

The Future of Europe: The Foundations of Unity of the States of Europe



*Excellency,
Distinguished Representatives of the Swiss Government,
Dear Mr. Director,
Dear Faculty and Students,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It has been 72 years since Winston Churchill, standing here in the auditorium of the University of Zurich, made his bold call for the creation of “the United States of Europe”. Today his famous address is universally seen as one of the starting points of the European integration.

It is my strong conviction, however, that Churchill’s Zurich speech always needs to be read together with his other famous text from the same 1946 in which he made a bitter but accurate observation that “an iron curtain” descended across the European continent “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic”. There, in Fulton, Missouri, and here, in Zurich, the British statesman was deeply concerned about the future of Europe. The connection between the two speeches becomes evident in the following sentence of the Zurich speech:

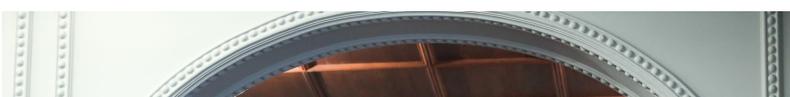
I quote. “If at first all the States of Europe are not willing or able to join a union we must nevertheless proceed to assemble and combine those who will and who can”. It reflects the drama of the early stages of European integration. When the concepts of European integration were born, not all European nations were able to make free choices concerning their future.

Unfortunately, at that time my country Poland was in no position to be part of any unification efforts, because our country was in the Soviet sphere of influence. The authorities in Moscow simply did not allow Poland to join any western integration processes. The descending of the iron curtain meant that Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe were denied their rights to independent policy choices.

The Western allies did not object that Central and Eastern Europe was cut off from the West. This was manifested in a dramatic way at the London Victory Celebrations that took place in the same year as Churchill’s two speeches. The Polish Armed Forces, were excluded from the festivities although they had fought together with allied troops right from the first days of World War Two. The British did not want to risk worsening their relations with the Soviet Union.

And let me be clear here. The fact that Poland found herself on the eastern side of the iron curtain was the outcome of the bargain made in 1945 at the Yalta conference between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill. It was not the decision of Poland. It was taken behind our backs. And let me be frank, they sold us.

The Cold War divide was an attempt to cut Poland off from her natural European political environment. It was not only a loss for Poland and Eastern Europe, but also for Western Europe. The “iron curtain” separated Central and Eastern Europe from the West just as much as it separated the West from Central and Eastern Europe. And in this way it created that unnatural fracture in the European world. How shocking it was for Poles is best illustrated by the story of Józef Czapski – a Polish painter and writer, and an officer in the Polish Army. Czapski, a son of Polish nobility, was born in Prague in the very end of the nineteenth century. He studied first in Petersburg, and then in Warsaw after Poland regained her independence in 1918. In the 1920s and 30s, Czapski lived in Paris and had exhibitions of his works in various European capitals. Among his friends was a Swiss painter and writer Richard Aeschlimann who exhibited Czapski’s works in his gallery in Switzerland as late as the 1970s. Some of you may have even come accross them. According to Czapski’s biographers, he was a European “to his fingertips”.





After World War Two, when he returned to Paris and found very few young people from Central and Eastern Europe there. Then he understood that in the minds of many Western Europeans there could be a Europe without countries like Poland. I quote Czapski's words from 1950: „*Yes – the blood of Europe flows to distant continents and here in Europe [we see] attempts to break the spiritual ties that have bound the broad masses of our continent for centuries*”. End of quote.

It meant that the Soviet idea of divided Europe had achieved one of its main goals. The division of Europe was accepted not only on the political level, but it also started penetrating the minds of Europeans. It was not only politically imposed, but it started to bear fruit in people's opinions.

Over decades, it cemented in Western European societies a conviction that what was left behind the iron curtain was “less European”. In this context, I am even more grateful to all those who against that conviction were helping Poles and other nations of Central and Eastern Europe in those hard times since 1945, especially during the surge of the Solidarity movement in 1980 and after that during the martial law in Poland in 1982 and 1983. Unfortunately, despite their efforts, I have no doubts that when after 1989, Poland and other countries of the region came back on the natural path to integration with the European institutions, they not only had to overcome the geopolitical rift with the West. We also had to fight against misunderstandings and the false stereotype of our cultural otherness.

I am saying this only because it is very painful for us to hear in the political rhetoric of today's leaders the echoes of the same stereotypes rooted in the iron-curtain-era Europe. These are the voices of those who would like to have a “more compact Union”, or a Union built around a “hard core”, limited only to the western countries. In their opinions, the EU could get rid of the baggage of what they call the “periphery states” of Central and Eastern Europe.

We cannot follow these footpaths. Recreating bad emotions and false divisions in Europe will always work against the ideas that Churchill put forward in his Zurich address. The process of European integration must be open to “those who want and can”. Nobody can be excluded. The iron curtain divided Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic. What we are doing now is connecting Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic to the Black seas. Through projects such as the Three Seas Initiative. This is what makes the Europe of the future different from the Europe of the past. Let us be the people of Europe's future not the echoes of Europe's past.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, seven decades after both Churchill's speeches, we are again thinking about the future of the European community with anxiety. Brexit, the euro zone financial and migrant crises, to name just the three most important challenges, have raised the question about the direction of the European integration and cost us the loss of people's trust.

Therefore, I would like to present you with the Polish perspective on the future of the European integration. This year Poland is celebrating the centennial of her regained independence. This anniversary makes us reflect very deeply on the history of our country which was filled with struggle for freedom. For us, Poles, being in the possession of a fully sovereign state is not something obvious – it is, however, an obvious value. We treat our membership in the Euro-Atlantic institutions as a way to express our sovereignty and an opportunity to pursue our interests within a broader community. Let me elaborate now on what I see as the three pillars the European Union should stand upon.

The first pillar is the community of equals. The respect for every country and equal rights of all states are the foundations of the uniting Europe. In his Zurich address, Churchill saw it this way: I quote. “*Small nations will count as much as large ones and gain their honour by a contribution to the common cause*”. End of quote.

This idea of equality is of utmost importance to me because I view it as the basis of peaceful cooperation on the international stage. I mean it not only in the European context. Not long ago, I stressed it during my address at the United Nations General Assembly. I said that the international order must be based on the concept of the sovereign equality of all states, as defined in the UN Charter.

We all acknowledge differences in the potential of states in terms of their size, military capacity, economy, demographics, etc. However, those differences in themselves give such an advantage that they do not need additional underlining by legal or political decisions. Community in Europe can be built only by loyal cooperation of states equal in their rights. Each state has an equal right to self-determination and this right must be protected in Europe.

It also means the need to defend the integrity of internationally recognized state borders. Borders in Europe cannot be changed by force.

Unfortunately, we have seen it happening in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. In both cases it was done by Russia.



Understanding “objective” differences between states, European integration must be first and foremost based on our common effort to redress those inequalities in order to provide a level playing field. Our history teaches us, Europeans, that the “concert of powers” always leads to conflicts and bloodshed. World War One was a classic example of this. The idea of the European integration was intended as an antidote.

The principle of equality that Poland advocates means that Europe cannot become an exclusive club. For centuries, one of the main doctrines of the Polish strategic culture has been “*nihil novi sine communi consensu*”, or nothing new without the common consent.

That is why for Poland multilateralism and the rule-based order must be built on the provision that the same rules and proportional responsibilities bind all parties. We advocate international relations of equal states and free nations, not of usurpation and hierarchy.

Let me provide a practical example. It is very important for Poland that the region of Central Europe becomes more integrated in terms of efficient infrastructure. We try to implement this idea through the already mentioned initiative called the Three Seas, which involves 12 countries situated in the part of the EU from the Baltic to the Adriatic to the Black Seas. The Three Seas emerged from the need to build better connections along the North-South axis. The countries of the Initiative simply need to make up for the infrastructural gaps dating from the communist era. However, ironically, for a long time, Brussels deemed the Initiative to be counterproductive to the integration effort. That was absolutely understandable for us.

I believe that our efforts to bridge the gaps and reduce inequalities should not be limited to the countries inside of today’s European Union. Right since the beginning of our membership, we have advocated bringing our eastern neighbours closer to the EU and to the West. In particular, I am referring here to Ukraine and Georgia as well as Western Balkans. We have always stressed that the door to the EU must remain open. We want these countries to become part of the EU in the future.

They have equal rights to become members, if they fulfill the conditions from the EU Treaties. And we owe them our support. We have to guarantee those countries an equal right to self-determination.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The second pillar of our vision of Europe is the Community of Ethics. Speaking here about the European integration in 1946, Winston Churchill emphasized the fact that the community of free European countries must be “established on solid foundations”. Therefore, we should never think about the European Union as a purely technical or bureaucratic construction. There has always been a moral dimension to the integration process based on a set of universal values.

By these values I mean loyalty, solidarity or forgiveness. They are universal, not political, because they cannot be simply voted upon. If we turn to the Churchill’s Zurich speech once again, we will find that he many times referred to moral and spiritual ideas as the basis for European integration. He speaks about moral acts and integrity in the similar way to the Fathers of Europe of the same time: Schumann, Adenauer, De Gasperi. All of them understood that Europe can be a successful project only if it is deeply rooted in moral acts of societies.

Those common values gave birth to the first institutions of the united Europe. It was not by mistake that they were called “communities”. It was because the word “community” assumes axiological unity of their members. I believe that in order to survive the European Union must return to the values which are pre-political. We cannot limit ourselves just to the paragraphs of the Treaties.

Today when many politicians talk about the European Union, they stress the primacy of European institutions. They believe that the more Brussels bureaucracy there is, the more unity we have. And in fact the reality is exactly the opposite. If we reduce the European integration only to that administrative dimension, we forget about its substance.

Values are deeply rooted in our common cultural heritage. Europe cannot reject its history. To the contrary, it needs to draw from it. Let me advance a thesis that out of three foundations of the European identity: Greek philosophy and its concept of democracy, the Roman sense of law, and

the Judeo-Christian ethics, in today's political discourse, we refer the least to our spiritual and ethical roots. It stands in total opposition to Churchill's line of argumentation in his Zurich speech. It was from the ethical basis that Churchill developed his political and legal concepts which were to become Europe's future.

Without the debate about the common values, there will be no united Europe. Europe which is connected only by law and institutions, without the base of values and morality, is easy to manipulate and open to conflicts of interests. To give an example, I have no doubt that in Europe that sticks to common values there would be no room for projects beneficial only to one country and undermining energy security of others. By this, I mean Nord Stream II.

The return to values is also the basis for regaining society's trust in European integration. EU citizens must be again confident that European institutions fulfill their needs. They must be confident that their choices, including the political ones, are respected. That there is an effort made to understand their motivations. Nobody can be excluded from Europe only because we do not agree with their political views or decisions. Unless, of course, they act in a secret and dishonest way to harm others.

The third pillar of the European Union should be freedom. Europe can be only built by the free will of nations. We, Poles, know its true value and for centuries we did not hesitate to pay the highest price of human life for it. Before Poland returned to the map of Europe in 1918, for one hundred and twenty three years my country was partitioned between Russia, Austria and Prussia. For the whole nineteenth century, every generation of Poles stood up for their freedom organizing uprisings.

It may astonish many here in Switzerland, and maybe especially here in this historic room, but the current generation of Poles is the first one in 300 years that will inherit wealth from their parents. In the past, the economic achievements of every generation were wasted in the turmoil of those uprisings for freedom in the nineteenth century, then World War One, then World War Two, Soviet communism and the drastic economic transformation of 1989. Only today, Poland is becoming a rich and developed economy, mostly thanks to the bred-in-the-bone determination of its citizens and free access to markets.

But please, stop and think for a moment, what would today's Poland look like, if for the last three centuries we could pass our wealth on from generation to generation? Poles can use economic freedom to their advantage when they have such an opportunity.

But freedom is not limited to the economic dimension. Most of all it is a political principle. Poland has always treated its fight for independence as part of some bigger struggle for freedom in Europe. Throughout history many Poles got involved in the common fight of European peoples against the oppressive empires of the time. Our national motto is "for your freedom and ours".

That is why Poland strongly believes that the European Union should respect the freedom of debate and political choices. To us, this unity springs from respecting the will of governments elected by the nations. This is the foundation of the European democracy. Freedom and democracy cannot be decreed. They need to be rooted in the respect for citizens, because only then we create real communities, not imaginary ones. Therefore, European institutions must be strong within the limits of their competences. But only those which were defined in the European Treaties by democratic governments of member states. European institutions cannot determine their roles by themselves. They are servants, rather than masters of European nations. That is how I understand freedom in the united Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland is one of the strongholds of the European integration, which is proven by a very large popular support for the European Union. This position is a natural consequence of our history and the lesson we learned from it. Poland always benefited from peace and cooperation in Europe. It was losing when European politics was about divisions, spheres of influence, and when the rights of weaker states were disrespected. We, Poles, are aware why we need the European community and what kind of community we need.

I am not the only one who advocates a stronger Europe today. There are many voices, from different countries and political groupings, which are saying the same: it is high time to rescue Europe. Józef Czapski, whom I quoted today, believed that the European integration requires a lot of compromise and a lot of dedication from everyone.

Therefore, I am calling on us all to create a united Europe as an ethical community of free states and nations, based on the equality of all its members.

In conclusion, let me surprise you. Do the three pillars of the European integration I have just mentioned: three communities of equality, freedom and ethics, ring a bell in your ears? For me they do. They are nothing more but a translation to the language of international relations of the motto of the French enlightenment: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

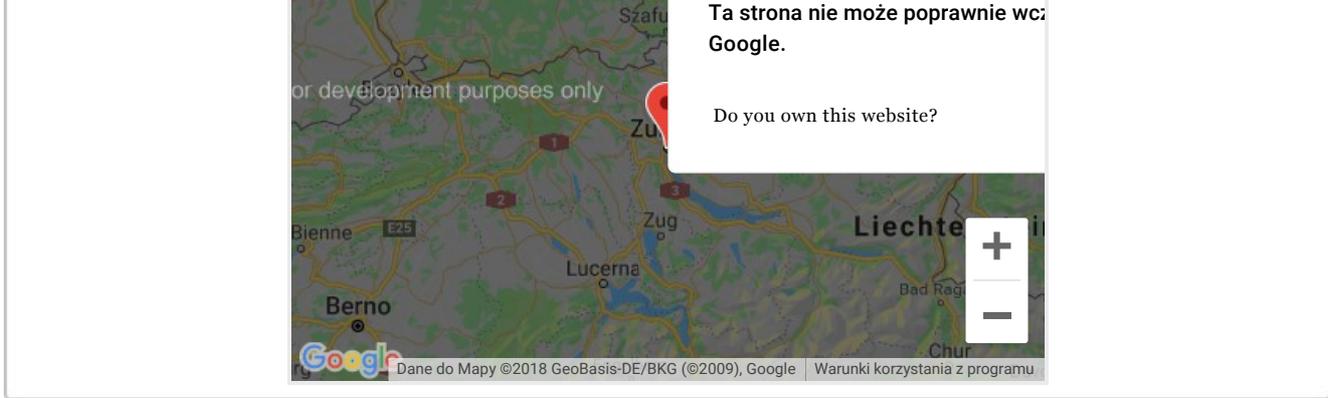
I am not trying to start a revolution here, but it is worth giving these values a second thought.

Thank you very much.

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