

Ambassador Lee Feinstein

Opening Remarks: U.S.-Poland Business Week

October 10, 2012

Just three months ago, thanks to the people in this room President Obama and Prime Minister Tusk were able to fulfill a commitment they made to each other during President Obama's trip to Warsaw in May 2011.

In June, we held the first U.S.-Polish Business Summit in almost a decade.

For those of my fellow New Yorkers who weren't there, 300 Polish and American business leaders met with Polish and American government leaders to look at new opportunities to raise our commercial to partnership to the next level.

I'm proud to say our government was represented by three of the Commerce Department's top leaders: Acting Secretary Blank, Under Secretary Sanchez (who has traveled to Poland three times since I was Ambassador), and Assistant Secretary Camunez, as well as chief of staff Adam Wilczek, who I believe is also here today.

It was Acting Secretary Blank's first trip after assuming that role, and her active participation is testament to the importance we place on the U.S.-Polish relationship.

The Business Summit was a government and business collaboration, the American Chamber of Commerce in Warsaw, the Polish Confederation of Private Employers, Lewiatan, led by Henryka Bochniarz, and Eric Stewart, an entrepreneur's entrepreneur who, in just two years, has built an organization -- the US-Poland Business Council -- with clout and energy.

At the summit we announced some B2B deals and also signed government agreements to promote one another's companies and countries. U.S-Poland Business Week is the first fruit of the Business Summit and warm congratulations to the industrious and business savvy deputy minister, Ms. Beata Stelmach, for moving so swiftly to pull together such an impressive series of events.

We know that security depends on prosperity and that is why both our State Department, under the leadership of Secretary Clinton, and Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the innovative leadership of Radek Sikorski, had the good sense to make this a Polish Foreign Policy priority and to put someone like Minister Stelmach at the helm.

American-Polish relations are deep and historic. And growing up in the Metropolitan area, we all listened to the traffic updates about the clogged Kosciusko Bridge. But even if they can't pronounce his name, Americans know Kosciusko's great history as a human rights advocate and defender of freedom.

I joke that I limit my speeches to a quota of one Kosciusko reference per speech. And I've already exceeded that.

But my point is our relationship is based on a strong foundation. And it is and must be forward looking, based on common security, promoting democracy, and trade and economic ties.

With the Business Summit and now U.S.-Poland Business Week, we are putting economic relations on par with the other pillars of our relationship. And this is as it should be.

I was proud to negotiate and sign a Memorandum of Understanding last year with the Defense Minister to establish a U.S. Air Force Detachment in Poland. The U.S. Commander arrived in Poland last week; and I called to congratulate him. This will be the first full-time presence of American forces in Poland. American boots on the ground are a symbolic and militarily significant step. It will further strengthen our partnership with a key ally.

In today's world, our economic ties are equally critical. I had to put boots on when I was present for the first hydraulic fracking outside of North America in northwestern Poland last year.

And if the geology is right and the regulatory and environmental protection system responsible and effective, those boots will be just as important as those worn by the airmen arriving now in Poland.

I know almost all of the Poles here but many of my New York friends don't. So let me say, you have Poland's top business leaders and entrepreneurs from energy, innovation, finance, and other sectors here. They are joined by senior and talented government leaders who I have had the privilege to work with over the past three years. You could not ask for better partners.

And let me simply give you the top lines: Our trade increased by 25 percent between 2010-2011. Chairman Majman believes America is the top foreign investor in Poland if you calculate the U.S. investment that is funneled through West European countries. We are on a track to double exports to Poland over five years. Our firms are rated among the best places to work in Poland. And we are beginning to see inward investment from Poland into the United States. The proof is the Ingot billboard I can see out of my Times Square hotel room. (Did you know Ingot was a Polish company?). And we are seeing joint Polish US ventures, particularly in the extractive industries, in third countries and we'd like to see more.

I gave you the top line. Let me end with the bottom line. Trade between Poland and the United States is growing. It's headed in the right direction. It's probably more than you think. But for the EU's fastest growing economy and the world's largest economy, there's room to do more. So let's get down to business.

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