Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to meet with members of the Foreign Policy Association. I thank Mr. Gonzalo de la Heras and Mr. Noel V. Lateef for the invitation. I am grateful to the Chairman for the hospitable reception and the kind words that demonstrate how close are the ties between Poland and America.

One can hardly fail to be impressed by the extraordinary track record and prestige of your Association. Since over eighty years your Organization has been involved in the public life of America. Great historical figures have been associated with the FPA, such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt, Frank Ross McCoy, John Foster Dulles. The persons engaged in the activities of the FPA – both in the past and today – are members of the elite of the American spirit and intellect.

Incessantly you exert a huge influence upon the public opinion, the development of mature political solutions in foreign policy. The Great Decisions educational program, which you have been creating since as long as half a century already, is an important source of knowledge concerning the problems of the contemporary world for Americans, and especially for the young generations.
Especially today we need new ideas and decisive actions. Instead of optimism that we have observed at the beginning of the XXI century, we perceive rather concerns. We are not able to limit poverty and hunger. The pollution of environment is still proceeding. We have not stopped the proliferation of Mass Destruction Weapons and are facing a new threat, international terrorism. Human rights are extensively and persistently violated in many parts of the globe. Ahead of us are new regional and international tensions and rivalries.

I deeply hope that the UN Summit will strengthen this organization and make it more effective. This is not a need – it is a necessity.

Ladies and Gentleman!

But I want today to talk about the Polish experience. The success stories of my home country may provide lessons also for other nations: for those, who crave for freedom, for those, who undertake the hardship of great transition. It is also worthwhile to analyze the achievements and challenges of our whole region of Central and Eastern Europe. The world, which is seeking ways leading to agreement, unity and solidarity – may draw a lot of inspiration from our experience.

We have recently celebrated the jubilee anniversary of a great event. Twenty five years ago, the “Solidarity” (Solidarność) movement was born in Poland. It was a unique phenomenon for the entire Eastern Block, which was subjected to Soviet domination. The movement, numbering some ten million people, independent of the authoritarian regime, raised the demands for liberty, personal dignity and respect for human rights. It was a great manifestation of civil society. Without resort to violence, it managed to dismantle the non-democratic system. “Solidarity” changed the course of history.

The wave of liberty, which spilled all over Poland in 1980, triggered the historical transformation of our part of Europe. The seeds of “Solidarity”, even if not instantly, gave rise to amazing crops. In Poland this consisted of the Round Table agreement of 1989 between the ruling administration of the time and the opposition, effectively leading to the establishment of the first non-communist government to the East of the river Elbe. Shortly afterward, the domino effect came, with changes in East Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the “velvet
revolution” in Czechoslovakia, transformations in Hungary, in Rumania, in the Baltic States, followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The victories of liberty, democracy, the rule of law – have paved the way for further integration of Europe. The “iron curtain” was dumped in the scrap-yard of history. The first great step toward the obliteration of the divisions inherited from Yalta consisted of the enlargement of NATO. This was initiated by the far-sighted, assertive policy of the United States. The Polish nation remembers this with gratitude. Poland and the United States of America, drawing on close traditional ties, have now become true allies. We have also proven that you can really rely on us. Polish soldiers, together with the American forces, are bearing the burden of responsibility and risk in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our economic relations are developing and strengthening. American investment in Poland has exceeded 10 billion US Dollars. Nevertheless, its volume is still behind that of French and Dutch investments. I believe that the Polish market of close to 40 million consumers is not only an attractive sales market for American business, but also an important target area for investment. It offers attractive opportunities due to the high quality of Polish labor and the stable political situation.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Europe is irrevocably growing together. This is demonstrated by the enlargement of the European Union. Most of the ten newly acceded states are countries from our region. We have successfully passed the test of integration. We have our due place at the helm of European policy. We manage well our engagement in the European economy. Poland is the largest country of this group of new member states, enjoying the position of its leader. We are proud of our common achievements. They largely stem from the accomplishments of “Solidarity”, from the courage, determination and perseverance of the Polish people.

Another historical achievement consists also of regional partnership. It was not predestined for us, it was not given for granted. There were bad reminiscences from the past. Our nations had entrenched mutual resentments, memories of ethnic strife and border disputes. These odd conflicts had been hibernated by the freezing breath of the soviet empire. The risk existed that they would revive again after 1989. Central and Eastern Europe could have easily shared the tragic fate of the nations of former Yugoslavia.
We did not allow this to happen. We drew on our best resources – the assets of good will, responsibility and confidence. The achievement of reconciliation and cooperation in our region is one of the pillars of European openness and unity. A very significant role in this regard is played by the process of Polish-German reconciliation. A wonderful achievement consists also of the reconciliation and partnership of the Poles with the Lithuanians and the Ukrainians. Poland is generally perceived as an exporter of stability, as a promoter of regional cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Central and Eastern Europe belongs to those areas on the world map, which are of key significance for international security and stability. This is manifested differently, of course, than in the “cold war” period. Today, our region is a source of very good news. But some issues remain, which cause headaches for the politicians.

Our region, and especially Polish territory, has always been a melting pot of mutual penetration of various different cultures, religions, traditions, civilizations. It was there that the West met with the East, the currents of Latin culture encountered the Orthodox one. When such meetings were open minded – they enriched and reinforced peace and development. Today, a specific feature of our region consists of the fact that it is exactly there that the structures of the European Union and NATO are neighboring with Russia, and also with other countries of the former Soviet Union, which have adopted their own independent course. This neighborhood will shape our future – in Europe and in the world.

One scenario – an optimistic one – assumes the continuation of the march advancing liberty and democracy. It assumes openness and close cooperation, as well as further progress of integration. It would be a great strength in the face of the challenges raised by the 21st century.

Another scenario – one giving reason for concern – presumes the permanent emergence of a new dividing line. It implies the increasing distance emerging between two zones in the world. One built democratic values and another one, where the idea of authoritarian rule predominates over the ideal of civil society. These two worlds might even coexist peacefully,
but they will never find a common language to the extent allowing them to join their forces to resolve their own problems and global issues.

As we can see, in the processes occurring in Central and Eastern Europe, very great stakes are at play. This is exactly why it is so essential that NATO should remain the pillar of European security and that it should contribute to the unification of the continent by its “open door” policy. Exactly for this reason it is so important that the new EU member states, the countries of our region, should gain a significant role in the shaping of the Eastern policy of the Union. Last but not least, it is necessary to support the pro-European aspirations of the countries neighboring with the EU in the East. They need to be assisted in their transition and prospects for membership of the European community should not be closed away from them.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I would especially like to draw your attention to the significance of Ukraine. As a state numbering almost 50 million citizens, it is a major factor of European stability. It is a nation with a long and rich history, which is attached to its identity. It is a country, where civil society has spoken up with a powerful voice: a country, which has undertaken the effort of great reforms, and which is turning toward the unifying Europe.

The “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine was one of the most important events of the beginning of this century. The crowds of Ukrainians, who took to the streets despite of the freezing cold, in order to defend the truth, liberty and democracy, have caused amazement in the world. The Polish people saw a reflection of their own past dreams and struggles in this Ukrainian upheaval. We were all given evidence of the fact that the heritage of “Solidarity” was still alive, that it had inspiring power. Let me quote the President of Ukraine, Mr Wiktor Juszczenko, who noted that without the hot Gdańsk of 1980 there could never be any freezing Kiev of 2004.

Today Ukraine needs the support of the whole family of democratic states. Especially on the part of the European Union, but also to a major degree from the United States, which seem to better understand the significance of Ukraine for international stability. Above all, of course, the Ukrainians themselves must get to grips with their challenges. It is very important, however, to unveil before them a perceptible outline of tangible and realistic prospects for
membership of NATO and the European Union. This will favorably impact the reinforcement of democracy there, of the rule of law, of the rules of political transparency and free-market reforms. Independent and democratic Ukraine inscribed in the European and Atlantic structures constitutes a guarantee of strategic harmony on the Old Continent, and also on the global scale.

Moldova should also be drawn into the orbit of European cooperation. The international community, and especially the EU, in its policy toward the East, should not avoid such ambitious challenges, as the solution of the difficult problem of Transnistria.

A worrying picture prevails in Belarus. For a brief period of time following the disintegration of the USSR democratic forces had a say there. But since eleven years, under the rule of President Alexander Lukashenka, Belarus has turned into an authoritarian state.

The situation in Belarus is becoming also an international problem. Some months ago, at their meeting in Warsaw, the leaders of the countries forming the Council of Europe have expressed serious concern due to the suppression of liberty and violations of human rights in Belarus. The European Union also does not intend to be inactive in this regard. A representative of the European Commission is going to Belarus. Only strong pressure of the international community may bring positive effects. But the most important factor consists of internal democratic transformations and the creation of civil society. It is important that possible sanctions should be targeted against the authoritarian regime, and not against Belarussian society. At the same time, the path of talks and multilateral consultations should not be disregarded. Poland, as a neighbor of Belarus, could play an essential role in such initiatives.

I would also like to devote some comments to Russia. This could indeed provide a topic for a separate lecture. Russia is a huge country of great opportunities. It is clearly visible today that Russia needs the western world and also the western world needs Russia. NATO – Russia and EU – Russian Partnership is in the interest of Poland. It is especially a matter of our security interests, but it also embraces other areas of interest.

I would like to convince you to observe Russian politics, and especially the attitude of Russia toward such countries as Poland. Russia tries to present a different appearance, as a much
more partnership-oriented one, to large countries enjoying the status of powers. Yet, the attitude toward medium size countries, such as Poland, is also indicative. It also provides evidence of its intentions toward the entire European Union and toward the Western World.

Poland is aware of the particular responsibility, which stems from the fact that our Eastern border is at the same time the Eastern frontier of the European Union and NATO. This presents a geopolitical obligation. It is our task to maximize the development of confidence, cooperation and partnership along this interface with the neighbors.

We wish to have the best possible relations with Russia. The growth of the volume of trade between us demonstrates that such development is indeed taking place. Last year it reached a record high of over 9 billion US Dollars. Exports from Poland have grown by 88 %, our imports from Russia by 23 %. Political dialog is a more difficult issue. Especially in relation to history, to the painful inheritance from the imperial policy of the Soviet Union, Russia finds it difficult to apply the perspective of declared democratic values to its critical review. Russia faces huge challenges. It is up to the Russians themselves how to respond to them. We wholeheartedly wish them every success in this regard!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

In spite of various dilemmas, the image of Central and Eastern Europe is - above all – that of a success story: of a historical success of the kind that the contemporary world so urgently needs.

I am sure that our region will continue to be a source of mainly good news. Poland will do all it can to make it happen. We have turned the tide of liberty. We are proud of its effects and we also assume responsibility for the future!