

**AMBASSADOR FEINSTEIN'S WELCOME REMARKS  
ATLANTIC COUNCIL FREEDOM AWARDS DINNER  
JUNE 10, 2011**

Thank you Rafał. It is a great privilege and a genuine pleasure to be back in Wrocław. And a great honor, as well, to be joined by so many committed defenders of freedom, including Prime Minister Filat, Foreign Minister Sikorski and Senator McCain – three men who obviously need no introduction. Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Foreign Minister, Senator McCain, thank you so much for honoring us with your presence this evening.

I'd also like to recognize and congratulate Fred Kempe, Fran Burwell, and the entire Atlantic Council team. It takes tremendous talent – and a great deal of persistence – to organize a major event from across the ocean – and, as always, you've done a magnificent job.

It's hard to believe it's been a full academic year since we last gathered here for the Wroclaw Global Forum and the Atlantic Council's Freedom Awards.

And what an amazing year it's been. Mayor Dutkiewicz won re-election by a landslide – a tribute to his laudable stewardship of this impressive city.

President Obama just concluded an enormously successful visit to Poland. As President Komorowski said, the visit opened a new chapter in Polish-U.S. relations and laid the foundation for productive cooperation for years to come. The President's trip underscored the importance of the close partnership between Europe and the United States, and the essential role that the countries of Central Europe – and Poland in particular – play in forging transatlantic solidarity.

It's been a year of hope. Nine months ago, few would have predicted that a small group of committed young activists in North Africa and the Middle East would use the internet to launch the next wave of democratic revolutions. We are honored to have one of them, Israa Abdel Fattah, with us tonight.

It has also been a year of disappointment. Even as we celebrated the progress of the Arab Spring, we witnessed Aleksander Lukashenka's brutal repression of the Belarusian people.

It may be small comfort, but it is nonetheless significant that the United States and the European Union spoke with one voice in condemning the cruelty of Europe's last dictatorship, and in showing solidarity with Belarusian opposition leaders and civil society. It is fitting that tonight we also honor Belarusian activists who bravely confront forces of oppression and corruption in Belarus.

Tonight we also honor a dear friend and true visionary, one who worked tirelessly to bring the transatlantic community closer together. Ron Asmus was an early and ardent advocate for NATO enlargement. He understood that the project of building a Europe whole and free would not be possible without an alliance of democracies committed to one another's security and committed to one another's ideals. Most of all he was a champion of solidarity between Poland and the United States. He is a most deserving recipient of the Freedom Award, and he will be sorely missed.

We are honored tonight by the presence of Adam Michnik and Helena Luczywo, two courageous intellectuals who used the power of words to help rewrite the course of history. Over the course of four decades, they have tirelessly worked to build coalitions to advance the cause of freedom. Adam was a co-founder of the Workers Self-Defense Committee (KOR) set up to support workers who had lost their jobs after participating in illegal strikes in the 1970s. And Helena helped to establish an underground newspaper, which strengthened ties between intellectuals and the working class. The alliance of workers, intellectuals, and clergy they helped to build was the foundation for Solidarity, a movement they actively supported, including after the Roundtable Talks when they founded Poland's only uncensored newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

The men and women we honor tonight have a great deal in common. They have all made tremendous sacrifice to advance human rights and democracy – universal values and principles that bind the transatlantic community together.

It is my great pleasure to serve as co-host for this evening's Atlantic Council Freedom Awards – as we pay tribute and express our deep gratitude to tonight's honorees for their courage, vision, and steadfast commitment to the cause of freedom.

Thank you.