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President: "Freedom and integration only possible by working together"

In his address to the German parliament on Wednesday, President Bronislaw Komorowski highlighted the importance of Polish-German reconciliation, praised European integration and criticised Russian politics.

"Being able to speak here in the heart of Germany, a country close and friendly with Poland on the 75th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, is a source (...) of happiness for my generation, whose parents not only went through the horror of war but also Polish-German mutual hostility," President Bronislaw Komorowski said.



"We remember and should always remember that in September 1939 (...) shots fired by the Schleswig-Holstein battleship on Westerplatte in Gdansk and air raid warnings all over Poland marked the beginning of a catastrophe not only for my country but for all of Europe," Komorowski said, adding that September 17, 1939, when Soviet forces marched into Poland, should also be remembered.

"The fear of that time, organised terror and systematic and mass-scale murder of people that insane ideologies considered to be sub-human, endures in our European memory even today," the Polish president continued.

"Still present (in that memory) are times of which the Holocaust has become a symbol, and the intentional destruction of the elites in conquered nations," Komorowski added.

"(Former Minister of Foreign Affairs) Wladyslaw Bartoszewski said 19 years ago that Polish-German relations had acquired a European dimension, that our neighbourly relations would largely decide if and when divided Europe would manage to grow back together," President Komorowski reminded his listeners.

"Europe was changed by the will of societies, the will of people hungry for freedom. Our nations did not waste that historic situation. The past 25 years tell an incredible story of Poles and Germans jointly building a united Europe," the Polish president said.

Comparing the two world wars, Komorowski pointed out that "it took the tragedy of World War II for Europe to turn towards everything that unites and not divides European nations, towards integration, strengthening the free market and democracy, towards security based on prosperity and cooperation with neighbours."

"The success of European integration had its source in culture, in a similar understanding of people's role in the world. (...) What unites Europeans is a belief in the inviolable dignity of every human being, and it is according to this belief that we must build all education and legislation, economic life and institutions," the president also said.

Komorowski pointed out that his appearance in the German parliament testified to "an extraordinary reality in

which the young generation of Poles and Germans can - for the first time in some 200 years - study and work together, build the shared future of the nations of united Europe."

Today Europe needs a debate on fundamental values and ethical foundations, according to the Polish president. "European unity will only be both deep and effective in action if it is built on shared values," he said.

The founders of the European Communities formed European institutions consistently and with determination in a drive to deepen and expand the area of integration, Komorowski said. "They knew very well that only a united Europe could become a Europe without wars. (...) Respect for human and civil rights, democracy and rule of law, respect for minorities - these foundations of peace became a mark of Europe," he pointed out.

The president added that "it is of key importance for Europe to combine government concern for all citizens with economic effectiveness. (...) Only a Europe stimulated by entrepreneurial spirit (...) will be able to compete effectively on the global market."

"Understanding for violence condemns Europe to defeat. This is another conclusion stemming from the difficult Polish-German history lesson which we should constantly repeat to Europe and the entire world. (...) let me tell our German neighbours and friends that only bold politics built on the foundation of values, the core of which is human dignity, can be described as realpolitik. Let us build wise politics in Europe, long-range and efficient politics that defends the human dignity of every individual and of all people," the Polish president also said.

Speaking about the Ukraine crisis, President Komorowski remarked that it had long lost the character of a bilateral regional conflict. "It has become a challenge for the entire continent, for the entire western world," the president said.

"We would like to see Russia as a partner of the broadly perceived West. And that is why its current politics is a deep disappointment to us and a challenge," President Komorowski said.

According to the Polish president, problems of security - including energy security, defence of citizens against terror attacks, protection of territorial integrity of states that are close to us and the necessity to strengthen one's own defence - are the problems that are growing more difficult today.

"Germany and Poland should today give an example of how to overcome a difficult history and build a safe Europe for the next generations and for the future," President Komorowski stressed.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel commented later on Wednesday that it was a great honour for the German parliament that President Komorowski had addressed it in connection with the 75th anniversary of a war that Germany had started. She called his words proof that "deep changes for the better are possible if we are prepared to learn from the past."

The German parliament's special session commemorating the 75th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II was attended by German President Joachim Gauck, Chancellor Angela Merkel and Bundesrat Chairman Stephan Weil.

President Komorowski was the first Polish president to speak in the Bundestag.

On September 1 President Gauck took part in the World War II anniversary observances at Westerplatte in Gdansk.

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