

Sperrfrist Redebeginn  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort



## Verleihung des Internationalen Karlspreises zu Aachen 2010

an den

**Premierminister der Republik Polen  
S.E. Herrn Donald Tusk**

### Dankesrede von Premierminister Donald Tusk, englisch

I stand today before you, Ladies and Gentlemen, because you have deemed that my biography serves "freedom and democracy". You have deemed that I am a "convinced and convincing European". And – which may be most important for myself – you have deemed that I embody "Solidarity and Poland open to the world, strongly set in the family of European nations".

When I read these words and look at the roll of winners of the Charlemagne Prize, to which you have decided to add also my name, I feel pride. This pride – I do not mean here my personal satisfaction – results from the fact that from here, from Aachen, one of the symbolic capitals of the continent, you have again noticed that the experience that was our share brings Europe closer to the Europeans.

I was born in 1957, less than a month after the famous Treaties establishing the European Economic Community had been signed in Rome and become the foundation of European integration. Therefore, I may say that I am almost the same age as the European Union.

I was born in Gdajsk, a city whose history, especially in the last century, is a lesson in world history. All the major dramas that humankind experienced in the 20th century took place here. It is this Gdajsk that is my "home" Europe. From the attic of the house where I lived, you could see the shipyard cranes at work, the beautiful old train station, and further, the towers of St Mary's Church and the Town Hall. In the nearest vicinity, there were seven cemeteries reached by alleys lined with age-old hedges: a trace of the botanic imagination and élan of bygone citizens of Gdajsk. With some effort, you could read their names and epitaphs on the tombs; mostly German, but there were also Polish, Russian, and even those with Eastern crescents. One of the cemeteries – cherished and guarded – was

filled with hundreds of graves without crosses or names: there were only stars and numbers. Buried there were the soldiers of the Red Army killed while capturing Gdańsk in 1945.

In my childhood years, the traces of the war were still fresh in the city: ruins, bomb craters, blemishes left by bullets on the townhouse plaster. Many streets were rebuilt and built, which after all was a consequence of the cataclysm that had taken place not long before. Every now and then, however, we encountered traces of another period: some coins with a fish or a sailing ship, containers with the Gothic inscription Salz, and buttons from uniforms of soldiers of defunct armies. Yet truly, we were an eternity away from the time those objects came from.

Possibly when going to school or to the shop, sometimes passing by ruins and sometimes ancient townhouses, I did not realise that this place on earth of mine is soaked with ancient history that made us citizens of a long tradition, and not only the residents of a city. It was only far later that I reached an understanding of what European phenomenon this tradition reached back to. I was beginning to understand that when I read a French historian, Fernand Braudel, who wrote that in the 16th and 17th centuries "this city – situated between the broader world and Poland's boundlessness – is if not only then at least the most profound gate for trade going both ways, import and export". I was beginning to understand this when the British historian Norman Davies described Gdańsk as the "swarming anthill of work, well-being, and culture" which was "a phenomenon well known in Italy and in the Netherlands, yet absolutely unknown in Poland".

It was quite similar when reading the memoirs of Joanna Schopenhauer, the mother of the philosopher – they were both born in Gdańsk. It is hard to read these pages, suffused as they are with sentiment and attachment to Poland, without emotions. Under her pen Gdańsk is "a particle of the West connected to Poland with real interests, and at the same time the window of the West looking at Poland from a close distance for a few hundred years" (K. Brandys). Quite unaware, I was walking in the footsteps of this ancient and long tradition during walks in the Oliwski Park, where my mother frequently took me, and which already at the time was named after Adam Mickiewicz, a great poet of the Polish Romanticism. I walked on the traces and among the remnants of the mediaeval Cistercian civilisation, which, the historians noted, overlapped in its expanse defined by its individual centres with the borders of Europe. I wondered many a time how it happened that the Nazis and Communists did not manage to disinherit us from Europe. It would seem that we had so little for our defence: ruined cemeteries, the shadow of the huge Gothic church, the pealing of bells in the town hall tower... We also had something that someone beautifully called the modest dignity of custom. In my case, these were the Sunday outings with my parents to the sweetshop, undertaken against the drabness and poverty of everyday life. In my family, this was also the joint music-making accompanying the holidays which – as I later learnt – used to be practised (and is perhaps practised to this day) in Trieste, Munich, and Utrecht.

Such a Europe was there in us, or at the least the faithfulness to the dream about Europe was there in us. Possibly Ortega y Gasset is right to write that the uniqueness of Europe hinges on the profound sense of historicity thanks to which it has organic continuity and identity. Thanks to being a community of cooperation and conflicts, exchange and custom, and not a product of ideologies, it can defy the very ideologies, even those that – like Nazism and communism – grew from the European spirit, yet eventually were not capable of corrupting it. Nevertheless, such ideologies had to make their mark on European identity. This may concern especially those expanses of the continent that for various historical and geographic reasons are of a borderland character. Beyond

any doubt, communism reinforced here a certain type of mixed feelings: in Europe we feel at the same time like natives and foreigners, to refer to the Polish Nobel Prize winner, Czesław Miłosz.

Yet may it be so that Europe needs such Europeans for whom it is at the same time the homeland and a foreign country; something of one's own and something alien. Possibly, it is from such relations and tensions that an increasingly better and increasingly more human community grows.

Possibly all this to a certain degree brought about the origin of the events of August 1980 in Gdańsk. The epic tale of Solidarity is not only a fragment of my biography. For the events that I am going to speak about compose the collective biography of a generation that participated in the development of this great social movement, thanks to which the fall of communism began; today, we also know that it was the first step on the Polish path to Europe and our presence in the European Union.

August 1980 began in Gdańsk, in Lenin Shipyards. Then, history sojourned by the shores of the Baltic, and my city lent its skyline as the backdrop to the great strike.

Yet that August began in Gdańsk 10 years earlier. Seemingly, a paradox. That was the time of the outbreak of a workers' protest against price increases, especially of food. I was then fourteen, so I was sufficiently mature to understand what was going on around me. Then I saw the scenes that shaped me for my entire life.

Thousands of demonstrators, singing *Warszawianka*, the burning headquarters of the Communist Party, militia beating whoever they could, shooting at the crowd and being torn to pieces by the same crowd. This was all just like in a primer about revolution. Good workers and evil authorities. Equality, fraternity, revolution. At the same time, a sense of great fear and joyful euphoria. I felt absolute and unconditional Solidarity with these people.

We were learning radicalism in the street, and the demonstrations – independent of their tragic harvest – were of a holy time for us, the young. We came out of that mystery enriched in a way, as we perceived that something very important exists: the public space, where inspiring matters may take place. In those days, nobody doubted which side was the right one. The ability to tell good from evil in the public space was one of the most profound experiences of December.

Such things cannot be forgotten. Whoever experienced December in Gdańsk as a teenager, saw tanks in the streets and the deluge of lies in the papers, matured politically incomparably faster than his peers who had not had similar experiences. I remember a word written in clumsy letters on the wall, whose meaning I could understand only later: *Katyń!* It was the work of the 17-year-old Aram Rybicki, later an activist of the democratic opposition, and in the free Poland a Member of Parliament, and my friend. He died tragically a month ago in the plane crash near Smolensk. Yet that experience also had another educational dimension. We remembered that the street confrontation, even the most violent, may be lost; that violence gives rise to violence. This is why inscribed in that ethos of the Gdańsk rebellion of the 1980 were responsibility, organisation, and strong leadership. They built powerful frames for emotions and gave us all a profound understanding that fighting makes sense, and gave us a vision of a victory. We were growing up.

August and Solidarity became my homeland. It was the beginning of a great change and the end of communism. Or, to put it more precisely, the first note of this change was the year 1980, and the second was 1989.

Everything was easy then. We were joining Solidarity as a national uprising. We were convinced that we were plainly dealing with the first victorious insurrection in generations. Victorious, as it was capable of self-limitation, that is combining courage with prudence, which for centuries has been the principle of conduct of my home city. In August, we became internally independent. Whoever was there by the gate of the shipyards on strike will not forget the sense of liberation that added to the strengths and made us possibly better than we usually are. The enthralled climbed up from their knees and raised their heads high to claim their rights. It was a triumph of citizens in us ourselves (in our minds and hearts) over the subjects of a communist state. Then words regained their indignity and ceased to be suspected. Plain speech was taking the upper hand over lies. Taking place before our very eyes was an unexpected and unthought-of ethical revolution. Nobody doubted that it was in Gdajsk that the act presaged by Pope John Paul II during his first visit to Poland had just been fulfilled. Yes, it was in Gdajsk that the face of my country was renewed.

This is how the decade, whose finale in 1989 brought freedom to the countries of Central Europe and unification to Germany, began.

With its impetus, Solidarity launched a vast process of political maturing of the society. It proved to be a peaceful political, liberating, and anti-totalitarian revolution that I could earlier only have dreamed of... or read about. Coming true before our eyes were the words of Hannah Arendt about public happiness, discovered by generations past. In August, we discovered them for ourselves. Then, the public happiness became the share of millions of Poles. Its source was the sense of participation in something important – unique in its potency, great, as close to a miracle as the fruition of a fruit tree in winter.

Connected with the bonds of Solidarity, we elected new guardians of our future, with Lech Wajjysa in the lead. Then we said: all for one, one for all, we were repeating words about being united in diversity, unaware that this is the motto of the European Community.

As far as Solidarity was the homeland, Gdajsk became the agora in August 1980. Somebody like myself, fascinated by the ancient Greeks, could easily perceive many an analogy. I do not know whether the strikers were reminiscent of the Athenians from the days of Pericles, but much like them they were concerned about the common good and the future of the polis. The freedom regained made everyone a true citizen. The agora was developing in the halls of steelworks, in tram depots, at workplaces and in universities: wherever people met to bring back the elementary sense to the notion of democracy. Its rules were learnt in motion, yet there was no difficulty in restoring the tradition of "the government of the people, through the people, for the people". And these ideals were never again allowed to be taken away, despite martial law, imprisonments, and repression. We denied validity to the ancien régime. Thanks to Solidarity, we returned to the Europe of free and democratic nations. At the same time, Solidarity became a new European experience. Achieved in 1989 was the first symbolic unification of our continent, when the "Iron Curtain" fell. The second, actual one took place fifteen years later, in 2004. Our generation was lucky. We live in extraordinary times. We are supported by moral rights and great political dreams. It has been a success. We have achieved what previous generations were also waiting for. It can be said that it all happened so soon, and at the same time in a way so ordinarily... Today, we find ourselves in a Europe of a great social and political experiment. Daringly and with prudence, we are undertaking attempts to build a certain whole – whose shape we do not know yet – over the plenitude of states,

nations, languages, and religions. Yet we remember that our idea of Europe grows from the eternal dreams about the community of free nations and brotherhood of free people.

I am addressing my words to all those who claim that "the hour of shadow" has come for Europe, to quote the famous metaphor of Ortega y Gasset. There are quite a few who believe that everything has become the subject of doubt, and the "the hour of shadow" that I have mentioned relentlessly heralds the twilight. I subscribe to the contrary point of view. For I believe that we are dealing with something that definitely does not augur death throes. It would still be hard to provide an example of any form of collective life dying of an attack of doubt, as the Spanish thinker says. On the other hand, some happened to fall due to sclerosis, especially when what they forgot what were the values and rules which made up the act of their foundation. I believe that "the hour of shadow" that I have quoted precedes the moment before dawn. To the partisans of dusk let us then juxtapose the partisans of dawn, and let its device be Europe as a standard, community as a rule, freedom and solidarity as the principle. This is our lodestar. Europe is not dying out at all. The current crisis is an opportune moment to reinforce and develop the European model. Let us then make use of this opportunity to announce that the hour of Europe has arrived.

The notion of Europe – as is corroborated by poets, historians, and philosophers – is one devoid of precision, shaky and at moments non-specific. Yet, it raises clear associations and speeds up our heartbeat.

Let me, Ladies and Gentlemen, dedicate the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen for 2010 that I am collecting today as the Prime Minister of the Polish government to my generation, to the generation of Solidarity, and in a special way – to all the victims of the plane crash near Smolensk.