

Lecture given by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz on EU Eastern Policy (Prague, 21 February 2003)

Caption: On 21 February 2003, in Prague, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Polish Foreign Minister, delivers an address in which he sets out his country's views on the European Union's cooperation policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe.

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Lecture by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs — Prague, 21 February 2003

EU Eastern Policy — the Polish perspective

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

Thank you for the warm words of welcome. Let me express how glad I am to have this privilege to address such a distinguished audience.

I would like to share with you today the Polish thoughts and ideas on the future of Europe, and particularly on the relations of the enlarged European Union with its future Eastern neighbours.

Almost everyone knows and feels that we have reached an extremely important moment in the history of Poland, the Czech Republic, other acceding countries and of course of the European Union. We have successfully completed our accession negotiations.

As a result, in April, during the EU summit in Athens, we will sign the Accession Treaty. We are in the middle of an intense internal debate on European integration that will lead us to a referendum, which in Poland will be held in June. The result of the referendum will determine Poland's place in the united Europe. On the other hand, the candidate countries are contributing to the debate on the future of the EU held within the Convention, which will be concluded by the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference. By all accounts the year 2004 will be a watershed in the Polish history.

After years of divisions, the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, Central European countries will return once and for all to where they have always belonged geographically historically and culturally, although not always politically.

"Our new Europe has been born" – said the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen when announcing the results of the Copenhagen summit. I share that view. Although tired of long anticipation and tough negotiations, we are at the same time delighted to be a part of this project - the most ambitious in the history of Europe - that will unify 25 countries with a total population of about 450 million people.

We are not acceding to the EU in order to turn our back on our Eastern partners, although some may think we are. Just the opposite - we are going to make every possible effort to prevent any new divisions between "our new Europe born" in Copenhagen and the rest of the continent.

Poland would like to contribute to strengthening the New Neighbours Policy of the enlarged EU. The EU needs a clear vision of relations with its neighbours, particularly at its Eastern borders. Our partners in the Union can certainly expect from us an open attitude and full co-operation.

Poland has recently presented its concept of the future Eastern policy of the European Union, thus proving that immediate interests are not our only concern. We care about the countries east of Poland. Their political, economic and social development will affect the entire Europe, its sense of unity and security.

Poland would like the EU enlargement to give a new impetus to the development in the whole region. Therefore we endorse the concept of the Eastern Dimension of the Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some of you may have already heard about the Polish proposal on the future EU policy towards Eastern European countries, which was presented in January to all EU and candidate countries as well as Eastern European states. Yesterday we discussed that issue at an international conference in Warsaw. Let me present the main ideas of that proposal and its background.

We are convinced that the European Union should create a new framework in its policy: the Eastern Dimension.

The Eastern Dimension should constitute a coherent, comprehensive framework of the EU Eastern policy. It should facilitate co-ordination of policies and projects of the enlarged EU and its member states towards the EU Eastern neighbours. It should also allow for co-ordination and synergy of activities of the EU and other regional as well as international structures and organisations, particularly assistance projects.

The Central European Initiative, in which Poland holds presidency this year, can also contribute to the Eastern Dimension of the EU. The Eastern Dimension umbrella will enable a more effective use of assistance for the Eastern European states. It will facilitate greater involvement of international financial institutions and private capital in assistance projects.

Poland agrees with many of the EU countries that the relations of the Union with its future Eastern neighbours should be differentiated. Their development should depend on the progress of the countries concerned in their domestic reforms as well as on the degree of convergence of their values and foreign policies with those of the EU. On the other hand, the contents of the EU proposals should be relevant to the aspirations of our Eastern European partners concerning their relations with the EU.

Poland has always supported and welcomed the European orientation in the policy of our neighbours. We want to be a good advocate of their integration with Europe. The Polish approach is more open than that of several EU member states.

We promote the view that Ukraine and Moldova should have an option to join the EU some time in the future if they wish so and if they are able to meet the membership criteria. Also Belarus should be given a fair chance to join the EU, provided that it introduces democratic reforms. Without such a prospect those countries will be devoid of perhaps the strongest possible incentive to pursue further difficult reforms. They are all European countries and therefore should have an open option to decide on their future place in Europe.

We are in favour of creating a road map for Ukraine and Moldova, setting immediate steps in their approximation with the European Union. Ukraine has already announced its interest in becoming a member of the EU and Moldova is following suit, with its government now working on the programme of integration with the EU.

We believe that Ukraine's declaration stating that its long-term objective is to become a member of the European Union deserves to be appreciated by Brussels. However, if this objective is to be achieved, the aforementioned declaration must be underpinned by actions, that is further reforms. The EU should extend a helpful hand in response. Poland will lend her support to Ukraine's endeavours to conclude the association agreement.

As far as EU relations with Russia are concerned, Poland shares the opinion that there is a need to strengthen the strategic partnership based on European values and common political and economic interests. Europe and the Transatlantic community appreciate the reforms introduced in Russia and its openness to co-operation with the West, which pave the way for real abolition of divisions in Europe.

Poland has welcomed positive changes in Russian policy towards Europe and wishes to contribute to shaping EU partnership with Russia. Hopefully, the preparation of the new EU Common Strategy for Russia will offer us the first real opportunity to do so. In the relations between the EU and Russia there is undoubtedly a need to make better use of the existing framework for co-operation to achieve specific results.

In case of all EU Eastern neighbours we find it necessary to underpin high level political contacts with practical co-operation at the working level, including state administrations, regional and local governments. I can hardly imagine a genuinely new Europe without division lines unless such co-operation exists and is efficient.

In our opinion the priorities of EU relations with new Eastern neighbours should reflect their importance for the enlarged Union, for its security, stability at its borders and its economic interests. They should address outstanding problems. We are ready for co-operation with our partners from the Visegrad Group, including the Czech Republic, to discuss and define common position on the general direction of EU relations with the new Eastern neighbours as well as to carry out joint projects.

However, I would like to emphasise that the EU Eastern Dimension should become a common policy of the entire EU, not only of the interested Central European member states. The EU relations with its Eastern neighbours should in the mid term evolve into a European space of political and economic co-operation, which should comprise many elements. Let me elaborate on some of them.

Enhanced political dialogue of the EU with the countries of Eastern Europe should be comprehensive. It should focus on human and minority rights, democratic reforms, resolution of regional tensions and conflicts in accordance with international standards, fighting terrorism, trans-national crime non proliferation and other global problems.

There is certainly ground for co-operation within the area of Common Foreign & Security Policy, including dialogue within the European Security and Defence Policy and possible contribution of these states to the EU missions. The prospect of closer co-operation with the EU should serve as an incentive for finding political solutions to the outstanding conflicts.

Development of economic co-operation should in the medium and long term be mutually beneficial for the EU and the Eastern European countries. Trade and investment may be the most important factors for development. The first step seems to be the recognition of these countries as market economies. We hope that the EU will finally take such a decision regarding Ukraine in March. The Eastern European countries need assistance in improving competitiveness of their economies, as well as in preparing for WTO membership.

After the accession of the Eastern European countries to the WTO, the EU should sign free trade agreements with them, which will facilitate a gradual harmonisation of business law in Eastern European states with the *acquis communautaire*. Moldova, which already is a member of WTO, could be the first to conclude such an agreement.

I am confident that the free trade agreements could be a good starting point for further economic integration of the countries concerned with the single market.

Energy co-operation with Russia and Ukraine aiming at securing stable and reliable energy supply to the enlarged EU will definitely remain high on the list of priorities. Economic co-operation should also focus on joint infrastructure projects in the energy sector, transport and communications.

Poland believes that co-operation in the area of justice and home affairs should be further expanded to tackle common problems, particularly organised crime, including drug production, smuggling and dealing, money laundering, human trafficking and sex slavery, illegal immigration as well as all forms of terrorist activities.

It is particularly important for the Visegrad Group countries that are frontline countries in combating organised crime from Eastern Europe.

Poland believes that it is in the interest of the EU to provide assistance for its Eastern neighbours for example in the process of establishing effective border control regimes with third countries. In the near future we should find a viable solution, in conformity with the Schengen *acquis*, to allow for local border traffic. Readmission agreements should be concluded with Eastern European states. In the future some flexibility in the visa regime might be considered, if certain conditions are met by the neighbouring states. This will be possible if they establish efficient external border controls, issue travel documents consistent with international standards and diminish the risk of illegal immigration,

The EU has recognised the importance of co-operation in solving specific security problems, like the destruction of old weapons. It should be extended to cover prevention and crisis management in case of

natural or man-made disasters.

We are aware that people-to-people and cultural contacts as well as free access to information are of crucial importance for rapprochement of the Eastern European countries with the EU, its values as well as political and economic system.

The EU could provide better conditions enhancing these contacts, co-operation between universities and schools, co-operation of regional and local authorities as well as of non-governmental organisations.

Belarus is perhaps the country that needs such contacts most urgently. Its society should not be left convinced that Europe is indifferent to them, that it has given them up.

Poland is determined to abolish obstacles in border crossing on our Eastern borders – to make the procedures less time-consuming and more comfortable. However, we can only succeed if our Eastern neighbours join us in this effort. It should become the objective of the whole, enlarged EU. It should certainly be accompanied by effective functioning of borders in conformity with the Schengen Agreement.

I would like to emphasise that Poland shares the position of the EU partners according to which the development of co-operation with Eastern European states should be gradual. It should depend on progress in democratic reforms, respect for human and minority rights and values that the Union is based upon, and respect for standards recognised by the international community in international relations.

Such factors as building democratic institutions and market economy, improving governance as well as fighting corruption should also matter. What is vitally important from the Polish perspective is that the conditionality principle should be applied evenly to relations with all Eastern European neighbours, neither discriminating nor favouring any of them.

In order to increase the momentum of co-operation of the enlarged EU with its new Eastern European neighbours, a mid-term Action Plan for the Eastern Dimension and Action Plans for co-operation with individual countries could be adopted. Setting a road-map and specifying benefits resulting from reforms and development of co-operation with the EU would motivate the countries concerned to further reforms. In our opinion, if the Action Plans are to be realistic, they should be agreed upon in close co-operation with the countries concerned. They should be accompanied by their national action plans for co-operation or integration with the EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Closeness and neighbourhood impose upon us, new EU member states, a particular obligation to build friendly and partner-like ties with Eastern European countries.

The EU policy towards its new Eastern neighbours should be supported by relevant assistance programmes. The volume of assistance should at least be maintained on the present level and increased if possible.

Assistance in transformation in the countries concerned should be enhanced and streamlined. In my view the obvious objectives of assistance are the advancement of democratic reforms and development of civic society. Substantial effort should be made to assist these countries in coping with problems of insufficient, outdated legal framework, ineffective institutions, administration that doesn't have adequate capacity, inefficient judiciary and law enforcement institutions and last, but not least - the problem of corruption. We should aim at economic stability, sustainable development and economic reforms.

Other priorities for EU assistance should be improving legal and administrative environment for enterprises as well as supporting the development of small and medium sized businesses. Countries in transition need support for modernisation of their social policies, to counteract social exclusion and negative perception of reforms in their societies. Eastern European countries should have access to know-how and financial assistance to improve and modernise their management of environment.

Having indicated these comprehensive objectives, I am far from expecting the EU to do all the job for the Eastern European states – we should rather concentrate on helping them to help themselves, providing them with ideas, know-how, skills and financial assistance for investments in the above-mentioned priority areas.

Poland suggests that the EU consider the following proposals:

Better co-ordination and synergy of the INTERREG and TACIS CBC assistance programmes. This is necessary if they are to serve transborder co-operation.

Establishment of a European Democracy Fund, or of a European Freedom Fund, which would aim at promoting democratic values in countries of Eastern Europe and transferring know-how necessary in the transformation process. Another solution could be the European Peace Corps that would capitalise on the positive experience and success of its American prototype. Such new instruments would make assistance more accessible for non-governmental organisations, which find the present arrangements within the TACIS programmes too lengthy and bureaucratic.

The EU and other donors should concentrate their assistance on development of human capital - through scholarship scheme, internships, study visits, seminars and workshops, supporting European programmes and chairs at the universities in Eastern European states and joint projects. Such institutions could play a significant great role in assistance projects.

Poland suggests that the EU should launch a special scholarship programme for students from Eastern European countries (European Scholarship Programme) and an internship programme for university graduates and young professionals as well as for those with some experience (European Internship Programme). Another option could be granting scholarships for students taking up distant learning courses at universities in the EU countries, combined with short stays at these universities.

Other ways of assistance may include: supporting European chairs or European programmes at Eastern European universities, as well as of joint projects carried out together with EU universities. I will underlie my appeal to the EU to step up this kind of assistance by submitting an offer of the Polish Government to grant about 200 scholarships for students from Eastern European states, which will be available from the next academic year.

Assistance programmes in institution building could be facilitated by study visits, twinning projects and advice on specific reforms, internships in relevant institutions of the EU member states. There is also a need for assistance in the form of co-financing of training and seminars or conferences on common problems allowing exchange of experience and know-how, including joint cross-border training projects.

Countries in transition need strong support for developing local government structures. This would boost their capacity to perform the tasks they must accomplish in the process of decentralisation, management of social services and financing local investments. Therefore technical assistance in the form of know-how shared by partner local governments in EU countries, particularly new member states, will certainly be appreciated.

To meet the immense need of information on the EU, its member states, democratic world etc, the EU should consider assistance in the establishment of the European Information Centres in Eastern European states. These centres could offer broadband, quick access to Internet and perhaps information sources in a multimedia form.

Let us take Poland as an example – such a project is now being implemented in Ukraine by the Institute of High Technologies in Warsaw in co-operation with UNDP and a Japanese donor.

Small and medium sized enterprises are a major driving force of economic development and further reforms in Eastern Europe. Therefore, they should receive more assistance – either through the establishment of training courses, business incubators or through establishment of European Investment Fund for Eastern

Europe. The latter would not only facilitate access to start up capital, but first of all provide advice, information and assistance in preparing a business plan and in the initial stages of business activity. Projects supporting the development of small business organisations as well as vocational associations should also prove to be useful.

The EU's assistance programmes should make use of the experience of the future member states and their know-how, which would also meet expectations of the Eastern European states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, while preparing to join the EU, we are facing new challenges. We also have to be aware that there are fears and doubts on the other side of the enlarged European Union's Eastern borders.

There is certainly a need for a more active promotion of the European Union, its forthcoming enlargement and opportunities as well as benefits that can be derived from closer co-operation with the EU.

Poland looks forward to co-operating with the EU, its present and new member states in promoting the idea and knowledge of European integration in the future Eastern neighbouring states and in providing all possible assistance to these countries. This would enable them to get ready for capitalising on the opportunities the EU enlargement will bring.

We look forward to the proposals that will be presented by the European Commission and the High Representative for CFSP. We are ready to provide assistance and advice if the European Commission and High Representative are interested. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now preparing more concrete, country-specific proposals in close co-operation with Polish non-governmental organisations involved in assistance projects in Eastern Europe.

In the Polish concept of the EU Eastern Policy, NGOs play an important role, constituting its third pillar alongside the EU activities as well as policies of the EU member states.

We are also doing our best to determine what kind of assistance Poland can offer to Eastern European states. Until now the focus has been on Ukraine and our co-operation has been carried out mainly within the framework of the Permanent Polish-Ukrainian Conference on European Integration.

Nevertheless, Poland would like to pay more attention to Belarus and also to Moldova, not allowing them to feel neglected or left behind. Last year we presented our offer concerning the Kaliningrad Region.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that the countries of our region have a moral obligation to develop far reaching Eastern policies. As future members of the EU we should and pursue them in concert with other EU member states.

I think that the Visegrad Group is a good forum for our co-operation in shaping EU Eastern Policy.

Thank you for your attention.