

Remarks by Ambassador Lee Feinstein at Welcome Reception

March 11, 2010

Szanowni Panstwo! Dobry wieczór.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this historic residence. I am delighted that so many representatives of the Polish presidency and government, the diplomatic community, the business world, civil society and the media are able join us this evening. Some of you Elaine and I are meeting for the first time, but we already count many of you as friends.

I want to recognize Deputy Prime Minister Pawlak and other distinguished ministers and guests who are present this evening.

I am also pleased that my Deputy Chief of Mission, Bill Heidt and his wife Sotie are with us tonight. Bill served at our consulate in Poznan from 1988 to 1990. Like many of you, he witnessed firsthand Communism's collapse in Poland. He has been a trusted advisor from Day One.

Elaine Monaghan, my wife and life partner, is no stranger to this part of the world or to foreign policy. She is known to most of you not through me but through her own intrepid reporting in the former Soviet bloc, Kosovo, and at the State Department, where she covered and traveled with two Secretaries of State.

Elaine and I had hoped to invite all of you to a *parapetówka* much earlier, but as many of you know, the house has undergone extensive renovations over the past six months. The entire heating system, including the original boilers and every single pipe and radiator, was replaced. This was the heating system's first overhaul since the residence was constructed in 1963. Our top priority since moving in two weeks ago has been to re-open the house and reunite our children with their toys.

This building has a distinguished and amazing history. It has offered respite to some of the foremost American leaders of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, George Bush Senior, Bill Clinton, Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright, and my present and former boss Hillary Clinton, all stayed here during visits to Warsaw. For almost fifty years, it has been a home-away-from-home for some of the United States' leading diplomats and public figures, including Dan Fried, Chris Hill, and Victor Ashe.

Even more importantly, this house was one of the few secure gathering places for Poles who worked to bring about the demise of a totalitarian regime. During the dark years of the 1980s, my predecessors Richard Davies, Francis Meehan, and John Davis hosted leaders of the anti-communist resistance and founders of the Solidarity movement, including some of you here today. Historic figures like Lech Wałęsa, Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, and Bronisław Geremek gathered in these rooms for passionate and visionary discussions with American diplomats, journalists, and opinion leaders. General Jaruzelski supposedly once asked, "What is Solidarity other than a bunch of guys sitting around the table at the American Ambassador's house?"

My first trip to Warsaw was thirty years ago. Back then, few could have imagined that Poland would become a member of NATO and the European Union. But in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges and the harsh realities of the Cold War, Poles, including many in this room, rallied in a mass movement, and threw off communist rule, creating a chain reaction that led to the collapse of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe.

The courage and moral force of this movement had ripple effects around the world. It is no exaggeration to say that Poland played a key role both in ending the Cold War and in creating the more democratic world in which we now live.

But as Secretary Clinton pointed out in November in Berlin, this was not simply a question of destiny. Poles, Americans, and other Europeans worked together to help the former East Bloc countries overcome their past and become reliable, productive members of the Euro-Atlantic community of democracies. Innovations like the Balcerowicz Plan, the SEED Act, the Polish-American Enterprise Fund – which led to the establishment of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation – and an ambitious program of debt forgiveness helped put the Polish economy on a solid footing.

Today, Poland stands as an example to countries and activists around the world that aspire to peaceful, democratic change and prosperity. I am honored to represent the United States in Poland. For America, there is simply no better friend.

Before I came to Warsaw, each of my predecessors told me of the warmth and generosity of the Poles they had come to know. Without exaggerating, I can tell you my first five months in Poland have vastly exceeded our extremely high expectations. Elaine, Jack, Cara, and I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and hospitality of the Poles we have met. I hope we will be able to return the favor, not just this evening but well into the future.

Szanowni Panstwo, our new friends, it is my great honor and a privilege to welcome you – in most cases, to welcome you back – to our home.