Polish Ambassador Visits IU Bloomington and Presents Two Awards

In April, His Excellency Przemysław Grudzinski, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland paid a visit to Bloomington, to deliver a talk entitled “Poland and the Future of Transatlantic Relations” and to present honors to two friends of Poland, Dean for International Programs Patrick O’Meara and Bill Johnston, director of the Polish Studies Center at IU Bloomington. The ambassador also met with a number of administrators, including Interim President Gerald Bepko and took time to have a breakfast meeting with students from the Russian and East European Institute, the School of Public and Environmental Affairs, and the Department of History.

Grudzinski actually wears two hats, one as a statesman and one as scholar and academic. His scholastic credentials are as distinguished as his diplomatic ones. A historian by education, he holds an M.A. in history from the University of Nicolaus Copernicus, Torun, and a Ph.D. in history from the Polish Academy of Sciences. He noted the pleasure he takes in visiting U.S. college campuses, being no stranger to life in a college town. He was a Fulbright Fellow at Princeton University in 1988 and was a visiting professor in 1989 at both the Center for International Studies at the University of Southern California and the Center for Strategic and International Studies at UCLA in Los Angeles.

Speaking to a large audience in the IMU Georgian Room, the ambassador said he was “particularly honored” to be visiting IU’s Polish Studies Center, praising its promotion of academic research about Poland and Polish culture in Bloomington for more than 20 years and acknowledging its past directors for providing the capable stewardship that has helped it to become the prominent learning center that it is today. The center remains a focal point for Polish studies in the Midwest and sponsors a wide variety of academic and cultural events for the campus and community.

In his remarks, he addressed Poland’s role as a NATO member state, the current status of Polish–U.S. relations, Poland’s involvement in the Iraq war, and how European Union–U.S. relations have evolved in the post–cold war environment. Grudzinski began by saying that NATO membership served as a milestone in Polish–U.S. relations. During the cold war, Europe had accepted a modicum of American leadership in exchange for security against the threat of the Soviets. With the Warsaw Pact now a distant memory, new challenges have forced a shift in American defense policy. With this shift, divergent viewpoints have emerged on international security among American and European decision makers. Poland, as a new member of NATO and traditional ally of the United States, now finds itself walking a tightrope between its allies on both sides of the Atlantic.

He stressed a belief that NATO’s relevance in the twenty-first century is indisputable and that it may serve to strengthen democratic institutions in the former Soviet republics as it expands eastward. On the subject of the war in Iraq, he expressed Poland’s “bitter disappointment” that a peaceful solution could not be reached. He reminded the audience that the long course of U.S.–Polish relations has been overwhelmingly positive in nature.

Finally, Ambassador Grudzinski was pleased to present a special award, the Amicus Poloniae, to both O’Meara and Johnston for promoting better understanding and friendship between America and Poland through scholarly work and academic exchanges between IU and Polish universities, especially with the American Studies Center at Warsaw University. In awarding these, he stated that it was of particular pleasure to present them because this award is traditionally made at the discretion of the ambassador.

—Mark Betka
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