr. Chairman, Charge d'affaires Pisarski, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I must admit that I have been looking forward to this moment with great trepidation and at the same time with anticipation. I think you will understand why as I continue my remarks. Three years ago, in 2008 at the banquet of the 68th Annual meeting held in Philadelphia I accepted the position of President of PIASA for a term of three years, following Prof . Wandycz's resignation, but made it clear that when my three year term of office expires, I would retire and step down from both the Presidency and the Executive Directorship. During this period between 2008 and 2011 I would serve as a kind of John the Baptist, and help prepare the way for a new leadership.

This is now June 2011, the three years have elapsed. New leaders will be shortly announced, so the time has finally come for me to step down. Luckily, unlike John the Baptist, I will be stepping down while I still have a head on my shoulders. Many of you can now sigh with relief and declare, at last Gromada is retiring and leaving the PIASA scene. When Richard Daley, decides not to run for Mayor of Chicago and Oprah Winfrey retires from her popular afternoon TV show, it's time to take the hint, it's time for me to leave.

I know I will be dating myself, but upon reflection and with the historical perspective that old age gives one, I think I have been closely associated with PIASA for far too long. It's hard to believe but next year the Institute will mark its 70th year of existence, which in itself is remarkable. When I was elected to PIASA Membership in 1961, the Institute was in existence only 19 years, and Oskar Halecki founder of the Institute and my mentor at Fordham, was President and Zygmunt Nagorski, Sr. was Executive Director. In 1971 when I was elected Secretary General, PIASA was 29 years in existence and the President was a famous scientist Prof. Stanislaw Mrozowski and the former Polish diplomat, Jan Librach, the Executive Director. During my tenure as Secretary General. that stretched out to 1988 , I had the good fortune to collaborate closely with President John A. Gronouski and Executive Director Feliks Gross. In 1991, 20 years ago, I was elected Executive Director, and was able to continue a close, fruitful collaboration with Feliks Gross who became President in 1988 and with Piotr S. Wandycz ,President from 1999 to 2008.

Perhaps, I was naïve, but I accepted those positions of honor and great responsibility because I received encouragement first and foremost from Oskar Halecki my great mentor, whom I considered my intellectual father. When he died in 1973 I was motivated by the desire to continue the work that he and five other members of Polska Akademia Umiejtnosci had begun when they created PIASA in

1942. But it wasn't only Halecki that encouraged me, there were many other colleagues and friends too many to list whose support I valued and needed.

It goes without saying, that I would not have been able to accept and function in those positions without the support of my wife Theresa, and my family, daughter Ann and sons Joseph and John. Without Theresa's understanding and tolerance it would have been impossible. I also must mention my sister Janina and her husband Henry Kedron. From 1987 to this year, Janina has been my closest partner serving first as my Executive Assistant and eventually Deputy Executive Director. Her services to me and PIASA were "above and beyond the call of duty" for that she deserves a "Medal of Honor".

The most decisive motivating factor for my involvement in the work of this unique academic organization was my passionate commitment to the implementation of its mission, which succinctly put , is to objectively advance knowledge about Poland, the land of my ancestors, to my fellow Americans living in a pluralistic society. To help Americas especially Americans of Polish ancestry gain a better , more complete understanding of Poland's intellectual cultural heritage which contributed so much to our Western Civilization.

All during the Cold War PIASA firmly stood in defense of academic freedom, respect for the human individual personality, and human rights. It was a dangerous period that threatened our civilization, but I for one feel fortunate to have lived during this era. I am proud of the role that the valiant Polish people played through the Solidarity movement; led by their moral leaders especially John Paul II, they exposed the moral bankruptcy of Marxist Leninist ideology resulting in the collapse of Communism in Europe. The peaceful emancipation of not only Poland but of other nations in East Central Europe followed. Moral power triumphed over raw physical military power.

But these dramatic changes that occurred in 1989 and years later in Poland did not essentially alter the mission of PIASA. Its mission is just as relevant and significant today, when Poland is a strategic partner and ally of the United States, as it was during the Cold War when Poland was a satellite state behind the Iron Curtain.

The changes finally allowed PIASA to have normal and natural contacts with its democratic government and with its academic and cultural institutions. Since 1990 we at PIASA have placed the highest priority on developing and maintaining close contact and cooperation with Poland in particular with PAU, PAN, Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwow Panstwowych , Biblioteka Narodowa, Fundacja Na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, Semper Polonia etc. and also with the Polish Embassy and the Consulate General in New York which have brought about tangible results. These contacts and joint projects are vital and must be continued for our mutual benefit, They certainly will help us fulfill our mission more efficiently only if we are able to generate more creative energy and supply more resources.

In spite of the limited resources, especially financial ones , available to us, we have not only survived almost seven decades but we have made measurable progress and contributions which future historians will have to evaluate.. Whatever we have achieved is largely due to a relatively small number of dedicated individuals who have given their pro bono labor and services and thus have subsidized our Institute. Our motto which has inspired us is “ Labor Omnia, vincit improbus” (Persistent labor, overcomes everything; Wytrwala praca , wszystko przemoze) (Vergil)

The new leadership of PIASA which will consist of a third generation Polish American, Dr. M.B.B. Biskupski, as its President and a Polish born Solidarity immigrant, Dr. Bozena Leven, as its Executive Director, will be facing new challenges in the 21st century perhaps even greater than those of the 20th century. The global context has changed dramatically and we are now faced with a more complicated, dangerous, and dynamic world.

It is the new PIASA leadership with its Board, Council and members that will have to make the creative responses to the various challenges that PIASA will be facing in the next several decades, to assure its future. It is my hope that we can not only look forward to the 75th anniversary of PIASA, but at least to its 100th anniversary in 2042 although I don't plan to be on this planet at that time.

Believe me it will not be easy for me to leave the Polish Institute where I devoted so much of of my time and energy and where I have met and inter acted with so many brilliant colleagues and generous friends from all over the country and also from abroad especially in Poland. It would be difficult to try to name them all , but I want you to know that I value them and will never forget them.

I leave the Polish Institute with a feeling of reverence that I experienced when I first became a member of the Institute 1961, that venerable institution in the service of knowledge and science, “w sluzbie nauki”. I am gratified that Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski on an official visit to the Institute in September 2000 said, in the presence of two Polish Ambassadors, Ambassador Grudzinski and Ambassador Stanczyk the following “The promotion of knowledge about Poland 's historic achievement is one of the most important Polish foreign policy aims. I am pleased to acknowledge that we can always count on the Polish Institute's valuable experience and professionalism in our activities in the USA” But now it's no time for me to linger or to worry about where I will be going next, I must simply “Move on” and thank you for all the support you have given me and to PIASA.

As Father Jozef Tischner wrote in His “Filozofia po Goralsku” TRZA BEDZIE KONCYC,
BEE JUZ DOSC TEGO