

INTRODUCTION OF PM JERZY BUZEK

The Atlantic Council Freedom Awards recognize the effort of courageous individuals and institutions to channel and focus the universal human desire for freedom into real-world results. In practical terms, these efforts include not only inspiring other countries to reform, but actually sharing with them the lessons we have learned about empowering civil society and creating democratic institutions. Today, promoting democracy around the world is one of the core goals of the foreign policy not only of the United States, but also of its partners in the European Union, and particularly of the government of Poland.

Poland was in fact the inspiration for many U.S. democracy promotion efforts. In response to the Solidarity movement's struggle, President Reagan called on the U.S. Congress to establish the National Endowment for Democracy, which we are honoring tonight. In a speech to the British Parliament, President Reagan called for the creation of an institution "to foster the infrastructure of democracy – the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities – which allows a people to choose their own way, to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means."

Today Poland is one of our closest partners in promoting democracy. As Foreign Minister Sikorski stated in a recent address to the Sejm: “We [the United States and Poland] get on especially well whenever and wherever we decide to join forces and foster the ideals of freedom and democracy.” We have worked closely together on numerous other initiatives around the globe – from Belarus to Benghazi.

Last spring, Foreign Minister Sikorski and Secretary Clinton launched the U.S.-Poland Democracy Dialogue, which has now launched several joint initiatives in Eastern Europe. We also support and applaud Poland’s efforts within the EU to establish a European Endowment for Democracy, modeled on America’s National Endowment for Democracy. We look forward to cooperating with the new Polish Know-How Foundation for International Development Cooperation.

Poland's leading role in the Community of Democracies, which Professor Bronislaw Geremek and then Secretary Madeleine Albright founded in Warsaw in 2000, has ensured that this important global platform for promoting democracy and freedom continues to give voice and hope to millions around the world. These institutions and initiatives are only a few powerful examples of the role Poland has assumed, as one of the premier advocates of democracy, human rights, and freedom around the world. As President Obama said when he was here last May, Poland brings special credibility to democracy promotion both because of the success of your transition and the immediacy of your example.

I feel truly privileged tonight in having the opportunity to introduce one of Poland's greatest proponents of spreading democracy and freedom in Eastern Europe and around the world, Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek.

Prime Minister Buzek has demonstrated his dedication to the cause of freedom in many arenas, beginning with his early membership in the nascent Solidarity trade union in 1980. He quickly rose to the union's top ranks, and chaired the national Congress in 1981. During martial law, he was one of Solidarity's key underground leaders, and remained active in Solidarity as it grew and ultimately brought an end to the communist regime.

As head of the Polish government from 1997 to 2001, Prime Minister Buzek worked together with President Kwasniewski to bring Poland into NATO and to set Poland on the path to membership in the European Union. Along with Poland, he moved on to the European stage where he has again distinguished himself as one of our most important advocates of spreading the message of freedom and democracy. As President of the European Parliament, Prime Minister Buzek was a champion of human rights around the world, calling for reforms in China, North Africa, and Central Asia. As he said in his farewell speech when he stepped down from the Presidency in January, "We European parliamentarians were always strong defenders and supporters of all people fighting for freedom, democracy and human dignity. When I spoke to protesters in Tahrir Square in Cairo, and freedom fighters in Martyrs' Square in Tripoli, they told me, 'Thank you Europe – thank you for believing, and being with us.'"

In 2010 I sat in this room as both Prime Minister Buzek and President Kwasniewski were among the first to receive Atlantic Council Freedom Awards here in Wroclaw. At the time, Prime Minister Buzek said he accepted the award on behalf of the Polish people who together had struggled for freedom. But he also pointed out that Poland was not alone in this struggle; it was able to rely on the support of the United States and other members of the Atlantic Community. Today, there are many countries around the world, who, thanks to Prime Minister Buzek, are grateful to Poland and the West for moral and material support as they struggle for freedom.

Prime Minister Buzek, the floor is yours.