

PRESIDENT MARTENS VISITS GDANSK

02-09-2005



EPP President Wilfried Martens addressed today a Conference in Gdansk, hosted by EPP member-party Civic Platform (PO) and its leader Mr. Donald Tusk, which commemorated the Solidarity movement of 1980:

"Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation of the Civic Platform, the greatest existing political heir to the tradition of Solidarity and a senior member of the European People's Party in Poland. It is a great honor for me to be here and to deliver this speech on the 25th anniversary of the most important Polish political movement. At the same time, we are also commemorating events in Europe that we should never forget, if we want to remain true to our selves.

We have gathered here to remember how in August 1980, in the middle of the Cold War, in the Communist dictatorial rule of fear and oppression, the workers in Poland - the Gdansk dockers, led by charismatic leader, Mr. Lech Walesa, soon followed by their brethren all around the country - had come together and posed the greatest challenge to the regime. People began to speak and act freely. More importantly, reflecting on lessons of Polish history and despite the terrible harm Poland suffered from the Communists, decided not to resort to violence. Instead, they faced their oppressors with the powerful weapons of truth and freedom.

Of course, they knew they were not alone. Since 1978, people drew inspiration for His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, the charismatic spiritual leader who always stressed the importance of fighting evil through good, thus re-shaping the face of our world. Guided by His spiritual leadership, in August 1980 Poles achieved a great victory: a victory of truth over lies, of courage over opportunism, of selflessness over cynicism, of responsibility over indifference. Everyone was amazed by this bold first step towards democracy and civil society.

At the same time, we then in the Western World also had to deal with our problems and disagreements. In Belgium, in the very year of 1980, I have presided over three successive governments in different party coalitions. And still every day, coming back from the world of quarrelling politicians, I have always found time to listen to the news that came from behind the Iron Curtain. I was proud to witness how there and then, a broad movement of people - founded on Christian values and standing for the common good - managed to pull together and to grow. I knew it that it was going to be a tough fight, in accordance with the old Polish saying, "For Our Freedom and Yours".

Solidarity managed to achieve a lot and the effects of its actions had, undoubtedly, lasting effects throughout Eastern Europe. The movement undermined the very foundations of post-Yalta division of Europe - it showed that if people of good would cease to be passive and act as citizens, they have the power to re-shape the face of the world, without violence and in spirit of compromise.

The problem was, of course, that the other side was not ready for compromise. Sixteen months of Solidarity come abruptly to an end on 13th December 1981, when the military coup d'état imposed martial law in Poland. But renewed repression could not undo the great lesson of freedom. In the West we all understood what happened and the message was loud and clear. Ironically, on that same 13th of December, I led the Belgian Christian-democrats into a solid and stable government with one clear aim in mind: to protect and promote freedom. It was clear to me that if freedom was suppressed in one European country, free Europeans in the rest of the continent would not remain indifferent. Not surprisingly, one of the foreign branches of Solidarity became our guest of honour in Brussels.

When the Berlin Wall and the entire Iron Curtain finally collapsed, it was the logical finale of the events that started in Gdansk in August 1980. The people of Prague, Budapest, Bucharest and Vilnius added new chapters to this great book of solidarity - commenced by Solidarity in Gdansk. Clearly, the era of imposing decisions of the privileged few and the limiting freedom of entire European nations had come to an absolute end.

This was also a personal triumph for John Paul II, who brought to our attention the fact that Europe ought to breathe with both of its lungs. We have remained faithful to His call. Most European countries are now united in the European Union, the emerging democratic superpower with a moral difference. In the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, most European nations are now standing alongside the United States - our faithful transatlantic partner - to preserve peace, security and stability.

The European People's Party, the largest European transnational political force that I have led over the last 15 years, has been at the forefront of all these events. We have always supported our fellow Central and Eastern Europeans, because we believed that Europe should not be divided - Europe should be united, strong and free. We have helped you to join the European Union in order to extend peace, prosperity and solidarity as far as possible. Now that we have in our ranks sister parties from Ireland and Poland, from both Portugal and Estonia, we know we can contribute to the greatest challenge that still lies ahead: to create a truly united European home for all, where no democratic nation is left behind and where Europe speaks at the world stage with one voice.

The European People's Party has no doubt this can be achieved. We have seen our continent ripped apart by war and discontent and yet we managed to reverse this and to create the European Union based on freedom, democracy, Christian virtues and the dynamism of the free market economy. We have

lived in a Europe cut in half, crammed with mighty armies and the possibility of even being destroyed in the war of all wars and yet we reuniting the continent without a single shot being fired by the people. Therefore, Europe has proven its capability to overcome the impossible and to push ahead.

At this point, I would dare to say that the profiles of Solidarity and the European People's Party can be well compared. Today, we can see peaceful revolutions, based on principles of freedom and solidarity, having swept through Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, and democracy taking roots further and further. This is all part of the Solidarity heritage. As democracy has expanded, the EPP has also expanded to 68 members, many of which belong to the newly founded democracies, including most recently, President Yushchenko and his orange platform. We also see the European Union growing in global importance, once again proving the foresightedness of the founders of the European Union, Schuman, Adenauer and de Gasperi. This is the EPP heritage. The events of past and the present have showed us that, with the help of God, the free human spirit will never be defeated it is strong, lasting and can conquer the impossible.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank all the heroes of Solidarity. I think we owe it to them for the possibility to meet here today."

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