

Toasts at the State Dinner for Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki of Poland

March 21, 1990

The President, Mr. Prime Minister and His Eminence Cardinal Szoka and distinguished guests and friends of Poland, Barbara and I are delighted to host this dinner tonight and, as I said this morning on the lawn of the White House, to return in some small measure the warm hospitality that we felt on our visits to Poland.

On our last visit this past July, that warm hospitality was coupled with a heat wave in Warsaw -- ninety degrees. Would have done Washington proud last week. [Laughter] But everywhere we went, Barbara and I felt right at home. I don't want to inject a partisan political note into this lovely nonpartisan evening, but at one point, Barbara even saw one fellow in the square at Gdansk wearing a Bush-Quayle '88 T-shirt. [Laughter] I know I shouldn't have mentioned that.

But I do remember my first visit to your country, Mr. Prime Minister, in the fall of 1987. Solidarity, Solidarnosc, was outlawed, underground, but still very much alive. And I remember well meeting with members of Solidarity. And afterward, as I rode to lay a wreath at the grave of Father Popieluszko, the murdered priest, in protest the state security agents removed the Polish flag from our car. But that was in 1987.

And 2 years later I went back to Poland in the summer of 1989, and I thought back to that first visit, about that incident with that red and white Polish flag. As I was riding through Gdansk, Solidarity's birthplace, to the Monument of the Three Crosses, thousands of Poles lined the streets, in their hands thousands of American flags and, of course, the red and white of Poland, your national flag, and the banner of Solidarnosc, high above the crowd.

What a world of change in those 2 years. On that first visit in 1987, everywhere undeniable determination, but just as undeniable, deep anxiety over the fate of Solidarity and the future of Poland. And on my return this past summer, on the eve of the Revolution of '89, everywhere we found a feeling of hope -- a feeling that Poland once more held its destiny in its hand, that the time had come once more for Poland to live in freedom, for Europe to be whole and free.

Mr. Prime Minister, I assure you all Americans agree that Poland's time has come, and all our prayers are with you at this time of Poland's rebirth.

Our meetings this morning accomplished a great deal. I found a wonderful frankness. We spoke from the heart, in candor, I felt, as friends. And tonight, Mr. Prime Minister, I offer this toast to old and enduring friends, the nations of Poland and America; to the future of a free Poland. And to you, sir, Mr. Prime Minister, let me return the kind wish that your countrymen made me in the Hall of the Sejm, in the streets of Warsaw, and the square of Gdansk: Sto lat, may you live 100 years.

The Prime Minister. Mr. President; esteemed Mrs. Bush; your Eminence, Cardinal; ladies and gentlemen, I would also prefer to refrain from talking politics here. But I will have to speak something about politics, and please forgive me for that.

Allow me to invoke here a classical piece on modern democracy, which is at the same time a classical work on America. It is a book by Alexis de Tocqueville. De Tocqueville referred to the unstoppable march of democracy; it was 150 years ago. Nowadays, we're witnessing an enormous acceleration of that march in Nicaragua, Chile, even Mongolia, but most of all in Eastern and Central Europe.

Democracy is a system which secures the freedom of the individual, the freedom without which no normal life is possible. Indeed, it has just been that deeply rooted need of normal life which has most strongly inspired the march observed in your country so many years ago by the famous Frenchman. It is also just to that need that, under the pressure of Eastern and Central European nations, totalitarianism is giving way -- the disease of our century which had devoured tens of millions of human lives, forcing hundreds of millions of others into a dead end history for many years. We in Poland are now emerging from a long night of totalitarian oppression.

In 1939 we were ravaged by the Nazi invasion. Our people suffered more than any other on Earth. Poland lost 6 million of its citizens, half of them Polish Jews. The Third Reich was crushed, and the war ended, but to our part of Europe, peace failed to bring an order based on freedom. For the next 45 years, we were forced to live under an alien political system, a totalitarian one which was imposed on the whole Eastern and Central Europe. The Poles never accepted their fate and were the first to challenge it. They succeeded in defending peasant homesteads, churches, and their own families against the greed of the totalitarian state, even through the most difficult times. The struggle by the Polish people to preserve their dignity and franchise played a great role in sparking the change which today has gained such momentum.

Just as we stood in the forefront of struggle, so today we wish to be in the forefront in establishing the rights and institutions of a stable, democratic order. We're making Poland a state of the rule of law, which guarantees all political freedoms to its citizens. We're building a free-market economy based on free enterprise. It is a program which calls for great sacrifices. Polish people are aware of it. We know that our economy needs to be repaired by our own effort. And so, now that this effort has been undertaken, we have the moral right to seek the support of other countries.

Today Poland enjoys such support, and I am confident that it will continue. A great share of it has come from the United States -- the American Congress and personally yourself, Mr. President. Allow me to thank you for that.

Ladies and gentlemen, the changes in the Eastern and Central Europe are making the situation across the whole continent essentially different. The era of Yalta is becoming history. A need is emerging for a new structure which would operate within the parity of powers to gradually free Europe of military rivalry and bring the two separated parts

closer together. Such a structure needs to be based on a solid foundation. Reconciliation between nations is possible only when they do not fear either for their present or their future. For this reason, an important component of the building must be the recognition of the Polish border along the Oder and Nysa Rivers in the form of a treaty. The direct participation in the talks about that, for Poland, was a very important matter for Poland; and it has already been guaranteed.

To create a new political facet of Europe is going to be a difficult challenge, and one calling for time and an enormous amount of work. A variety of ideas emerging, in this respect, need to become ripe, which in turn requires certain conditions. In our view, a helpful factor would be to form the Council for European Cooperation. Its job would not be to replace any of the existing organizations: it would serve as a platform whereby, within the CSC framework, work might be launched to give the ideas a concrete form. One can hardly imagine such work without a significant role on the part of the United States. After all, your country is linked to Europe by bonds of blood and by experiences of history.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, after General Sikorsky visited the White House in 1943, mine is only the second-ever call by a Polish Prime Minister here. How different the circumstances and how different, I believe, the perspectives of this period in history. I would like the United States to view Poland as one of the important actors of the present-day European politics. A strong Poland engaged in building a democratic order and freed of economic difficulties will be a stable factor of the new European order, an order based on freedom, respect of human rights, and economic and political balance on the Continent. I trust that the United States, with so many of its people linked to Poland by their origin and with the affection for Poland so much alive, will see a friend in the democratic, strong, and economically sound Poland.

Permit me, ladies and gentlemen, to raise in a moment a toast to the good health and the well-being of the President of the United States.

I raise this toast also to the good health of Mrs. Barbara Bush. I wish you strength and perseverance in your difficult role here. It is well-known that the house, even if it's called White, becomes a home only upon the touch of a woman. I know how much Americans like you, and I want to tell you that so do the Poles.

I raise this toast, also, to the well-being of your great country and the millions of its citizens, as well as to our friendship, which at the Polish end has for long been extremely profound.

I raise this toast to you, Mr. President.

Note: The President spoke at 8:15 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. The Prime Minister spoke in Polish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. The toasts were released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 22.

