

SPEECH BY MR ZBIGNIEW GNIATKOWSKI, AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND
ON THE OCCASION OF THE POLAND'S INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS
Auckland, Europe House, 29 November 2018

*Good Evening, Dobry wieczór, Tēnā koutou.
Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends, Szanowni Państwo,*

I would like to warmly welcome you all. I want to acknowledge the members of the Polish Community with the representatives of the Polish Associations in Auckland. Thank you Mr Boguslaw Nowak, the Polish Honorary Consul in Auckland for your efforts to organize tonight's event.

It is a very special moment for the Polish people to celebrate the Centenary of Poland's regained Independence. In November 1918, when the entire world was celebrating the Armistice Day, the end of the Great War, Poland regained its independence, after 123 years of absence on European political maps. On the 11th of November 1918 Józef Piłsudski, founder of Polish legions who came back from German prison one day earlier, was appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Forces. Before, when Poland was divided between the neighbours, in the difficult time of persecution, my compatriots always cherished the idea of an independent Poland. Also those who fled their homeland being under oppression; among them were the Polish early settlers who arrived in NZ in the 1870s. Following the end of the Great War, Poles began to create the institutions of an independent state. Despite the human and material losses, which are difficult to estimate, the challenging process of shaping the borders and political systems of the reborn Republic had begun.

However, a new episode in Polish history – of sovereignty and rebuilt – was too short, as we know from history. Even though Poland ended the WW2 on the winning side and was re-established as a state, it fell under the influence of the Soviet Union and was forced to communism as its political system with a satellite government, strongly dependant on Moscow. (...) 29 years ago, when thanks to the Polish Solidarity movement the communism in Central-Eastern Europe was over, we regained once again our sovereignty. Following the years of transformation, in 1999 we joined NATO, in 2004 - the EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year marks 45 years of the diplomatic relations between Poland and New Zealand. However (...) our official cooperation began earlier. In 1941 the Consulate-General of Poland was established in Wellington by the Polish Government-in-Exile in London. (...)

When we remember Consul Wodzicki and his wife Maria we refer to their role in arrival of the Polish children, later known as the Pahiatua's Children. (...) Besides the brotherhood-in-arms among New Zealand and Polish soldiers, in the Battle of Britain and at Monte Cassino, the invitation of a large group of Polish children who survived Siberia was one of the most significant chapters in Polish - New Zealand close relations.

After forty-five years of official diplomatic relations between Poland and New Zealand, the relationship is in good shape - politically, economically and culturally, as well as through people-to-people links.

In August 2018, we witnessed the first official visit of a Polish head of state to New Zealand. Poland and New Zealand share the same values of freedom, democracy and good governance, respect for international law and a rules-based system. The President's visit was

of great importance to the Polish Community, with its distinguished members recognised with state decorations and the “Polish Children – Polskie Dzieci” Square inaugurated in central Wellington. The visit also served to further foster our bilateral relations, providing a great opportunity to discuss current challenges such as security. The Leaders’ focused on Poland’s activities in the United Nations Security Council as well as climate policy and the upcoming COP24 to be held in Poland in December; political and trade relations between Poland and New Zealand were also discussed. Several bilateral agreements were signed in the presence of the Polish President and the New Zealand Prime Minister. The meeting with the business community highlighted our common interest in trade relations, expected to triple up to NZD 500 million this year. In time of peace we can focus on building our prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many times in history, our nations defended universal values of freedom and independence. Our common history was often marked by Polish migrants coming to New Zealand in search of a better life. Many Poles escaped from communism imposed on Poland and in the early 1980s when the communists crushed the “Solidarity” freedom movement. (...) In the globalized world, Polish nationals, highly qualified and professionals, continue to travel, and some choose to settle in New Zealand. Their contribution to the development of a new home country has always been highly appreciated.

It is vital to preserve the historic achievements of the founding generations of New Zealand’s Polish communities. Moreover current generations must forge new connections with today’s Poland (...).

It is always great to be together with the vibrant Polish Community in Auckland, with people who are proud of their Polish heritage. I want to thank you all. Special thanks to the Polish Associations who together with our Honorary Consul organise various events and support the Polish Embassy.

Thank you for your kind attention.