

Aid to parliaments in countries of new and emerging democracies
statement by the Sejm Marshal
at the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments
(Copenhagen, 1st July 2006)

At the end of the 20th century, “solidarity” became the best known Polish term in the world. This term, denoting a certain value, has of late returned to our public debate and politics with new strength.

Solidarity, which we regard as the organizing principle of European cooperation and of the European Union’s external activities, has been a guideline of the Polish policy, too.

Yesterday, I spoke about our inter-parliamentary activities. These embrace also countries that are re-establishing democracy. Our activities find their expression in the establishment by us of an inter-parliamentary assembly, Poland-Ukraine, and together with Lithuania--of an inter-parliamentary assembly, Poland-Lithuania-Ukraine.

At the same time, a fair prospect of membership, held out for those European countries who aspire at taking part in the European unity, makes a key element in the promotion of democracy in Europe.

It is good that we hold out this prospect, even though it is worthwhile--particularly in the case of Ukraine--speaking about it more specifically, as a European prospect makes optimal means to promote democracy and a potent incentive to accomplish it.

Of late, the European Council has given an official weight to the notion of absorptive capacity. It is spoken of in the context of the pace of enlargement. It is very important not to invest this notion with a new meaning, with one that curbs the prospect of enlargement. Such new meaning could be fatal to democratic changes in the East.

Actually, there are countries there that are in a more serious situation. I mean Belarus, in particular. The European Union’s aid is of tremendous significance to the future of democracy in that country. Besides, the recent elections have revealed rising democratic aspirations of Belarussian society.

We are aware of the fact that, for geographical and historical reasons, singular responsibility for representing Europe in Belarus lies with us. Meeting this

responsibility, Polish parliamentarians monitored the presidential elections in that country. Earlier, the Polish Sejm played host to Oleksandr Milinkevich, the presidential candidate of the united Belarussian opposition.

The Europejskie Radio, Polish non-commercial company, belongs to an international consortium of German, Lithuanian and Russian businesses which, having won the relevant tender, has been operating a Union fund of €2 million, assigned to the establishment of a radio station to broadcast in the Russian and Belarussian languages to Belarus. The radio station has been broadcasting since the end of February.

Although the satellite TV programmes, broadcast since April, cannot be jammed, yet they reach only few viewers.

On the other hand, Belarussian students, expelled from their college on account of their democratic activities, and also those studying until recently at the independent European Humanities University in Minsk, which has been shut down by the government, are able to study at Polish universities free of charge.

In all that, our relentless and consistent aid is necessary. We have already done a lot, but needs are still greater. That is why it is so important that we accomplish the plan to establish the Union's new financial instrument to support democracy beyond our borders.

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