

Szanowny Panie Rektorze,  
Drodzy Goście z Polski i Ukrainy,

Thank you for inviting me today to take part in the opening ceremony for this conference on cross-border crisis management. As I look at your planned program for this conference, I am impressed by how dramatically this region has changed in less than a generation. Just over twenty years ago, most people in this part of Europe would have thought that cross border crisis management could only mean one thing: defending against an attack by foreign troops. Back then, there was no independent Ukraine with whom Poland could discuss cross-border security. Civilian authorities in both the Soviet Union and communist Poland were often excluded from involvement in crisis management activities, and communist party political interests often got in the way of effective crisis response.

Nothing better illustrates the terrible problems of crisis management of those days than the extraordinary events of the Chernobyl crisis in April 1986. I was serving in Warsaw then as a young diplomat, and will never forget the horror I felt when hearing the news that a nuclear disaster that had taken place in secret, blanketing northern Europe with a radioactive cloud before anyone could be warned, while authorities desperately tried to cover up the scope of the accident. In many ways, it was the beginning of the end of a system of government that centralized control for political purposes, regardless of the impact on human lives.

That you are here together today illustrates how far Poland and Ukraine have come in only 25 years. You have transformed

your governments and societies so that crisis management is in the hands of experienced professionals like yourselves, with no regard for political affiliation. You have dramatically opened up communication with each other to share information that is vital for saving human lives. And you meet regularly to share experiences and improve each other's mutual understanding of best practices to use in crisis management.

One only need recall the extraordinary success of Polish and Ukrainian officials this year in managing the considerable challenges associated with the EUROUCP to show that there is a new way of crisis management in this part of the world. Border guard with border guard, policeman with policeman, and local government with local government, together, you proved to the world that we have moved far from the days of Chernobyl. And for that I congratulate you.

The United States is proud to support your efforts. The cross-border cooperation program between Poland and Ukraine has been a success for several years. Our consulate has been co-organizing Bridges to the East and Partnership for Democracy projects since 2003. And, of course, Poland initiated in 2009 the European Union's Eastern Partnership, a project that the United States strongly supports.

Your friends from the United States wish you continued success in your important endeavors to change the face of Europe, and make it a safer place for Ukrainians and Poles alike.

Thank you.