

BRONISŁAW KOMOROWSKI

**INTRODUCTORY SPEECH
AT THE 6TH MINISTER KRZYSZTOF SKUBISZEWSKI
SYMPOSIUM***

Rector, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you all for the invitation to meet here and to recall together not only the achievements, but also the way of acting and thinking of Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski. For me, it is also an opportunity to make some personal confessions and express personal thanks. Back in the early 1990s, at the turn of the political system and the beginning of huge changes, a revolutionary background and a revolutionary lifestyle was the norm among solidarity ministers. It was the time when a new Polish political morality was being shaped, brought about by the new solidarity environment that placed it somewhere between the sweater of Jacek Kuroń and the slightly old-fashioned elegance of Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski. His style was very much to my liking and I am still grateful for it today because somewhere behind it there was a sense of the need to help the deep idealism which brings about the wind of revolutionary change combined with the need for continuity, the need to promote professionalism, a focus on knowledge, on experience and on this, again rather old-fashioned, not always fashionable, thinking in terms of not only what is desirable, but also what is possible, what is realistic from the point of view of knowledge and experience, and the logical reading of the signs of the times.

Mr. Krzysztof Skubiszewski liked me. I remember a conversation which I had with him when he was already sitting as a judge in The Hague. ‘Minister, I am voting for you, not just because I knew your father and your family, but because you are promising and seem to be good at what you are doing. But I am not only voting for you, I am also watching you.’ And I still have the impression now that Mr. Krzysztof Skubiszewski is observing us all a little bit, looking at us, so we too should be working and doing everything possible so as not to lose a sense of responsibility for Poland’s future and the future of the world, to try to find examples somewhere in the past, that are worth remembering and being constantly analysed. This was probably a significant experience of the whole team which was the first to attempt to change Poland not through revolution but through evolution and political compromise,

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through hard work and respect for the diversity of backgrounds. It was about a proper sense of the balance between dreams and realism, also in the area of foreign policy. And what I believe is what we all need now, is this thinking in terms of both, wanting to maintain our dreams but also to maintain our faith that these ideals of ours, our own achievements on this difficult road to fulfilling our dreams must be continuously positively monitored that they do not necessarily have to fall victim to base realism or the mere reading of the signs of the times.

I believe that this is particularly necessary today, when we reflect on what has become of our contribution today, and what has become of the contribution of the whole generation, and also of those generations, engaged in the project of moving Poland towards European integration. Therefore, the topic of today's meeting is important both politically and ideologically. The question of whether Europe is in crisis is pointless because it is obvious that Europe is in crisis, we all see it, we all feel it. We can also see that this crisis is serious enough because it manifests itself simultaneously in a number of important areas. However, in the name of the romantic approach to politics as well as partly in order to keep to our dreams and maintain our optimism we must remember that Europe has always been in some kind of crisis. We may say that Europe has been developing by overcoming crises. The European project has constantly been enriched by experience frequently acquired in dramatic crisis situations. It can therefore be said that there is no progress, in the area of European integration too, without accumulating the experiences of breaking up, crossing, and overcoming successive crises.

Our problem is that perhaps never before in history have we had to deal with so many crises happening at the same time. Today we are facing an economic and an identity crisis which has manifested itself through the immigration crisis. There is a crisis caused by events in eastern Europe, and what I mean here is Russia's aggression on Ukraine. We also have to deal with Brexit. Moreover, there is a crisis which does not affect Europe only but can be felt throughout the whole Western world. In other words, the problem of the crisis of liberal democracy has rightly become a subject deserving consideration. And even if in none of the EU documents is it stated that European integration is an idea or a dream of liberal democracy and that the task of integrating Europe is to spread, promote and strengthen only this model of democracy, in practical terms this is exactly what has been and is still happening today. The idea of European integration was logically linked to what used to be felt as a principle-based liberal democracy— political freedom, individual freedom and eventually, economic freedom, free movement of capital, people and services. Subsequently, areas related to political and economic security were added. We, too, in 1989, thanks to Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski, made a clear and unambiguous choice. A choice that was not only for our Polish or Poland's freedom, but a choice regarding our, Poland's participation in a project termed Liberal Europe, we did that by saying that we wanted to proceed Westwards and wished to be part of European integration. In choosing the political system, we decided on the development model. At that time there was no introductory lecture and no Symposium like this

No. 6 today. They were not necessary, because with all due respect to those who were working within the realities of (then) Polish People's Republic, everybody knew, including the communist authorities, that life and things were better in the West than in the East. If someone fled Poland, it was never to the East, only to the West. We all knew it, we all felt it, it was clear to all that capitalism is better than socialism. It was obvious to everyone. We all knew there was freedom in the West and oppression in the East. Hence there was no special discussion, the choice was made automatically, without thinking. It was clear that it was necessary to take over the tried and tested model of the western world. This direction was obvious, and this is why it was not only at the Round Table, but also within the framework of the then government in which Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski was foreign affairs minister, that there were people of diverse backgrounds and views or outlook. Among them there was a socialist, Jacek Kuroń, and a conservative, Olek Hall; there was Leszek Balcerowicz, a supporter of a direct move towards a free market economy, since he knew that there was no third way. And there were also people who had experienced the bankruptcy and downfall of the earlier system of real politic and real socialism in a moral, political and political dimension. It is worth remembering that our choice then was to direct ourselves entirely to the West, as far as possible away from socialism and as close as possible to liberal democracy. The direction towards the West meant European integration. European integration, in turn, meant, embracing the logic of thinking of the system adopted by the State namely its economic system in terms of a general understanding of liberal democracy. It is worth remembering this and remembering it in a situation where this direction is questioned today by different parties, from different positions, often in opposition and hostile to one another as it might sometimes seem. This is because the model of liberal democracy and the freedom-oriented direction of European integration are being challenged by the left and by the right.

What should we do in this situation? It is worthwhile to talk and discuss, but it is also worthwhile to remember that, in fact, everyone individually, but also collectively, as a society, is confronted with the question of whether we have something new, something different to offer. Are we be able to come up with something equally logical, attractive, equally ambitious and, in addition, in line with our national and social interests and the interests of the whole Western world? Today, when I hear many, from both sides of the political spectrum, criticise the model of European integration, the model of democracy and the free market, I say this—if someone has a better idea, please, put it on the table and then let us have it reviewed and discussed. In my opinion, there is no new solution nor a real and effective path midway between socialism and democracy. Therefore ideas such as amending or changing EU treaties are political fantasies. Likewise the ideas for rapid changes in important areas of integration, which are false trails too. Ladies and Gentlemen, if we do not know how to behave, then we have to behave decently. We have tried and tested models, this is our own generational experience, we have made this change and so far—in my opinion—no one has as yet come up with a third way. Of course this does not mean that every-

thing must remain the way it was. It must mean thinking critically about where we can find sources of strength for the future, so that both projects, liberal democracy and European integration can continue, develop and gain support. We must also be aware of the fact that today the foundations of the European project and the foundations and the project of liberal democracy, such as economic freedom and the source of Europe's economic power are being questioned.

Let us remember, therefore, that the integration of Europe was a project of freedom and I believe it must remain so.

Today the vision of a social Europe is fashionable, but we must think about what that means in the realities of the Polish situation. What does this mean when it comes to the mechanisms related to unemployment, wages and employees' rights? Therefore we must be aware of what this means for Poland's chances of catching up with the main European States. Today we already know what European integration is all about, what European integration is, or what liberal democracy means. But we also need to know what the consequences of moving away from any of these ideas will mean. We must consider everything from the position of what it means for opportunities for Poland, because in the EU one may think in terms of a European community, a community of the whole Western world but this still can and should be combined with thinking in the national interest, defined differently than by those who are saying that Poland must get up from its knees and challenge freedom-oriented character of European integration and free economy in order to please the whole nation. We must therefore think of how to attract people who are sensitive to visionary issues of a social Europe. And yet, here in Poland, just as in 1989, we must look at all this from the point of view of whether it brings us closer or moves us further away from the perspective of catching-up with Western Europe. We can tell one another what we would like to see changed in European integration, but always judge it through the prism of whether this would mean slowing down or accelerating the process of catching up with the richer parts of the western world. We were and we are still starting out as a nation. We had a gigantic opportunity but I am afraid that slowly we are beginning to lose it, not only in terms of political integration but also in the economic dimension that would allow us to hope for a faster rate of development for our country.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to have a discussion, but in my view we need to keep to two principles: political realism and thinking about what this will bring in terms of the national interest of societies in the labour market, and catching-up and overcoming gigantic backlogs.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Wyspiański once put it beautifully 'We could have a lot if we only wanted to want.'

We have faced such a challenge for the last 25 years of freedom. We could have had so much but did not always wanted to want. What I mean is the euro zone and many other strategic challenges facing Poland. Today, I am afraid there will be another quote from Wyspiański that will frequently be more appropriate: 'You had, you boor, a golden horn.' This horn is moving away, and so are the opportunities for rational collaboration in the shaping the integration

process and the liberal democracy that would also be consistent with the Polish national interest. They, too, are moving farther and farther away.

I wish you an interesting discussion and I am very curious not only as to the range of opinions , but also whether we will manage to free ourselves of thinking in terms of left-wing, right-wing, or conservative stereotypes in order to look for optimal solutions from two points of view: Poland's national interest reasons of state and dreams about the greatness of the Western world.

Thank you very much.

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President of the Republic of Poland 2010–2015

