

President Moskal speech in the Polish Senate

THE ADDRESS OF EDWARD J. MOSKAL

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Your Excellency, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Exalted Chamber, Your Eminence, Cardinal Glemp, Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, Distinguished Guests

I would like to thank you sincerely on behalf of the Polish American Congress for the invitation to this discussion on the cooperation of the Diaspora with the homeland, by the Senate of the Polish Republic, which is not only the moral, but the actual patron of the multimillion Polonia spread throughout the world.

From the outset, I cannot refrain from mentioning the fact that in the history of the Third Republic, this is the first discussion between representatives of the leading Polonia organizations with the government of Poland dealing with the fundamental topic of our mutual relations.

Governments have changed, the Parliament has changed but the matter of contacts between Poland and its Polonia, especially the basic policies of the Polish nation vis-a-vis Polonia and Poles abroad, have not gone beyond mere courtesies.

That is why we owe the Speaker, Professor Longin Pastusiak, and also the Members of the Senate, words of highest praise and gratitude for organizing today's discussion. I do not think that I would be exaggerating if I say, that this meeting will have crucial significance, in the development of future contacts and cooperation between the Poland and all of Polonia.

Honorable Speaker!
High Chamber!

I would like to remind you, that the Polish American Congress, which I have had the distinct honor to lead as its President for the last 14 years, is under the presumption that it is the Polish people who decided the future of its Nation, once Poland regained its sovereignty in 1989.

In short, the present and the future of Poland will be decided on the shores of Wis?a and not on the Hudson, on the Potomac, nor on the Chicago River.

It should be clear that Polish Americans, as well as the Diaspora in the rest of the world, represent almost a third of the population of Poland, and have the right to express their own opinion and to voice their views as to current developments in Poland.

At the outset, I wish to state that the Polish American Congress was founded in 1944 with the express purpose to perform its duties according to its Charter, which were and remain today, as follows:

- to support the vital interests of Poland and those of the Polish Nation on American soil and all initiatives serving that purpose;
- to defend the good name of Poland and that of the Polish People, to counteract any attempts

to slander The Nation, and to combat those, who would violate that image and our common good.

Coming to this assembly I expect that the Polish government, will acknowledge and respect our accomplishments to date, or at least express, at a minimum, an honest and objective evaluation of our work and efforts, the fruit of almost sixty years of activity, of three generations of Poles beyond the ocean.

Honorable Speaker!
High Chamber!

At this point I would like to present a few concrete issues, which trouble the American Polonia. For a number of years the Polonia community in the United States (however not only in the United States) is deeply concerned with the problems, which surfaced when visitors to the "Old Country" were crossing the Polish border.

Incidents of not accepting lawful United States passports by the officials of the Polish Border service then multiplied, as they demanded that those with full rights of USA citizenship present an additional Polish passport to the passport control officer.

The basis for this legal action is the Polish Law of February 15, 1962 regulating the status of Polish citizens. Polish law accepted the rule that obtaining citizenship in a foreign nation, would not automatically cause a loss of Polish citizenship. However, this is in basic conflict with the requirement that Poles swear allegiance to and use passports of their newly adopted country.

The Polish law provides that citizenship is not determined by country of birth, but by the citizenship of the parents. This means that children born in the United States of parents of Polish descent are according to Polish law, Polish citizens and, as such, must have Polish passports.

One must remember that this principle is not accepted by other countries, which are governed by their own laws. The only solution is judicious tolerance, the acceptance of the right to possess other passports for Polonia scattered throughout the world.

As I have already mentioned, the law governing principles of Polish citizenship dates back to 1962. For 30 years this provision was not enforced and there were no problems when crossing the Polish border. Paradoxically, the previous Polish administration, disregarding realities of life within Polonia communities, without consultation on this matter, suddenly began to rigorously enforce those regulations.

This created an unacceptable situation. We began to witness improper treatment of visitors at the borders, even of the generation of those Poles who, fought for Poland during the Second World War, and then later fought for Poland's independence. These incidents have apparently stopped, however, there needs to be, in today's world, a revision in the wording of the law.

Honorable Speaker!
High Chamber!

There is another matter, still unresolved over the years, which poses a problem for Poles in America. For a number of years, there have been thousands of Poles living in the United States who are undocumented, living in an illegal status. Even so, they have established families, their children were born in the United States as American citizens, and I should remind you, considered Polish citizens also. They are involved in various businesses and are loyal taxpayers of this country.

This is not the time nor place to dwell on to the reasons nor causes for this situation. I believe,

however, that the Polish government has the duty to express concern about them. These people hold Poland in their hearts, but are cutoff by legalistic barriers from stabilizing their life situation in the United States.

It appears to me, irrespective of our endeavors, that official actions on the part of the Polish government would be welcome, and in fact indispensable.

Discussions on this issue at the highest international level between Poland and the United States are becoming necessary, in order to eventually bring about an amnesty. A precedent for this process is the ongoing discussions between President Bush and the President of Mexico, who is constantly demanding a resolution of the status of Mexican illegal immigrants.

Another matter that touches on immigration is the issue of visas. I would like to join with those who are of the opinion that it is time to eliminate visa requirements between Poland and the United States. Although Poland eliminated their visa requirement, America has kept this requirement. Poland is, after all, as Washington has trumpeted it, America's most faithful partner on the European Continent, our new partner in NATO. Further, we are of the opinion that words should turn into deeds.

The above-mentioned matters, concerning Poles living in America, and their unresolved legal status, could find a favorable solution only - and I emphasize this again - with the intervention of Polish Diplomacy. Unfortunately, this has not as yet occurred.

Honorable Speaker!
High Chamber!

Now, I would like to present an example of some of our positive actions, which are within our authority. A very successful activity was undertaken concerning German reparations for Poles who during World War Two, were victims of slave and forced labor under the Third Reich.

The activities of the Polish American Congress, in the matter of reparations, go back quite a long time, and what is commendable here is the fact that it occurred at a time when no one spoke about the possibility of establishing such a massive program of compensation from Germany.

Our correspondence with the Chancellor of the German Federal Republic - Helmut Kohl - at the end of 1993, and then hiring a German lawyer to file claims for compensation representing Poles living in America, former prisoners of Nazi camps, before the labor court in Berlin, preceded the later negotiations by several years. I should add, that Poland did not concern itself with representing those former slave/forced laborers in negotiations for compensation because they were now American citizens, and neither did the United States government.

The Polish American Congress became the official advocate of over 6000 individuals from USA, Canada and the Caribbean, and our representative, Les Kuczynski, Esq., National Executive Director of the Polish American Congress, was invited to work with the IOM, (International Organization on Migration) in Geneva, which is the German Foundation's partner for processing compensation payments to former slave/forced laborers living outside of Europe.

Attorneys from the offices of the Polish National Alliance also participated in this operation. I would like to inform you that this organization, active in North America for over 120 years with assets of around \$500 million, which I am also honored to direct, is the largest Polish organization of its kind in the world, and the most important member organization of the Polish American Congress. For 12 years it has been providing a free legal clinic for Poles in Chicago, and over 10,000 immigrants have benefited from its

services.

Honorable Speaker!
High Chamber!

Throughout Polish immigrant communities we observe more and more often cases of increased sentimentality with a desire to return to Poland permanently, especially among older people who have reached retirement age. Retirees, returning to Poland or planning to return to Poland, are a human asset, which deserves respect.

Many of them still have vital energy, knowledge, and life experience and could still be active both professionally and socially. Many of them have undoubtedly served Poland, they should not be treated as useless ballast, no longer of use to anybody.

Therefore, the requirement of taxation of American pensions in Poland, as all retirees are required to pay according to Polish law, should be carefully reconsidered. The issue of Polish-American taxation is still determined by an agreement between the authorities of the Polish Peoples' Republic and the government of the United States, signed in Washington on October 8, 1974.

The Polish American Congress, authorized by its numerous members who are interested in returning permanently to Poland, has initiated actions that would allow those individuals to choose under which country's tax laws it would be taxed. Also at issue is the right of retirees, who are exempt from paying taxes on their Social Security in the United States, to be able to take advantage of this privilege in Poland as well.

We should emphasize that only recently, thanks to the energetic efforts of Sejm Delegate Roman Giertych, Chairman of the Sejm's Committee for Contacts with Poles Abroad, that this matter has started to move ahead, and we hope it will be settled in accordance with the wishes of the majority of our American Polonia.

Honorable Speaker!
High Chamber!

I am pleased to express thanks, in the name of the Polish American Congress and in my own, here on this Senate forum, to the association "Wspólnota Polska", and to Professor Andrzej Stelmachowski, who has been directing the work of this organization for over 10 years, for the sincere and very fruitful cooperation, which we have enjoyed. May it continue to develop along these lines of success.

The association "Wspólnota Polska", as a non-governmental organization, operating under the patronage of the Senate of the Republic of Poland, fulfills an important role as liaison between emigrants and their motherland, a role that should not be underestimated.

This evaluation surely is shared by the representatives of other Polonia organizations, especially those in the East, which is demonstrated by the banner flag, which was presented by world Polonia as an expression of gratitude to the association, "Wspólnota Polska".

In the course of this presentation, I would like to express one more request, which up to now could only be described as "wishful thinking". Namely, I would like that the Polish government, formulating a foreign policy toward Polonia, should make use in greater measure than up to now, of the knowledge and professional expertise of Poles scattered not only across America but throughout the world.

Poles carry their homeland with them not only in their hearts but also in their minds. This huge

potential, it seems, has not been up to now, nor is it yet being exploited appropriately in the process of bringing Poland into the twenty-first century.

Honorable Speaker!
High Chamber!

During the last decade we carried out intensive efforts to include the new Poland under the umbrella of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, in order to bring our homeland into the sphere of influence and military protection of the United States. We accomplished that goal, of which we are very proud, as the Polish American Congress played a very important role in that campaign. Our program of putting pressure on the US Senators was conducted on a nationwide scale across America by mass mailings of letters and faxes, as well as personal visits

and telephone conversations with the Senators. That pressure contributed in a great measure to the end result when 80 Senators out of 100 voted for Poland with a resounding "yes!"

That decision cannot be diminished nor ignored by the Polish authorities. News has reached us, however, that today's Poland, wavering under European pressure groups, is not accepting offers of American businesses, and is ready to sacrifice long established relationships by entering into new economic structures, regardless of the obvious harm to America and Poland.

As Americans of Polish heritage, we cannot approve of such tendencies. We believe that Poland's place is in the sphere of activities of a multidimensional American economy. This is the most advantageous position for Poland, and that opportunity should not be wasted. It is common knowledge that the American economy is the most powerful in the world and has no real competitor. Currently it is coming out of a mild recession with its next period of prosperity anticipated.

It is, therefore, very important that Polish politicians do not lose sight of this possibility and do not make decisions that would close the doors on Poland's further, intensive cooperation with America. So that once again we do not have to hear the proverb: "Polak mądry dopiero po szkodzie!" ("A Pole gets wise only after the damage!")

I would like to emphasize, therefore, our deep concern that Poland should remain, in its own best interest, true to those alliances that were created with our assistance, and not to agree to any limitations - or even more, to the elimination of - any agreements of a political or economic nature with the United States of North America!

On our part we intend to fulfill our obligations concerning the needs and aspirations of the Polish nation and Poland on American soil. And in spite of the fact that not infrequently our judgments and opinions have differed and still differ from the official views of successive governments of Poland, we should rather seek positive values in those differences and not necessarily negatives.

Allow me to conclude this presentation on a personal note. I am a third-generation American, and from my parents I learned, as did thousands of Americans of Polish heritage, a love of Poland and a love of Polish traditions and culture, for which I intend to work faithfully to the end of my life.

Thank you for your attention.

Long live Poland!

God Bless America!