

May 28 / Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Letter to Members of Congress on the Visa Waiver Program and United States Visa Policy With Regard to Poland

May 27, 2011

Dear _____:

Thank you for your letter regarding my visit to Poland and your recent introduction of the Secure Travel and Counterterrorism Partnership Program Act of 2011 (S. 497/H.R. 959) to restructure the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

I write to express my strong support for the Secure Travel and Counterterrorism Partnership Program Act of 2011. I share your view that our counterterrorism and security partnerships have evolved and it makes sense to pursue a restructuring of the program. Countries that are willing to cooperate with the United States on our global priorities, including on counterterrorism initiatives, information sharing, and prevention of terrorist travel, deserve the opportunity to become part of our VWP.

I also share your support for Poland and disappointment that this close NATO ally has

been excluded from the VWP to date. Poland's strong and steadfast support during our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrates the deep alliance we have forged and the close partnership between our two countries.

It is my hope that my trip to Poland will help to strengthen the enduring bonds between the American and Polish people. Thank you again for your leadership on this important issue of interest to both countries.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Sens. Mark S. Kirk and Barbara A. Mikulski; and Reps. Brian Higgins, Daniel Lipinski, Mike Quigley, and Janice D. Schakowsky. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 28.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Bronislaw Komorowski of Poland in Warsaw, Poland

May 28, 2011

President Komorowski. Mr. President, I would like to express my satisfaction and my gratitude because of your presence at our summit of Central and Eastern European states. It was an important event for the leaders of my region of Europe—our region of Europe.

Your words were also very important, when you said that in the process of European integration, you can see an opportunity to reinforce the world of Western values. Other words were also very important: the words about keeping up an open character of both NATO and the European Union. I know that these words go very deeply to the hearts and minds of many of the leaders of this part of Europe.

This part of Europe has its successes; it also has its problems. And I am very glad that there was also a meeting directly between you and the President of Ukraine. I would like Ukraine

to be a country which consistently, perhaps not very spectacularly, but still consistently striving at deepening its relations with the Western world.

I am very happy that we could exchange our opinions about the engagement in the construction of democracy in the environment of Europe, both to the east, for example, in Belarus, where there was a dramatic collapse of democratic processes. So we are having to deal with the arrests and convictions of the combatants—[inaudible]—the opposition to the current Presidential elections, and there is also the harassment of the correspondent of the Polish press in Belarus. I'm also very glad that our views are absolutely identical as far as very firm presentation of problems of civil and human rights in Belarus.

I also would like to point out very clearly the issues connected to the security—for the security policy. And with satisfaction, I would like to note that the arrangements that were made in Lisbon are fully reflected in that practice of political actions taken up by the United States and NATO as a whole.

I mean here, first of all, the prospect of NATO missile defense program, which will take into account the possibility of cooperation with Russia, but it will continue to be an element or the tool of the alliance that will also be capable of performing tasks connected to article 5 of the Washington treaty.

President Obama. Let me once again thank President Komorowski for his wonderful hospitality, and to the Polish people, thank you for the warmth and generosity with which you've greeted me.

Yesterday was a excellent day. I was glad to be able to commemorate the extraordinary sacrifices of the Polish men and women in uniform, to meet some of the veterans from previous wars, to go to the memorial of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which was extraordinarily moving, and to meet some of the survivors of that period, and to see the enormous investment that the city of Warsaw and the Polish people have made in remembrance that, I think, will end up being a site that is important not only for Polish history, but will end up being an attraction for people from around the world who need to know the history of that period and before.

The dinner last night I thought was excellent. It was a good, frank conversation with leaders from throughout the region. As the President indicated, what I emphasized was that a strong, integrated Europe is very much in the security and economic interests of the United States. And we want to encourage that process as much as we can.

We want to make sure that NATO and EU membership remain open. We think that's important. We think that Poland, because of its extraordinary success, both as a democracy and as a market-based economy, is a model and example for the region. And this incredible transformation that's taken place over the last 25

years here in Poland is now making it a leader in Europe, as we look forward to an EU Presidency for Poland, that's an example of the leadership that it's taking, but also as countries like Ukraine look to Poland, and Poland, I think, exerts a very helpful influence in showing a pathway for modernization and democratic reform.

In our meetings today, as the President noted, a country like Belarus is backsliding, and it's important that we work together, as we've already committed to doing, to encouraging civil society, encouraging reformist trends within Belarus. The kind of repressive actions that we've seen in Belarus can end up having a negative impact over the region as a whole, and that makes us less safe and makes us less secure.

We had an extensive discussion about our respective relationships with Russia. I'm very proud of the reset process that has helped to stabilize relations between the United States and Russia, and President Medvedev, I think, has been an important partner in this process.

As I indicated at the Lisbon summit and I reiterated over the last 2 days, we believe that missile defense is something where we should be cooperating with the Russians because we share external threats, and this would not be a threat to the strategic balance that Russia is concerned with. But as you just heard from the President, we think it's very important that NATO remains in charge of NATO defense capabilities. That's one of the central principles of NATO.

We also discussed how we can strengthen Polish and American commercial ties, and President Komorowski presented some interesting ideas that we will be pursuing on that front. We discussed how we can more regularize the visa process between our two countries, and I indicated to him the work that we are doing in the United States to be able to achieve that.

And we also discussed NATO operations both in Afghanistan as well as in Libya. And I want to again thank the Polish people and the Polish armed forces for consistently meeting their responsibilities.

In sum, I think the relationship between our two countries has never been stronger. I am very proud to come here in order to say thank you to the Polish people for their friendship and to assure them that there are millions of Americans who understand that Poland is one of our closest and strongest allies.

We congratulate Poland for its extraordinary successes under your leadership, Mr. President. And we trust that the next 25 years are going to be bringing as much extraordinary progress to this great country as the previous 25 and, again, thank Poland for the leadership it's taking not just in the region, but

around the world when it comes to promoting democracy not just through word, but also by example.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. at the Presidential Palace. In his remarks, he referred to President Dmitry A. Medvedev of Russia. President Komorowski referred to President Viktor Yanukovich of Ukraine; and journalist Andrzej Poczobut, who faces criminal charges in Belarus for criticism of President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus. President Komorowski spoke in Polish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks During a Discussion on Democracy and Development in Warsaw May 28, 2011

President Bronislaw Komorowski of Poland. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, I think we feel it all too well that it's worth having dreams, but dreams come true when, apart from dreams, we have courage and determination to pursue such goals as freedom and democracy.

Mr. President, today in this room you are meeting the Polish democracy. These are those who fought for the Polish freedom and for the democratic state, and they fought well. Those are the people who fought in the anti-Communist position; those are the people of Solidarity. And here in this room, you also see those who have come here to meet you, and those are the protectors of today's democracy. Those are the ones who will take part in the—today's processes of democratization. Here we see the representatives of the—both Chambers of the Parliament. There are Ministers; there are also representatives of the major political forces in Poland—in our democratic Poland.

I also would like to indicate that that part of the Polish democracy, which is not directly involved with politics, but they cocreate Polish democracy, those are nongovernmental organizations, as they are watchdogs; they, in fact, incentivize us as to take due care of democracy as our constant challenge and our constant commitment, and to also be in touch with the society.

Also there is the former Prime Minister, Mazowiecki, together with us, and he is the person who would like to talk with you about our Polish experience in transformation; that is, when we were passing away from the Communist regime and getting onto a democratic society.

And once again, I would ask to speak Mr. President first and then the former Prime Minister.

President Obama. Well, thank you very much, Mr. President, and thank you for the great honor of appearing with all of you. I want to express my thanks to everyone who is here today to share with me their experiences and expertise in democracy-building. I look forward to listening and learning from Poland's esteemed democracy leaders and younger activists.

I have to say that it is especially a treat for me to be able to see so many of you who inspired us in America when the Solidarity movement first appeared. I was still a relatively young man. I have a lot of gray hair now, but at the time I was still studying. And I remember at that time understanding that history was being made because ordinary people were standing up and doing extraordinary things with great courage and a great—against great odds.

And the Solidarity leaders and others in this room launched a peaceful revolution that eventually led to a regime's collapse and the