

Remarks from the Annual PACT Meeting in Anderson, Texas

by Consul General Robert Rusiecki

November 14, 2020

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for extending to our office your kind invitation to the PACT Annual Meeting in, Anderson, Texas.

I very much appreciate Polish American initiatives in the United States and in Texas, the cradle of Polish immigration to the United States. Representing the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Houston, established in December 2017, I am honored to be a part of such events and projects.

I am proud that I can work together with Polish American Council of Texas under the leadership of Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz, whose decades-long commitment and dedication in developing cultural, educational and business cooperation between Poland and Texas and the US in general, I truly admire. Just last month, on October 25th we successfully concluded the project: “St. John Paul II 100th Anniversary Concert”.

Last Wednesday, November 11th on Veterans’ Day, we celebrated Poland’s National Independence Day. This date marks the rebirth of the Polish state, early in the 20th century. Partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795 by Russia, Prussia, and Austria led to progressive reduction of Poland’s territory. Finally, after the third partition, the state of Poland ceased to exist for 123 years. Poland regained her independence after the Great War, in 1918 when on November 11, Marshal Józef Piłsudski assumed control over the state.

Poland was free again!

According to most definitions, freedom is the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint, and the absence of a despotic government. This applied perfectly to the situation on Polish soil, where during the partition years the state belonging to the nation was nonexistent. The people were not allowed to act, speak, and think the way they wanted. There were three despotic governments imposing their power, control, and oppression. Many of Poles could not stand such conditions. Deprived of their freedom, treated as second- or third-class citizens, they took part in heroic national uprisings. Others, including some of the brave freedom fighters, decided to emigrate – many of them to Texas.

One of the newcomer communities they established in mid-19th century was Anderson.

The freedom and independence regained in 1918 had to stand a test of time. After regaining free Poland, another historical disaster very quickly came to our homeland, i.e. the terrible night of German Nazi occupation and captivity. Immediately after the war, we went through the post-war time of Soviet communism, with neither freedom nor independence. 1989 brought us liberation and opening a new, free space in our personal and social life.

November 11 is an important date for every Pole.

It is a symbol of love for the homeland, the fight for freedom, a symbol of faith and victory.

Every year, at this time, patriotic celebrations prompt us to reflect on the value of freedom and independence, which are an essential component of national identity.

For most Poles, freedom primarily means independence and sovereignty of the national state.

For over 30 years now, the people of Poland could enjoy peace and no threat from an external enemy. Even such a short time can encourage some ambiguity regarding the concept of freedom.

When asked today how to understand freedom, students overwhelmingly identify it - like the elders - with independence; but also... with free internet access.

Therefore, regained freedom is still a task for us. It should never be taken for granted. We need to stay vigilant.

Earlier I mentioned the concert commemorating Saint John Paul 2 100th anniversary, and I would like to conclude with one of the thoughts of the great Pole.

Freedom can be used right or wrong. True freedom is measured by the degree of readiness to serve and self-sacrifice. Only such a concept of freedom is truly creative. When we understand freedom this way, we can build our humanity and interpersonal bonds.