

## Europe More Important Than Ever

*Interview in the Warsaw Voice (April 28, 2011)*

**U.S. Ambassador to Poland, Lee Feinstein, talks to Hilary Heuler in the run-up to President Barack Obama's visit to Warsaw.**

### **Is the weight of world affairs turning U.S. attention away from Europe?**

So much is happening in the world now, and everybody's attention is focused on grappling with the different issues we're facing. In most cases, we find that the challenges we're presented with are actually reasons for much closer cooperation between the United States and Europe, as well as between the U.S. and Poland. We see this in North Africa and the Middle East, we see this in Afghanistan, and we see it more broadly when we talk about the rising importance of other countries, including China and Russia.

President Obama believes that our relationship with Europe is more important than ever, because dealing with the problems and opportunities we have requires as much cooperation between us as possible. There are a lot of different ways to measure the importance that he gives to this relationship, but one small measure is his travel schedule. President Obama is coming to Poland for two days at the end of May, and he'll also visit Ireland and the UK, as well as attend the G8 meeting in Deauville, France. This will be his eighth trip to Europe, which is more trips than he will have taken to any other continent, and more trips to Europe than any other president will have taken in the same amount of time in his administration. If what you do is as important as what you say, it's a very strong indication of how important he believes our relationship is.

### **How do you see the future of U.S.-EU relations? Does Central Europe have a key role to play?**

One of the things that President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton firmly believe is that we want to see a strong Europe. America depends on a strong Europe. There was a time in the United States when there was a debate over whether a strong Europe was good for us or not, but that debate is now resolved. We believe that a Europe that's effective, economically prosperous, militarily capable and willing is really important for us, for our diplomacy, our prosperity, and our security.

Within that context, Central Europe is very important. If you look at indicators of relative importance, you find that transatlantic links, including links between Central Europe and the United States, are central. One measure of this is a recent report, put out by the Johns Hopkins Institute in Washington, which measured the amount of U.S. investment in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. American investments in Poland were the largest—\$30 billion—and if you added all three together it came to roughly \$83 billion. That's twice the level of American investment in India.

### **Should President Obama's visit be seen through the prism of Central Europe's role in this relationship?**

When we look at Poland we see the most important country in the region, but we also see an important country within NATO and the EU—it's the sixth largest country, and, depending on how you do your bookkeeping, the sixth largest economy in the EU. It's also one of the top-tier countries in NATO. So we look at Poland as a country of importance on the continent, and we also cooperate more broadly on the Eastern Neighborhood. America and Poland worked together to come up with a strong response to Lukashenka's crackdown after the December elections in Belarus. We not only led the way together in forging transatlantic solidarity in punishing Lukashenka with sanctions, but we also came up with additional money to show our support for democracy activists and civil society in Belarus.

Secretary Clinton saw Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski at the beginning of March, and she said, "I consult Minister Sikorski not only about the region but also about the world." One of the things they talked about, for example, was North Africa and the Middle East, and one outcome of that meeting was an agreement that Poland would send a delegation to Tunisia so that it could share its experience in building a resilient democracy after a period of authoritarianism.

### **What potential do you see for greater cooperation between the U.S. and Poland?**

In building a relationship for the 21st century together, we have identified three areas of key cooperation. I think the

President's visit next month will be an opportunity not only to highlight all of our cooperation, but also to set a course for the future. Within the areas of greatest importance we have three pillars; the first is working together on security. We have a huge amount to be proud of over the last two years, including reaching an agreement in November in Lisbon to reaffirm Article 5 of NATO's Washington Treaty and developing NATO contingency plans for Poland and the Baltic states. Presidents Obama and Komorowski announced last November that we have agreed for the first time to send American servicemen and women to Poland on a permanent basis, which is historic. We have also agreed to deploy important elements of our missile defense program to Poland, and missile defense plans in Europe are ahead of schedule. These are things we should be proud of, take stock of, and build on for the future.

The second pillar of the relationship is democracy promotion. We work together in the Eastern Neighborhood, not just on Belarus but also on Ukraine, Moldova and the Caucasus. We also work together globally through the Community of Democracies, which was born in Poland in 2000. I was fortunate to be in Warsaw with Secretary Albright in 2000 and then a decade later with Secretary Clinton when she attended the 10th anniversary of the Community in Cracow last year. Secretary Clinton talked about the importance of civil society in promoting democracy around the world. Since then, America and Poland established a democracy dialogue with each other, something we don't have with any other country.

The third area is building prosperity. American investment in Poland is probably bigger than you think, but still not enough. There's definitely scope for us to do more, but we've done and we are doing a lot. In the early 1990s, American companies were the first to invest in Poland, and helped build investor confidence in coming here. Since 2008 American investment has been particularly strong, and what's interesting is that it's been strong in the manufacturing area and service industries, but also in hi-tech and R&D. Another promising area for us is energy cooperation—we're interested in helping support Poland's potential program in nuclear energy; we're very involved in Poland's rapid development of wind and other renewables; and we're equally interested in shale gas.

I know I said three pillars, but let me add one more key area: people-to-people exchanges. 140,000 Poles traveled to America last year, and we have a large and growing American community in Poland. We're doing as much as we can to promote this kind of exchange. We are proud to cooperate with the Polish American Freedom Foundation to give Polish university students the chance to spend the summer working in the United States for American firms, a program we expect will continue to grow next year. The number of scholarships in the Fulbright Program is increasing significantly. We also try to do a lot of new media outreach—we've got a very active Facebook page in English and Polish, and we've got a very good website that's updated round the clock. The embassy community has set a goal of meeting 11,000 students and young people in Poland in 2011, and I think we're well on our way to reaching it.

President Obama's visit here is, of course, the ultimate people-to-people exchange. The visit comes at an excellent time in U.S.-Polish relations, which are based on our unshakable historic ties and, as important, on our common values and interests today.