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How did you choose a European career? Or did a European career choose you?

It was probably both. I think it was probably all about being at the right place at the right moment and I probably happened to be there. I was strongly involved in European issues and in European integration at the university. Then, when I joined the government, it was natural that I would be the person who would deal with European affairs. But it all happened long ago, in 1991-92. They were looking for someone who would know and would understand EU issues. I did not have to convince myself, I was already convinced that Europe was important and that Poland should gradually move closer to the EU and then enter the Union. That was how it all happened.

Did you have a vision?

A vision, maybe, but you also have to be prepared. I think I also had the necessary knowledge and skills, because in Poland, at the beginning, when the whole change started, coping with the European challenge was not easy, you had to have a lot of passion.

How did your multidisciplinary professional path and your experience both at the national level and within the European Commission, the Parliament and the Council influenced your vision of the European Union?

I have always thought that a united Europe was extremely important. We are a very small continent, even if we are together. Even the biggest countries such as France or Germany cannot mean much in the global context, which is today a messy and uncertain environment, with a lot of conflicts and wars just around the corner. We have to stick together. Europe for me was always the only option for us to live better and with more security and safety. When the European integration started in the 50s, in my part of Europe, we were sort of left aside, we could not participate in the integration. We knew how important integration was, we knew that we would not solve problems in the traditional European way which was wars and battles, but only if we would basically meet at one table. In Poland, we suffered a lot from the wars of the century. For us Europe was the best way to live and to think of the future with peace and stability. I think that it was only natural for us to see that Europe needed to be more and more integrated and for Poland and for other countries from that part of Europe to keep growing within the European family. I think it was obvious, but at that time Poland was the only country from the new Member States where there was strong opposition against the accession. There were two or three parties which were negative and were actually campaigning against it. So for those who were active and

willing to enter the EU, this situation was a motivation, an additional challenge to fight.

Given all the stages that we have already gone through, what do you think would be the role of Poland in the further building of the European Union?

I think that it is already clear for all the politicians that the stronger Europe is, the stronger Poland is, the safer Poland is. We can benefit economically if Europe is growing, if Europe is competitive, if Europe is creating jobs, if there are new markets for us. We also understand very well, today, I think, that if we want to have an impact, we have to be involved, engaged, and to love Europe in a way that also makes it stronger. So, I think it's a win-win situation and most of us would understand this. That is why usually when you look at EUROBAROMETER survey results in Poland and the new Member States, we have the highest level of support for European integration and the highest level of happiness with the accession and the membership. So I think we understand quite well the benefits of European integration. But of course I have to admit that we have citizens that are not very much pro-European in this sense; they do not ask us to leave the Union but they are sceptical, it is like in many other countries. But the main message is that Poland is pro-European.

Given this context, what would you think of the future of Europe in the long term including EU borders, the economic and financial governance?

I think it is important to be fully aware of the fact that only a united Europe can make it in the future and can make us better, economically but also in terms of atmosphere, of happiness. Europe must be united. So, all those people who think of Greece leaving the Eurozone, of a new crisis and of a more divided Europe: I think we cannot afford it, we shall all be united in building a new Europe. We do not have a vision today, that is what is lacking seriously. Actually, we never had this tendency to think about the future of Europe in the sense of a *finalité politique* which would be a more integrated Europe. But I think that we always had a vision for all the major changes including the internal market, the Eurozone, even Schengen and a year by year roadmap. Today, we no longer have it. We advance step by step but you cannot get people on board if you do not show the vision, the strategy, and the roadmap to do something together. Today, we are gradually moving on. Incremental change is a way to go. We know that we still lack some elements in the eurozone economic governance framework and we have to move forward. We are expecting in June a vision for a new framework for EU economic governance.

Europe must think more about its citizens – it has been a permanent challenge, but now we also have to think of the way we make decisions, because we must be accountable and there is a need for democratic legitimacy. There is the European Citizens' Initiative, which is also a challenge and a way to move forward, together with the voters and citizens of the European Union. But, above all, I think that Europe cannot be divided. We have to keep Europe together and to create a geostrategic harmony around Europe – and there is a lot to be done. There is still war, just across the border, and there is still a lot of uncertainty in the Western Balkans and in the Mediterranean. Hence, Europe must be more open and must cope better with its neighbourhood and foreign policy. Furthermore, public defence policy is also important, not only for the economy but also for issues related to our openness to the world – that is what matters today.

And having said that, what would be the role of the Transatlantic partnership?

We are negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. We know that there are still a lot of barriers to overcome, on both sides: the American Congress has to make decisions; we also have to make sure that we will get the treaty ratified once we find a resolution. But if we do not do it, tomorrow, it will be the big emerging economies that will be setting the standards for us. Between the EU and the US, differences are relatively small, so we can find some common ground and we should aim at it. I think it is this year and next year that we will have the opportunity to finalise the negotiations and to have sorts of “sound” economic foundation and relations. We have NATO for defence and foreign affairs but, in the economic context, we do not have the solid foundation which is necessary to boost growth, competitiveness and trade.

Given your wide expertise in European matters, would you consider yourself a European professional?

I just feel like a European passionate and a fighter for the unity of the European Union. If that makes me a European professional, then I am. But Europe is not only about professionalism, it is also about understanding, about emotions. I think it is important that we all feel Europe. There is also a need for action in terms of what is to be done. So we need professionals, but professionals with passion and heart.

What piece of advice would you give to young professionals who want to venture on a European Union career path?

We live in a multiple-factor environment. Of course, we need some experts in the administration, in important positions, because there is so much to coordinate and to do: that is absolutely important. But you also need a little bit of emotion, and that is equally important, because we have to live under one roof. While being extremely different, still we have to stick together. We need people who know, who understand, but also who have emotions.