

Wystąpienie Ministra Radosława Sikorskiego
podczas spotkania *Yalta European Strategy*
“Eastern Europe and the Role of Ukraine”
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to touch base with friends who support anchoring Ukraine in the European Union. Coming from an EU member state, for the first time chairing the Council of the European Union, I feel more responsibility to help translate our agenda into action.

It is a truism that Ukraine lies at the geographical and historical crossroads. Sandwiched between the European Union and Russia, the 2nd largest country in Europe after Russia and the 6th in population size. Reforms help it shed the Soviet legacy. Because of its potential, **Ukraine is to Eastern Europe what Poland is to Central Europe**. Ukraine, called “Europe’s linchpin” and a “strategic pivot,” has what it takes to play a leading role in the region.

There is, however, a mismatch between middle-size power potential and resources. Ukraine has not invested enough capital in leveraging its position. Instead, it has vacillated, choosing nebulous vectors over strategy. No wonder analysts regard it as “*an indeterminate country.*”

It would be wise, however, to heed Javier Solana’s counsel: “*Ukraine’s geographical position has often been called challenging. **But wise leaders turn challenges into opportunities.***”

Poland has traversed the path from communism to Western democratic community, because that journey by and large enjoyed bipartisan support. In Ukraine, though, it has been politicized.

One reason has to do with conflicting identity constructions: Gogol’s divided soul set against Hrushevsky’s grand narrative. But, identity discourse is shaped by elites, who may, if they choose, revise it. So, existential angst can obfuscate rather than clarify present policy.

Another reason, partly Europe’s creation, partly Ukraine’s, holds more water. **Ukraine for far too long has been stuck in a twilight zone:** lumped together with other post-Soviet states, uncertain whether the EU’s door is shut or open.

The debate on Ukraine's place in the EU has also been mired in the "either-or" discourse: either we are with Europe, or with Russia. Well, in the 1990s, when Poles were pushing for a seat at NATO, critics shed tears over our departure from the East. Has Poland, an architect (with Sweden) of the Eastern Partnership, moved away from Eastern Europe? Likewise, **Ukraine's European integration does not mean burning bridges in relations with Russia**. It is not a "winner takes all" process.

We cannot be held hostage by clichés and caricatures that pass for geostrategic analyses. **It takes willful Ukrainian leadership, and willing European Union to move European integration forward.**

Today's meeting point between Ukraine and the EU are the association agreement negotiations, the key of which being the **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement**. It is a catalyst for European integration. I do believe, after Schuman, that this essentially technical undertaking would have weightier political repercussions in the long run.

I am optimistic we can conclude DCFTA on Poland's watch. It will give Kiev access to a market of half-a-billion people generating 12 trillion EURO. What is good for foreign investments, for business is good for job creation, good for Ukraine's standing in international lending institutions. **DCFTA, though, is not a "silver bullet" letting Ukrainian leadership wash its hands off responsibility for reforms.**

We need Ukraine to ensure energy security. The implementation of the Energy Charter, especially 2nd and 3rd legislative packages, will both strengthen Ukraine's bargaining position in dealings with Russia, and **inject transparency and accountability to energy policy** in Europe. Some 80 per cent of Russia's gas exports to the EU pass through Ukraine. EU standards in place will help us avoid the annual spectacle of gas brinkmanship, in which everybody loses.

Promotion of the "Ukraine brand" cannot be taken for granted. It's nice to hear that "*Among the polities of the new Eastern Europe, Ukraine is the most democratic regime.*" It is easy to stand out when there is the "*sultanistic regime*" in Belarus next door. Better to raise the threshold higher and judge yourself against Central Europeans. Genuine cheerleaders for Ukraine in the EU are few and far between. Slips in democratic standards, for instance **manipulating the courts**, will be taken up as an excuse to cover up

“enlargement fatigue” and a lack of enthusiasm to loosen the purse strings while the economy is down. I urge Ukrainian policymakers to keep this in mind.

Poland will press to **relax the visa regime**. Travel, work and study abroad work wonders for Europeanization. We can do better; for example, allow more Ukrainian students to benefit from the EU Tempus and Erasmus Mundus programs. The pull of Europe is irresistible. With more Ukrainians drawn into it, **hopefully, the current European fad on the banks of Dnieper will become a fashion.**

Ukraine as an associate member of the EU can become a stronger player in the region, and a partner for Russia. Kiev could help clear the air around Transnistria. Crisis management is up for grabs. Poland is setting up a joint brigade with Ukrainians and Lithuanians. We wish to draw Ukraine closer to Common Security and Defence Policy. It has strategic air assets - in short supply in the EU. Democratic governance, free trade and movement of persons will give Ukraine the strength to realize, if it hasn't already, that securing a place in Europe does not mean uprooting it from the East. **Reinforced by the EU, and – to recall Solana - emboldened by wise leadership, it can at last punch its weight.**

Crimea is a perfect witness to Ukraine's once tightly-coupled relationship with Europe. Throughout 13th century, first the Venetians and then for two centuries the Genovese integrated Crimean and Black sea commerce with the rest of Europe. How many Europeans today realize this? Refreshing memory is not enough – let's continue building a strong policy framework to bring Ukraine and the region into the EU fold.