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Interview and Discussion with Andrzej Olechowski

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Discussion with Polish Minister Andrzej Olechowski about his life and Poland in the 1990s.

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Visions of Europe - Andrzej Olechowski

Dr. Sergey Radchenko: Minister Olechowski, thank you for joining this Zoom session, which is a part of a Wilson Center project on Europe and world transformation in the 1990s. You held a number of increasingly prominent positions in the Polish government during the long '90s, including, in 1993 - '95, the portfolio of the Foreign Minister of Poland. You thus have unique insights into this period, which we're very happy to have you share with us today. Let me briefly introduce myself. My name is Sergey Radchenko. I'm Professor of International Relations at Cardiff University in Wales, and joining me today are Margaret Gnoiska, Associate Professor of History at Troy University in Alabama, and Marek Hańderek, who's Assistant Professor in the Institute of Middle and Far East of Uniwersytet Jagielloński - and he's also a researcher at the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw. So welcome, everyone. And with this, I would like to give the floor to Margaret, who will pose the first question.

Dr. Malgorzata Gnoiska: Here I have the privilege of starting, so thank you so much. Thank you, Minister Olechowski, for joining us this evening. My question may be a little bit personal in the beginning. You were born right after World War Two and you grew up in communist Poland. Can you please share with our viewers a little bit about your childhood and your life as an adult? And how did that experience shape your view of Poland's place in the Cold War but especially in the post-Cold War Europe?

Minister Andrzej Olechowski: Okay, you know, my mother came from Galicia and my father from Warsaw, so these were two different parts of Poland, one under Austria during the partition and one under Russia. My Galician family was heavily, heavily hurt by Germans and communists, and my stepfather and my mother were killed by communists. She was herself in a concentration camp in Ravensbrück. And so that's the background here. On my father's side, he and a number of his brothers - he had seven brothers - fought in the Second World War, but [they were] more related to Russia because my father was much older than my mother, so he was, in fact, born when Warsaw was still in Russia. And they were - they were not hostile - but they were cool on Russia. And they treated the Germans as the other soldiers. So, there was less of this extermination, more of the fighting with the Germans. Both families were very anti-communist. Both of my parents were educated. My mother was a pharmacist, my father was an engineer. And they were educated enough to see the difference... the difference with the pre-war, the difference with what was happening in the world... Radio Free Europe was often on in our apartment, and so on. I personally was a rock-and-roller. So, life was difficult in that sense that new records were difficult to get, new songs were very difficult to get, in fact... I didn't feel oppressed or anything like that. Until 1968. So, I was 21. I participated in Warsaw student protests, so there were two layers of '68. One was the anti-Semitic party thing and developments around that. And the other was the student protest, and those student protests were about freedom of speech and, you know, student issues.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Right.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: So, I was involved in that. I was, in fact, relegated from the university, then from the Central School of Planning and Statistics, to...then I returned after a year but, anyway, '68 somehow made me politically aware... and interested in politics. Before, I couldn't care less. Rock & roll was everything I could care about.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: I want to ask something in this connection, actually. '68 was also a very important moment for future Russian reformers. So, people who eventually were a part of Gorbachev's team, for example, they're even called a generation of the shestidesyatniki, and people who lived through the '60s, of course, were impacted deeply by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Do you relate to this kind of people?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: I do. You know, Europeans, Western Europeans and Americans, I guess, when you mention '68, they think about Paris student protests, which were...well, there were some similarities. But this was a different story. In our countries that was different. That was the time that my generation and Russian generation...Prague...I remember vividly the moment that I learned about the invasion of Czechoslovakia. All that made a strong impression on us.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Anyone has a follow up question?

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Goshka, I think it's up to you. I think you've got the next question.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Yeah, I just wanted to say that I'm on a personal note, we're fellow Galicians. I grew up in Nowi Sącz, and my dad was also part of a rock & roll band that he started with his friends, called The Glitters. So, it was based on the Beatles, but I can - and I can also relate to when you were talking about trying to get hold of records, how it was very, very difficult. So sometimes they just played one over and over, right? But I think it has to do with... I guess, what your experience shows is that openness to the West... there are ways of getting things from the West and the young people, like yourself, were exposed to some Western aspects of pop culture at that time.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Yeah, there was no intent of protest or anything like this. But because... we were so keen on that, we were, in fact, starting to live separate lives. You know, we were different from our colleagues who were in the Organization of Socialist Youth and things like that. So, we were starting, as I said, we started to differ, to diverge.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: By the way, it's very interesting that you mentioned that '68 is such an important, real breaking point for people of your generation, and not, say, '56. Of course, '56, that's, that's much earlier, so that's maybe a different generation.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: He's too young, probably, right? Excuse me-

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: But does '56 mean anything to you at all in this context?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: I was nine years old in '56, which was an important event for my parents. I do remember '56, mind you, because I lived in the very center of Warsaw, [in the] next, sort of next building from the Warsaw University, facing the Three Crosses Square, and there were student demonstrations, and they were also collecting blood and money to help to help the Hungarians. I didn't - I couldn't contribute my blood, I was just too small, didn't have enough of that, but I remember I had contributed some - a coin that I had, I didn't have money or anything, but I did contribute to that. So, but it was... you know, [I] was [a] kid. It had no political impact.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Thank you, very, very enlightening. So, we're going to fast forward a little bit to the 1990s. Before you were appointed Foreign Minister in the new government of Waldemar Pawlak in 1993, you held a position as the Minister of Finance in 1992. Could you tell us a bit about the experience of working for international organizations like the World Bank, United Nations, but also your participation in 1989 Round Table discussions? How did that shape your economic vision of post-Cold War Poland? And did you share that vision with Prime Minister Jan Olszewski?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: The work that I was doing in UNCTAD before World Bank, and then the World Bank, which was, in both institutions, it was focused on trade protection[ism], on liberalizing international trade. And I had, I was a full-time researcher at that time, I published in economic journals, but I also participated in World Bank missions in Africa and Latin American countries to help them sort out their trade policies. Okay, so that gave me a huge experience in terms of both and this it helped me to understand economics better... (I know what you're asking, I'll

come back to that) ...but also to experience the making of trade policies. They vote on international agreements in multilateral negotiations, and so on and so forth.

Well, anyway, I came out from that as a staunch believer in the free market, and free international trade. And I remain so, and I regret, of course, what is happening nowadays, but that's a different story. With that sort of experience, baggage, knowledge, I came back to Poland to a position that, it sounds funny, because I was...I returned to Poland in 1987. And I was the only living Pole who had worked in World Bank and returned, and therefore, I was the only person that could be really of help in developing Polish relations with World Bank, because Poland, at that time, decided to rejoin the World Bank.

So I've run I've run the so-called World Bank office in National Bank of Poland, Central Bank of Poland. Then I moved to, to what I knew, really, that is, to Minister of Foreign Trade, where I negotiated the first-ever economic agreement between Poland and European communities. At that time, it was not yet the European Union. Which was the first international agreement that had been signed by the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Before, I was chief negotiator of that agreement. And I hung on, I stayed in Minister of Foreign Trade, as well... For some time, I was the Governor of the Central Bank and then I was the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade. From that, I got an offer, or a request, from Prime Minister Olszewski to join his cabinet, where he had massive problems with finance and with the ministry. Why Olszewski, who was a socialist, would want to have a free market as his finance minister? It is because he was very conscious of the importance of Polish relations with the IMF. And these relations at that time were frozen. The program that we were implementing was sort of in a stalemate and relations were frozen. So, my main task was to revive this program and these relations, which I did.

And perhaps the answer to your question is that when I returned from Washington with this result, I got a standing ovation from the government of Jan Olszewski. Things sometimes were different than described today. But that was the point, that was apparent. And it was, to some extent, because of me. It was, well, partly because of me. But it was so fortunate that he thought it was important that I was able to do it, because at that time, more or less, the growth started to reemerge in [Poland], and what Poland needed in such a situation - hugely, enormously - was debt relief, but also some credibility with international investors on international markets and so on and so on.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOJSKA: And then with the shock therapy, also, the effects of the shock therapy, right? I mean, we're talking about 1992, 1993. So...

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Yeah. So, we were able to sustain this growth. And until probably this quarter, in 2020, the economy in Poland never went back. We didn't have even one quarter of recession since my watch in 1992.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Which is, you know, in many ways, I find remarkable. It's such a different story to what was happening in Russia at the same time. You know, you have the same kind of prescriptions that were proposed by the IMF, by international institutions. You had a reformist-minded government, you have people like [Yegor] Gaidar and Boris Fyodorov, who was Minister of Finance, but the Russian version of shock therapy was, in many ways, quite disastrous for the population. I wonder what accounts for this, for this difference?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: It was...it was hard for the Poles as well. But it was relatively short, okay? So, we're talking about the real bad time - [that] was '90-'91. There were two things - Poles had a huge, enormous confidence in the government of Mazowiecki. You know, if Mazowiecki told us to go and, I don't know, walk into the Baltic Sea, we would have done it. He was a true leader. Hugely, hugely. He lost it very quickly, but at that time, he was, yeah... That economic liberalization adjustment, bringing, you know, the transformation from socialism to free market had

also the umbrella of [Lech] Wałęsa. Wałęsa was the president, and his instinct was always capitalist, free market instinct, you know? And you wake him up at night and ask: what is better, state enterprise or private enterprises, he says "private."

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: It's private?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: That was his way of thinking. Simple. No, no sort of sophisticated arguments, when needed, he... And we politicians at that time - I was not a politician, I didn't count myself as a politician - but politicians, or people who were making reforms, were presenting it as their own decision, their own jobs, not trying to blame IMF and saying "we have to do it because of IMF" or anything like this. Poland, and historians should somehow study that a little bit more, [it] was an example of a successful transformation. And I believe that the fact that the governing politicians at that time were not trying to blame the IMF, had a lot to do with it.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Not to monopolize, and I know we have so many other topics, but could you explain a little bit why Poland had such a difficult relationship with the IMF? It had to do with the martial law?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: That it had a difficult...

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: With the earlier imposition of the martial law? Right, in the 1980s?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: That's why-

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: So, Poland's relationship with the IMF was very difficult.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Oh, no, no, no, no, we- Yeah, that's fine, but we have started the program with IMF in 1989 or 1990, perhaps. But then things became complicated with the political instability. And, in fact, at the end of his tenure, [Leszek] Balcerowicz was unable to meet the criteria that the IMF was expecting Poland to meet. So, things were sort of falling apart and that's why the program was proposed. So, there was an expectation of some radicals and people who just thought differently in parliament that the Olszewski government would sort of kill that thing, okay, but Olszewski, Olszewski... when you read about Olszewski and his advisors, they were extremely conscious of the importance of an international setting for Poland, for security and for economy, okay? So, they thought that, and rightly so, that IMF program has to be rescued because that will bring credibility to this country.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Excellent. Thank you for this clarification.

Dr. Marek Hańderek: Minister Olechowski, my first question concerns very important issue for Poland in the early 1990s. That was the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Because when the Cold War ended, 60,000 Soviet troops were stationed in Poland. The Polish government initiated negotiations regarding the withdrawal of these troops in December 1990. And the last Soviet soldier left Poland in September 1993. Some Polish historians and politicians claim that Poland should have started negotiations earlier, just as Hungarians or Czechoslovaks. Do you agree with these opinions? And the other part of my question is: is it true that Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki didn't want to initiate negotiations with the Soviets until the signing of the German-Polish border treaty in November 1990?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: I don't know. I was... you need to, you need to know that I have worked my long days, strictly in the economic field. I did participate in meetings of the Mazowiecki cabinet, in some of those meetings, as the deputy

governor of Central Bank, but these were mostly on points relating to economy and economic situations. I can't tell you what he [was] thinking. However, if I were his advisor at that time with my current knowledge of things, I would probably, at that time and now, I would advise him to do exactly what he did. The Poles... have a complex on this sort of "two enemies" situation of being squeezed between Germany and Russia. So, you can do things more boldly, with more confidence, if you're on good terms with at least one side, but you don't do...you don't open negotiations at the same time with two sides. So, he, I don't know if he was thinking like that, but I would have advised him to do that. I don't think... Poland was also in a different situation than Czechoslovakia and Hungary because the Russians, Russian troops in East Germany had to somehow get home and not through Czechoslovakia or Hungary, but through Poland. So, I don't think that the earlier negotiations would have been so sufficiently successful or so successful as, finally, they were. I vividly remember being at the courtyard of Belweder Palace on the [day of the] symbolic farewell to Russian troops in Poland, where the small contingent of Russians paraded in front of President Wałęsa, and General [Viktor] Dubynin, who was the last commander of Russian - of Soviet troops in Poland - a very impressive general, by the way. He sort of reported the departure up there, but [it was a] historical event, you know. Kaczyński was always saying that Poland had foreign troops on its soil for 250 years, you know?

DR. MAREK HAŃDEREK: Yes. So now, let me skip to late 1993, when you became Foreign Minister. What did you see as the key priorities in Poland's foreign policy?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Strategically, there were two, shared by a great number of Poles, but as we'll discover later, not by all. It was the membership in NATO and European Union. European Union was unquestionable, basically. Well, no. We'll develop this point. But anyway, so that was the strategy. Simple. But not easy to achieve. Tactically, if you want - and talking about sort of current affairs - I was very much involved in developing Weimar triangle which was forum for meetings of Poles, French, and Germans. And that was, from our point of view, a way of overturning what happens in European communities, and telling them and explaining to them our problems and our achievements and so on.

And I remember two of those meetings, we were holding them every year. Also, presidents were meeting prime ministers and so on. I was also developing the Visegrád triangle at that time. These were Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians, which was an interesting venture, because this... We were not exactly friends in every area, but these were three of the post-communist countries that were set on a course to join the European Union and NATO. So that differed us from others who either were against or were hesitating, and... my other thing was to develop, to advance relations with Eastern neighbors. My predecessor, Minister Skubiszewski, was, in some sense, a gift of God. Because, you know, at the beginning of a republic, we could have gotten anybody as a foreign minister. What about Macierewicz, for example, okay. Somebody who would be a radical revolutionary.

[Bells toll to mark the hour]

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: It will be seven times, okay.

[Bells stop]

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: And Minister Skubiszewski's hobby was to draft international agreements. That's fantastic. So, he set up, he had signed a good... not "project," how do you say... agreements on neighborhood relations with all the countries with the exception of Lithuania. Lithuania was tough. The Lithuanians were insisting, for example, given the history, I understand them perfectly, but the Lithuanians were insisting on saying, in international bilateral agreement, that Vilnius

is the capital of Lithuania. We were saying, "But listen, if you wanted to change it, and it's your capital, you'll have to ask us for permission because this is what we've signed," and they said, "well, we will take this risk willingly." I remember when we eventually signed this agreement with the Lithuanian minister, I was so moved that for the only time in my life I spoke with some verse, you know. So that was an important event for me. And we have learned, and I have learned at that event only, that Minister [Povilas] Gylys spoke Polish. I didn't realize he did, nobody knew. Even over our secret services unit.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: And he was not a Polish minority, right?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: No, not at all, not at all. He was an economist, I think, actually Professor of Economics, and he learned Polish because he wanted to have access to literature, which was much more difficult to get in Lithuania than in Poland. So that was... we have also Ukrainians, at the time, Byelorussians, regaining their independence, and Russians. I took a lot of care of trying to repair, if you want, to develop relations with Russians. I was the author, I believe, of the only plan that was ever announced in Poland which I have, [which I have reviewed, and in a speech to the Polish senate, of energizing and building up relations with Russia.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: If I may follow on that, since you touched on Russia. What were the key challenges of relations with Russia for you when you became Foreign Minister? What were the problems of this relationship?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: You know, the problem with us Poles is that we never had a good framework to think about Russia. So, the only policy that we ever had would be for Russia to vanish, you know, because we never had a vision of relations with Russia that would make us and Russians happy, okay, that would make Russia an asset rather than the problem, or whatever. Now, at that time, I was blessed to work with a government which was unique in Russian history, I would say in a certain sense, because these were liberal people, you remember, with these very great ideas of "one Europe from, from-

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Vancouver to Vladivostok.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: I was very, I was very optimistic at that time, truly. So, the problem, as we saw it, was the instability coming from Russia, not the Russian government. We were not fearing the Russian government. We were fearing developments in Russia that would be- that would happen despite the Russian government or because of some fractions and things like that. But it was... We were not afraid of the Russians. When I was a finance minister in the Olszewski government, this was... about 1992... early 1992, which was the end of a disastrous winter in Russia. '91 was disastrous, and people were really worrying that the Russians will suffer from hunger at that time. So, what do we do? And on my request, which was very welcome, the government also made a small allocation, small provision of money for help - humanitarian - to join efforts to help the Russians at that time, so the mood was, you know, it's not so long ago, but the mood was completely different.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: It's interesting, you know, I was reading materials that have now become available in the United States in the Clinton library that recount your conversation with American counterparts, also, Lech Wałęsa's conversations with American counterparts, with Clinton, for example, and what comes across very clearly in those conversations is every time there's a discussion with the Americans in the early 1990s about Russia, then, you know, the Polish leadership would say things like: well, we have to take advantage of this historic opportunity to draw Poland into the West because Russia will turn bad. You know, there's almost like a fatalistic element to it, that Russia is going off the rails, we have to move quickly to join NATO,

or else. Do you think this was, in a way, an exaggeration to get the Americans to move on the question of NATO membership? Or did you really feel this way about Russia, that it was going off the rails?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: They felt strongly about the fact that we were in what was called at that time a security vacuum. We have reemerged as a country, a sovereign country, and we were not anchored anywhere, okay? And there were people who were suggesting that we should stay neutral and so on, being a country in the middle. I was saying, you know, the country of Middle Kingdom is China, not Poland. Poland has to be anchored somewhere, cannot be just [sit] loose on this big Central European plain. I remember the Russian Chief of Administration in President Yeltsin's administration who - I believe that was in Munich - was saying that that Central Europe is the bridge to the West, and it has to stay open.

I stood up, I said, "Look, this bridge has a name. Its name is Poland. It cannot be treated this way." So, there were voices like that.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: But presumably you also did not want to be a bridge, because you know, why would Central Europe or Poland specifically want to be a bridge?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Not the bridge. But wait. When- I thought it is important to explain to the public in Russia and Ukraine and Belarus, what we are thinking. So, I wrote an article at that time, which was published in all those three countries. When I was explaining that our purpose... what we're trying to achieve is not to cross the line, but to move the line. And jokingly, but we were talking with [Andrei] Kozyrev, who was my colleague at that time... We were saying, he was saying, he was telling me, "Don't rush, we'll both join NATO." I said, "Andrey, look, you know, it's going to be difficult for you. You're a big guy. Let me let me join that first. And, you know, make some movement." But I was truly serious, when I wrote that I believe - and I believed at that time - that by joining NATO and European Union, Poland would get would give some Slavic features to the institutions. You must remember that perhaps, these things were naïve. This thinking was naïve at the time, but the mood in European politics was that of great optimism about basically one system, one ideology. But to answer your question then: the dates are important. Things were so nice and so optimistic until [Vladimir] Zhirinovsky got to the parliament. Zhirinovsky was a big-

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: That's December, December 1993, is when his party got the highest number of votes.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: So, Zhirinovsky was dramatic... Zhirinovsky's success was a dramatic wake-up call that things are not determined to go the way I've described. So, when you read these conversations, note the dates, okay? Because it may be - that will be my bet...

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: I think it's very, very interesting. I think what you're talking about is exactly correct. This is actually confirmed by the documents. Once you have Zhirinovsky, who was elected in December 1993, you've got a very shrill rhetoric coming from Moscow and from Parliament. And that, I think, definitely affects views in Central Europe, in Poland, I'm sure as well, but also in the United States.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: And also United States, and that was the fear of that instability coming. It was not fear of Russia suddenly invading us or anything like this, but you know, Russia being... It's not going this way, it will go some other way. But what way it's going to be, we don't know. You know, we don't know who's going to... So in such a case, you need to have... Your appetite for security is bigger than before, okay.

42:31

DR. MAREK HAŃDEREK: I would like to ask you now about President Wałęsa and his vision of security policy because [you] closely cooperated with him in the early 1990s. And before Poland officially announced its willingness to join NATO, in March 1992, President Wałęsa presented his idea of creating the so-called NATO-bis, consisting of former Soviet satellite states in Europe. [Did] anyone in Poland and abroad treat this vision seriously, according to your knowledge? And, of course...

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Well, I tell you, I love President Wałęsa, but not all his initiatives. I think he was... he's one of the greatest men I've ever met in terms of his achievements, and in terms of some of his instincts... It was not very clever. It was not seriously discussed anywhere. However, you need to remember that it was in the mood, in the framework of discussions... If the candidates for these institutions - NATO, EU - should be somehow prepared inside or outside of the thing. So, first, you sort of grow up, and then you will be admitted, or we'll get you in, and we will help you grow up, okay? So that was the idea of NATO-bis that was supposed to be a - not yet NATO - but some sort of a federation. But no, it was never developed.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Right, you mentioned that Poland needed to be anchored somewhere, right. Like, within NATO, for example. So, it seems that the Polish government was kind of ready to push for that initiative. But can you recall any opposing voices, any serious opposing voices among the political elites? And did you have any misgivings about the actual process? And what I really have in mind is the Partnership for Peace, based on some of the discussions you had with the [US] Secretary [of State] Warren [Christopher]... I mean, you were really looking for the road to membership as opposed to just a road through the partnership. I'd like to have you recall the 1994 conversations, if possible.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Yes. The Partnership for Peace was a disappointing concept for us. So, our... we were striving for the avenue, for a road plan to get to NATO. And I remember vividly when the delegation came with Madeleine Albright. General Shalikashvili and Charles - what was his name - Gati.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Charles Gati, the Hungarian.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Yeah, to sell Partnership for Peace to Mr. Wałęsa.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Just to mention, and this is January 1994.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Yeah. Early January, I think, right?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: And when they finished the meeting, Mrs Albright called me and said they would like to meet for a drink, and they were visibly shaken by the reaction of President Wałęsa. And I remember - and she remembers that as well because we spoke about it in Warsaw a year ago. She said, "Listen, we are not people of Central European descent. We are from Central Europe. Shadi, myself, and Charles, and this is what we- this is the best we can get nowadays, and if Wałęsa stands up, goes to kill it, if Wałęsa goes against this thing publicly, he will kill the program. And there's nothing, there's nothing behind, you know? So, do something about it. What shall we do? How we can work on that?" We did work. I did work on Mr. Wałęsa, and eventually we met with President Clinton in Prague at the meeting with the countries of the region.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: The Visegrád [meeting].

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: When we were flying there, I didn't know what he

was going to say. And he would not repeat what he was going to say. Eventually, it was a bit of a theater, well, a show: he came to the microphone and said, "It's a small step, but in a right direction." And then I saw Clinton - but Ambassador [Daniel] Fried says that after these discussions, Clinton came back. I don't know, you'll need to verify with him, of course, but ... he said quite recently (maybe he has written it somewhere). He [Wałęsa] came back to Tony Lake, [Clinton's] national [security] advisor, and said, "No, it doesn't sell, this thing, you have to come up with something better for me, okay?" So that was the beginning of our tough work of implementing in reality the idea that security of Central Europe is material for the United States. Okay. So that was the line. And I remember also my meetings meeting later on with Tony Lake, who, when I was saying partnership is fine in good times, what about bad times? [He would say:] "oh, bad times we can-" I said, "no, I have witnessed number of NATO meetings where I could see that if something was happening, European countries, particularly the smaller ones, were very scared." So, I said, "It's not going to work." Membership is the only solution that will make us confident and therefore less of a risk for everybody. And it will [improve] United States security also. And then I understand that, also, the work started on developing... I don't remember the time, but it was during a UN session in New York. I met with Strobe Talbott and Dick Holbrooke in the Waldorf Astoria, and they said they were working on a plan. And I said, "I hope you're serious. And you will not, later on, tell me that you couldn't do it because Luxembourg was against us, and I think that Strobe said, "You must be kidding," and so on and so on... It's my personal view, I think this was it. Then the rest was practical implementation of the acceptance by United States. The principal idea that security of this region is important for the United States.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Just a very quick one about opposing voices, did you-

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: And you know what was the reaction, Sergey, you know what was the reaction of Kozyrev?

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: I would love to know that.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: No, no, he gave an interview... a long time after he... sometime after he resigned but that was when Poland was joining, or no, maybe before the final decisions were announced that Poland is to join and stuff, and he was asked, "What do you think about it, how did that happen?" And he said, "I was always telling the Kremlin that if you piss against the wind, don't complain that your pants are wet."

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: It's interesting, though, you know, during that time, during that time in '93 - '94, Kozyrev would tell the Americans, Strobe Talbott and others, he would say, "well, do not enlarge NATO, because if you do, people like me will be overthrown, then you will have some hardliners who will come, etc." And this, in fact, is one of the main reasons why the Americans were so reluctant and so edgy when the Central Europeans and Eastern Europeans were pushing this agenda.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: My, my sort of my sort of assessment of Andrei Kozyrev was that he was, at heart he was a good democrat, and a zapadnik, pro-Western modernizer. He put it this way. However, he was Foreign Minister. He also was representing his country. So, he would make... remember his, where was it, Helsinki speech, where he showed-

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: A big speech that he made, yeah.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: That...to me, he was... At one stage, he said, you know, in an informal conversation, when he was asking, "why do you want..." He said, "And what if we and the Germans would give you a sort of cross security

guarantees?" I said, "Andrei, you don't want to do that with the Germans now... you know, after all these experiences from the past, you don't want to come up with a program like that... You're kidding, you are pulling out Germany from European Union. This is crazy." So, there were- he was searching, wavering. But he made a great contribution to our task. Russia under his stewardship, Russia had never proposed an alternative, didn't come up with some form of initiative, which would be very difficult for us to cope with. Because when the big neighbor comes up with some proposals, you have to respond. You cannot just say no, I'm not interested in talking about it. But that never, that has never been done by Russian Foreign Ministry. By the way, in my two-year tenure, I don't think I had a formal round of talks with Andrey. We met at least twice for in-depth talks, but they were both informal. I once came to Russia because ambassador had a good idea of opening a dining room with a good Polish cook. So, he invited Kozyrev and myself to that event, and we had a good chat. So, I had a good chat with him in Kraków. But I never had a delegation to delegation [talks], him visiting or [me] visiting Moscow. No.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: I guess I'm moving from the Russians to the Americans now for a few minutes. If you recall the visit of President Clinton in July of 1994, he gave this really big presidential address, which seemed very important for the Polish parliament. Do you recall that speech? And do you think, as some say, that it just kind of offered a lot of hope, but nothing really concrete? And can you comment a little bit more about US-Polish relations at that time, especially maybe as pertaining to NATO, but any other aspects as well?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: I don't remember the speech very well. I remember the visit. And I remember my meetings with Warren Christopher at that time. And I also remember, of course, I remember President Clinton as an imperial, but very warm, person, so. That was good stuff, he has done a lot-

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Did you say imperial?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Well, he was...

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: That's what I thought I heard, right.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: It's interesting what you mean by that. Did he-

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: He has a, he had a status, you know? Very... Well, he was a sizable man at that time, also. Anyway. We were at that stage. We were not disappointed, in fact, he did what was expected from the visiting leaders from the West. Because we were not inviting, or discouraging, people who were not willing to say that Poland will be, in future, [a part of] Western structures... But that was...where was he? In '94, what was the time, or the month?

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: That was July 1994.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: July. So, it was still the Partnership for Peace, and so on and so on. And we were yet before this breakthrough decision, that membership is the...

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: And would you say the US-Polish relations were on a good kind of standing, or was there still fear of the betrayal, perhaps?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: No.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: That they can just leave...

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: No, no, no, no, there was none. No. I, you know, I like Americans. I feel well in America. I spent a couple of years in America so that...

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: But just to follow up on what Goshka is saying now, this fear of betrayal you see very clearly in the US, on the US side, in the documents, this notion that the Americans will have another Yalta and basically sell [out] the Polish and the rest of Central and Eastern European countries. How real was this fear?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: I don't think there was such a... I didn't have such a feeling at all. That's completely strange to me, what you're saying. We knew we have to present our case. [We knew we'll have to do some work. I was very impressed, and I'll remember it forever when I had some dinner discussions with some senior Americans, and these were mostly military and so on, and one of them said, "Look, you know, what is important is that you are aware that NATO is like a group of ducks. And you know, if you want to join it, you have to look like a duck, you know, you cannot be a goose, you cannot be anything else, you have to be a duck. So, there is a work to do." So, we were aware that the military, would have to also be convinced that they will be able to discharge the responsibilities and so on. So, there is work. So, at that time we were not disappointed by empty political declarations because that was what was going on. We had people who knew America very well and were helping us, like Zbig Brzezinski, like [Jan] Nowak-Jeziorański. These were very helpful. I had, for example, enormous help from [Henry] Kissinger. Kissinger was never keen on a quick enlargement of NATO or anything like that, but he was very helpful, particularly in the republican establishment and so on. We had a very able ambassador [Jerzy] Koźmiński, in Washington, who was working in... He was my pick. He was working on the Congress and the Senate. And we were gaining individual issue after issue and document after document, also opening the way for the Czechs, Hungarians and others who were tactically following us. So, there was I don't remember... Oh, I knew that I wanted to say something. Americans have done a tremendous job, tremendous work with our debt... So that established very much the... For that, we were extremely grateful. We would never be able to emancipate so quickly if we didn't get that debt relief. And people from the Treasury, the US Treasury, were really hardworking on that. Convincing the Europeans was one thing, convincing the Japanese was, you know, a bloody job, and yet they did it.

DR. MAREK HAŃDEREK: In order to somehow sum up our discussion, I would like to ask you a general question. Do you believe that Poland's foreign policy in the 1990s achieved its main goals?

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: I think so. I'm proud I was part of it. I think it was... Firstly, it represented, a consensus of people at that time. So, that made this job easier than otherwise. But it was well-structured, as I said, the convincing of the Americans that it is their interest. That our security is related to... that their security is related to ours was the right way of presenting this issue. And it was, I think, reasonably well-executed in direct discussions with the Americans and with the Europeans as well. [And we are in NATO, we are in the European Union. And so that was the...NATO came more or less as expected, NATO membership. European Union membership came much later than I expected. I thought that 2000 would be the deadline for our waiting, but it was four years more.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Well, on this very hopeful note, I just wanted to thank you once again, I think I will speak for our entire team in just saying how fascinating this discussion was. I personally found it extremely interesting and would like to thank you very much for sharing your insights.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: And thank you for inviting me, and good luck with

your research and your work. Thank you.

DR. MALGORZATA GNOISKA: Thank you, pleasure speaking with you, thank you.

MINISTER ANDRZEJ OLECHOWSKI: Bye.