

“Let Us Love One Another”

By: *Joanne Winetzki*

Grandfather Andrew would not have agreed with some opinions that have recently appeared in Polonian publications. One article applauded the fact that Poland could opt out of a number of European Union Provisions “promoting” reproductive freedom, homosexuality, and euthanasia. The writer gave the impression that the EU is a public relations firm advertising products and services for sale. I believe a more accurate description is that the EU encourages governments to “allow” individuals to make up their own minds in matters of faith, morals and personal integrity. Grandfather fought for Polish political freedom and encouraged his children to adopt a “live and let live” attitude when judging the behavior of other people. The family lived in a multinational neighborhood where different religious beliefs and cultural traditions were taken for granted. For some thirty years my many friends in Poland have exhibited this same attitude of open mindedness and acceptance. This is what I believe to be authentic “traditional Polish values.”

My dear Polish friends include devote Roman Catholics, atheists, seekers on a personal path to spirituality, and a few who are simply indifferent about the subject. Yet in their hearts and homes all of them have heartily extended legendary Polish hospitality to my life partner and me. My Catholic friends practice Polish traditions fully aware that many of them are of pre-Christian origin. Both the deeply religious and the non-believers risked their lives working for Solidarność during the Soviet occupation. Some were imprisoned and others forced to seek political asylum far away from their beloved homeland. Yet they share an enduring love of Poland, an awareness of Polish history and an innate sense of the oneness of all humanity.

The Polish Way, a Thousand-year History of the Poles and their Culture by Adam Zamoyski is recognized as the standard short history of the country. Chapter five entitled God and Caesar begins with a quotation by Hugo Grotius stating, “To wish to legislate on religion is not Polish.” Zamoyski makes the distinction between the importance of religion to Poles and they fact that, “it has never dominated their judgments or their instincts to the extent that it has those of other nations which hardly qualify as particularly spiritual or bigoted.” He gives several examples of the intervention of both Catholic and Protestant szlachta on behalf of burghers accused of heresy, Jews, and Arians. Commenting on the rescue of three Jewish men from execution in 1556, nobleman Jan Tarnowski remarked, “It is not a question of religion, it is a question of liberty.” In 1573 the Sejm passed an Act granting religious freedom to all of its citizens.

I quote from the first paragraph of the Act, “Whereas in the Commonwealth there is no small disagreement in the matter of the Christian faith, and in order to prevent that any harmful contention should arise from this, as we see clearly taking place in other kingdoms, we swear to each other, in our name and in that of our descendants for ever more, on our honour, our faith, our love and our consciences, that albeit we are dissenters in religione, we will keep the peace between ourselves...” Today, more than four centuries later, religious tolerance has evolved and expanded to include other human rights issues. As the descendents of these remarkably farsighted ancestors surely we can do more than merely “keep the peace.”

“Loving your people is larger than loving yourself,” said Iraqi Minister of Environment Narmin Othman. What does he mean? We love ourselves for the person we perceive ourselves to be. Perhaps we must love others for how they perceive themselves. Most people have a personal set of values and beliefs as important to them as ours are to each of us. We tend to toss the word tolerance around like a frisbee at an extended family picnic. However, the dictionary description is serious and right on the mark. According to Webster’s II New

College Dictionary, tolerance means the “Recognition of and respect for the opinions, practices or behavior of others.” Doesn’t that seem fair and something all us would appreciate from one another?

If we accept the strict interpretation of “being Polish” that some groups advocate, many of our national heroes and heroines would have to be downgraded. After all, that “Uppity woman” Maria Skłodowska-Curie ran off to France and married a Frenchman. Mon Dieu! Thaddeus Kościuszko sailed away to America in order to fight another country’s war! Our beloved Fryderyk Chopin has been accused of abandoning his “backward” country for Paris! That’s like criticizing a champion surfer for choosing to live on the North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii, instead of staying home in Minneapolis! These are only three of the scores of courageous Polish women and men who have brought honor to their country of origin by contributing to the betterment of our world.

Book XII of Adam Mickiewicz’s epic poem Pan Tadeusz is the source of the title of this article. What a beautiful expression of love to tuck into a valentine! And what an appropriate verse to send to my grandfather’s homeland, a country I love dearly. Like Poles and people of Polish descent the world over, I have a deep attachment to Polish soil, history, and culture. Yet I’m aware it is the people of a country who till the soil, create the history and develop its culture. How can we help but love one another? □

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The Future of US Missile Defense in Poland

[NOTE: The Federation of American Scientists is delighted to have a Scoville Fellow this year, Ms. Katarzyna (Kasia) Bzdak. Kasia comes to FAS from Columbia University has been following the Polish language press since before the recent national elections there and submitted this report on the political status of the US missile defense deployment.]

Although the recent election in Poland promised to bring change in the style of Polish foreign policy, it was not a definitive referendum on the future of US missile defense components on Polish territory. The outgoing ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS), led by former Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński, supported the deployment of US interceptors in Poland wholeheartedly during its tenure and during the campaign. The victorious Civic Platform (PO), conversely, failed to clearly articulate a position on the missile defense shield, and seemed to hedge its position on what the US would concede to Poland for its participation in the program. Reports in the Polish press directly following the election suggested that certain concessions from the United States - the transfer of short and medium-missile defense systems, relaxed visa restriction, or economic investments - could induce the Civic Platform’s consent. More recent reports in the Polish press, however, suggest that the PO has tempered its enthusiasm for the project, and negotiations with the United States have been postponed pending discussions with Poland’s neighbors, including Russia. Nonetheless, given the dual-executive system codified in Poland’s constitution, President Lech Kaczyński (former PM Jarosław Kaczyński’s twin, biologically and ideologically, and a leader of PiS) will continue to wield substantial power in Polish foreign policy, so the effect of the PO’s potential change of heart remains dubious.

In the course of the election, the PO and its leader, Donald Tusk (now Prime Minister), never ruled out the deployment of missile interceptors in Poland, but instead indicated their intent to drive a harder bargain with US negotiators, repeatedly stressing the importance of close cooperation with the US. While the missile defense system remains unpopular amongst the Polish population, the PO initially suggested that some specific concessions by the United States could help broker a deal. One of the PO’s leaders, Bronisław Komorowski, was candid about one of these demands, making it clear that Poland would not consider a deal that neglected to provide short and medium-range missiles for Polish territorial defense. Many media outlets and pundits, in Poland and elsewhere, speculated that the transfer of a US Patriot missile defense system might be a precondition to the deployment of long-range interceptors the US wants to deploy in Poland. Two other issues commanded a great deal of attention within Poland: increased economic investments by the US in Poland and a relaxation of visa requirements for Poles

seeking to travel to the America. In the debate prior to the election, Mr. Tusk personally harangued the former Prime Minister for acceding to the deployment of Polish troops to Iraq and to the missile defense shield without gaining anything in these two categories. The Civic Platform’s position on missile defense seemed relatively fluid at that point, and US concessions on one or all of those fronts could have apparently resulted in continued support for the deployment.

In the weeks following the election, however, press reports in the Polish media indicated that Prime Minister Tusk and his party began to lose enthusiasm for the deployment. The Civic Platform’s public overtures to Russia are indicative of this shift. The new administration is apparently more concerned with the state of Polish-Russian relations than its predecessor, and has voiced particular apprehension regarding the Russian decision to suspend its participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty. Poland additionally continues to suffer economically from a Russian ban on Polish meat products, which is widely thought to be politically motivated.

The PO has made two significant concessions to Russia in the past few weeks in line with this attempt to mollify Russia: it has declared that Poland will cease blocking Russian negotiations with the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (which Poland had veto power over), and more significantly in the realm of the missile defense deployment, it has declared that Poland would consult Russia and other neighbors prior to resuming negotiations with the United States. This is a significant departure from the Kaczyński administration’s policy that held that the missile defense talks were a strictly bilateral issue. The Polish daily Rzeczpospolita reports that the PO’s decision to confer with Russia on missile defense has been influenced by a recent study by physicists at Cornell and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which argues that US missile interceptors in Poland could potentially destroy Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles, not just Iranian intermediate range ballistic missiles. The recent publication of the US intelligence community’s National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, which downplays the risk of Iran attaining nuclear weaponry in the near term, may further decrease the administration’s inclination to permit deployment of the missile defense shield components on Polish soil.

Nonetheless, opponents of the missile defense shield must remain vigilant, as Polish politics complicate the seemingly simple picture. If Prime Minister Tusk and his party reject the deployment of US interceptors after further negotiations (now a distinct possibility), they will still have to contend with the significant influence President Lech Kaczyński will continue to have in Polish foreign and security policy. In Poland’s dual-executive governing system, the President has ultimate authority in Polish foreign relations and national security: President Kaczyński is Supreme Commander of the Polish Armed Forces, and has the authority to agree to or revoke international agreements. If President Kaczyński’s public statements are an accurate indication, he intends to exert this influence to the fullest extent possible in pushing his own vision of Polish foreign and defense policy - which, of course, includes an acceptance of US interceptor missiles in Poland. Therefore, even if Mr. Tusk decides that the deployment of missile defense components is not in Poland’s interest, he will not be able to single-handedly commandeer Polish foreign policy. Given these complexities, the future of US missile defense components on Polish territory remains unclear, although on balance, the election of the Civic Platform has reduced the probability of the deployment taking place, at least in the short term. □