

## A Polish Perspective

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The issue of unification permeates modern European politics. For many, the drive for increased cooperation and solidarity raises serious questions: What will a more unified Europe be like? Do the benefits really outweigh the costs? Is increased unification really possible?

Tuesday, in a public address presented by the Riley Institute at the Youmts Conference Center, former Polish Prime Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz shared his perspective on his country's unification experience and his hopes for the future of a uniting Europe.

Cimoszewicz has been involved in the Polish political arena throughout the past two decades. He saw Poland's admittance to NATO in 1999, and was serving as Foreign Minister when it joined the European Union in 2004. During his political career he has been a strong proponent of increased European economic, political, and educational unification.

After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, Poland made a strong effort to join NATO, but member reactions to Polish enthusiasm were somewhat cold, considering Poland's former alliance with the Eastern bloc. Polish military officials, who spoke Russian, had to be trained in English. The Polish Parliament had to enact thousands of pieces of legislation to be eligible to become a part of NATO and the E.U. Less than two decades later, Poland has a strong cooperation with the United States and other NATO countries, and the vast majority of Polish citizens thank E.U. membership for an improvement in their quality of life.

However, Cimoszewicz admitted Poland's entry into a more unified Europe has not been totally smooth. Agricultural competition, social security, and the preservation of a national identity continue to be concerns for Polish citizens. All of these issues, and more, he asserts, can be overcome — the end result well worth the effort. Since joining the E.U. Poland has been in a period of adjustment. The opening of interstate trade and farming subsidies has ultimately been beneficial for Polish producers, but at first this issue caused some upheaval. In addition, as a result of more open borders, many young educated people have been leaving Poland to live and work in other European countries. Cimoszewicz argues that a similar phenomenon happened after Spain and Portugal joined the E.U. and that these young people will eventually return to Poland with valuable knowledge and experience.

Cimoszewicz looks to unification to give Europe a greater political power in the global arena. However, for this to be achieved, he believes Europe must develop a common foreign policy. Although nationalist sentiments are in strong opposition to such ideas, he believes this course of action will ultimately be in the best interest of all European nations.

Essentially, this issue is at the heart of the greatest question: What will the future of the E.U. look like? Will it preserve national identities as they are today, or will increased unification for common benefit create a more collective European identity?

Seeing the issue of unification from a Polish perspective offers a fresh look at how Europe is changing, as well as clues to what the future might hold. Ultimately, Cimoszewicz considers the lack of strong, committed statesmen to be the biggest obstacle to a bright future in a unified Europe. He sees a great need for politicians who will fight for what is best for Europe against strong opposition, not mold their views to win votes.