



RADOSLAW SIKORSKI

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland

I would like to say how pleased I am to be in such excellent company on this panel. Minister Védrine was instrumental in bringing Poland into the EU and Professor Kaiser's view from outside the EU currently, spatially speaking, is very important. Personally, I felt myself to be European as well as Polish when I was living in Washington and it is the view from outside that helps.

Commissioner Almunia has procedures in train that affect Polish companies, but I would like to tell him what a hero we think he is for finally proving that the European Commission is capable of policing the rules of the free market with respect not just to Microsoft but also to Gazprom. What he is possibly going to do will be a revolution in gas prices in Europe. When we were raising these issues of energy security five or seven years ago we were greeted with scepticism. Now, we have a combination of Commissioner Oettinger, who is helping to build the physical interconnectors within Europe and the legal challenge to some market-skewing practices and is already lowering gas prices in Europe. This has the capacity to help us re-industrialise and, as we know, low gas prices in the United States are helping the United States to come out of this depression. I would therefore like him to know that he has admirers and support in Europe.

As regards Poland and the euro, you are right that we have declared that we want to join. However, it is more than that. In our admission treaty, we are actually obliged by law to join, and I will tell you more. We are actually members of the European monetary union; we are just not a member of the third stage, which is to say that we have not yet issued the coins and the bank notes. The timing and rate of exchange are the two things that remain.

However, I think that it is useful in a discussion to be frank and I will tell you that we are – how shall I put this diplomatically? – angry that the eurozone has been mismanaged so badly over the last few years. Five years ago, we had 80% consensus in Poland for joining the eurozone. In other words, we could have joined without paying a political price. We now have 30% support for joining, which means that as politicians we will have to expend significant political capital on a course of action whose outcome is uncertain in terms of our advantage. Marek Belka, the President of the Polish National Bank and former Prime Minister, is here and he will be much more informative than I on the conditions that we feel need to be met on the eurozone side for us to be convinced that we can join safely. As a politician, I have already made the argument in the Polish Parliament that for political reasons it is useful for us to join because we want to be at the core of Europe and among the decision makers. I think that we are moving to systems where the eurozone will be at the crossroads of all the circles of integration, with the eurozone, the Schengen group and then perhaps a defence union.

I would like to say something about that as a former Defence Minister and I have given it a lot of thought. During our Presidency of the EU, we did our best to push the defence agenda forward. We proposed a letter of five and had a minor success in activating the European Operations Centre. However, where we failed was in going further in creating a joint headquarters and just going further generally. The reason for this – and I do not blame them for it – is because we know that there are important domestic considerations for which the United Kingdom is simply unable to join this closer integration.

However, if the eurozone shows us how dangerous it is to break treaties then we should watch out for this one. In fact, the Lisbon Treaty stipulates and gives a timetable for creating a defence union and we are already in breach of the Treaty. By now, we should have launched permanent structured cooperation in the area of defence, and we have not done it. When you break treaties bad things happen. I completely agree with Professor Kaiser in that we cannot always count on the United States. The United States will be engaged in Asia and will possibly have to cut down on defence and there may be crises in Europe's vicinity in which we might have to act. If again we do not have the institutional instruments to act, as we did not have when the eurozone crisis hit, we will be in trouble.



10 EU Foreign Ministers have proposed a vision of how to go further on integration and anyone can look up the documents so I will not go into the details. However, let me just pick up on a couple of points that were mentioned and finish with that. One point was about borders and their relevance. The way that I think this works is that we can maintain our Schengen freedoms securely provided that we strengthen the external border more effectively than hitherto has been the case. I do not think that the penny has yet dropped in some member states that there is a difference between citizens of other member states who move around the European Union, which is not actually immigration. They just come in search of opportunity. For example, we have the Poles – and this is actually one of the arguments for the euro. If you remember, the argument against the euro was the lack of mobility of labour, but there is actually mobility of labour. Poles are moving to Britain and to Germany to a certain extent now, and many of them are returning home. This is therefore not migration. The real migration is from outside the European Union and here Poland is the seat of the Frontex agency and has one of the longest external borders of the EU. We should police our external border more effectively and have patrols that are composed of border police officers from all member states so that there is a feeling of shared responsibility and mutual control.

Let me finish by relating to you what Prime Minister Monti said. He said that federalism is the more likely to happen the less we talk about it. First of all, I think that the word 'federalism' should be avoided. It is misunderstood in some countries and some people, rightly or wrongly, associate it with the idea with an irrevocable transfer of sovereignty to the federal capital, and almost nobody is ready for that. I prefer to talk about a political union.

In another sense, Monti is wrong in the sense that our policies are national and what has worked so far is that because the public in most countries was overwhelmingly pro-European you could make a national argument in your member state and then make pragmatic deals in Brussels. I think that we have just run out of the efficacy of that model because there is less public support. As politicians in Europe, we now have to start making the case for Europe. If we do not, the support will drain away further and we will end up with a re-nationalised continent where everybody will lose.