

Statement by H.E. President of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Bronisław Komorowski

at the UN General Assembly Session

September 26, 2012

Chairman,

Secretary General,

Distinguished Delegates,

May I offer my warm congratulations to Mr. Vuk Jeremic on his election to the position of the chairman of the 67 session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

After the experience of recent years, the world still continues to be poised in a difficult moment of its development. The weakness of international institutions in the face of economic, security, humanitarian or environmental problems is indisputable, and yet these institutions were designed to resolve such problems. This also applies to the Security Council, especially in the context of the conflict in Syria. International financial institutions are not capable of handling the destructive impetuosity of financial markets which all results from opaqueness and arbitrariness of great private actors operating in this area.

The signals coming from Asia point to an undiminished number of tensions and disputes. We have been following with concern the tension resulting from the Iranian nuclear program. Our anxiety is caused by the increasingly tangible threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of intensified arms race among the Gulf states. The results of the mission in Afghanistan are not entirely satisfactory to us. We must learn a lesson from the shortcomings of the strategy devised for that country so far. The approach suggesting “military first” – is not a suitable method for resolving difficult internal conflicts.

The hopes raised by the Arab spring have been justified only to some extent. The civil war in Syria and the toll of lives in its aftermath, as well as the inability to contain it on the part of the UN and the Arab League cast a shadow all across the region. The tragic death of American diplomats and concomitant events should also prompt a reflection among all of them who are persuaded about the automatism of democratic transformations.

As we were signing the United Nations Charter which is a constitution of the contemporary international order and testifies to our faith in a better world, we pledged our readiness to take a concerted effort and to cooperate in pursuit of ideals invoked in it. One of the main roads leading to a more secure and fair world is peaceful resolution of disputes and conflictual situations. This concept is the main subject of this year's Session. The choice has been most accurate. In recent years, we have seen numerous occasions where a commitment laid down in the second normative article of the United Nations Charter was ignored with very dramatic consequences. The best example of such a development is the drama of Syria. Such situations occur also in other parts of the world. Throughout the 20th century, the international community has developed many means and ways of peaceful settlement of disputes on the universal and regional level alike. Volumes have been written on the subject, there are many international institutions involved in this field, there also are many renowned and prominent experts, diplomats and politicians. Some of them, such as Jimmy Carter or Martti Ahtisaari, have been rightly acknowledged being awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. They were able to use effectively the existing procedures to quell conflicts and to peacefully resolve difficult disputes, be it international or internal, which otherwise could have escalated into international conflicts. Not everywhere, though, it was possible to achieve success.

Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

If success was not achieved, it was for the absence of one crucially important factor, the factor without which it is impossible to settle a dispute in a peaceful lasting and just manner. It is all about realization of the obvious truth that without compromise one cannot arrive at a lasting solution to any conflict. This is embedded in the very nature of conflict being a clash.

At this point, I wish to refer to the Polish experience, the experience of Solidarity and the Round Table talks in the spring of 1989. Both sides of the profound social conflict those days, i.e. the communist regime on the one hand and the champions of democratic transformation on the other, who ultimately strived to overthrow communism, demonstrated wisdom which allowed them to reach a compromise, even if it was not fully satisfactory to neither of the two. This was, nevertheless, the compromise that opened perspectives for further change. What made it possible was also the ability to self-contain on the part of those actors who ultimately strived to achieve a revolutionary change. Let us recall that all previous attempts undertaken by democratic opposition outside the system precipitated

with military interventions, bloodshed, tens of thousands of refugees and further repressions. This could have been also the case, on a massive scale, in the spring of 1989.

In the long run, the ability to self-contain and the strength of a wise compromise make a much better solution than maximising one's own demands and trying to advance one's own arguments by force. We know the latter mechanism all too well. It usually ends in taking up arms in order to prove one's rightness by military measures. In line with the rules of geopolitics, both parties to the conflict seek allies abroad. Finally, the logic of holding each other in check or of "all or nothing" starts to prevail. Costs are no longer significant. As the conflict is prolonging, the scale of drama is increasing. The situation develops into a truly international one. In order to fend off further escalation of antagonisms, major humanitarian and stability operations supported by the army and police force are inevitable. The process of reconciliation, normalisation and reconstruction is excessively protracted.

Mr Chairman, we have seen this mechanism in various situations occurring in different countries. It can be avoided provided that from the very outset of a dispute both sides anticipate dialogue and acknowledge the limits of what is feasible, show sensitivity to potential costs of conflict and seek compromise. The art of self-containment and of wise compromise, symbolised by Nobel Prize Winners Lech Wałęsa and Nelson Mandela, are worth promoting. This approach however is insufficiently promoted in the context of peaceful conflict resolution and situations that may lead to a conflict. Syria is a poignant example of what a wasted chance for compromise may unfold into. We expect that an end shall be soon put to the bloodshed in Syria and that the conflict shall be settled based on UN principles and using the instruments available to our Organization. May the new UN envoy for this conflict never lack determination in the fulfilment of his mission.

After many centuries of antagonisms, disputes and conflicts in Europe, yet another preventive method was invented in order to do away with wars and to stop differences and claims from turning into bloody drama. It is regional integration which was ushered in after World War II by the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community. The project's hidden intention was to put the "no war" principle in place. It did not suffice to ban war, as it had been the case of Briand-Kellog Pact of 1928. What was needed was to make war impossible. By establishment of the coal and steel community and its expansion upon new areas of integration and also upon most of the countries in the continent, disputes threatening Europe's security and peace had to be consigned to the past. Even if this experience cannot be

used in a copy-paste manner in 100%, it merits a word of recommendation to other regions of the world.

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The plight of civilian population is the most dramatic consequence of the inability to self-contain, absence of culture of and will to compromise in contemporary disputes and internal and international conflicts. The methods and means of combat spare soldiers at the expense of innocent civilians who often emerge as a target of military operations. It is also international forces involved in peace-keeping and stabilizing a situation that are often responsible for the toll of lives among civilians, even if unintended but still the toll. Based on various experiences gathered, the disputable idea of humanitarian intervention was replaced with the concept of “responsibility to protect”. This was a very wise way out of the stalemate which emerged in this area more than ten years ago. The concept of responsibility to protect has been approved of by the entire international community and has been a UN norm since 2005.

As we know, a norm and a practise may sometimes be worlds apart. In the light of developments unfolding in the last decade, and in the light of humanitarian tragedies, in particular the suffering and death of thousands of innocent children, which must stir people’s hearts and conscience, we cannot afford a situation where responsibility to protect remains a dead letter. What we put forward for your consideration is that the United Nations should initiate work on defining a catalogue of instruments to be applied in situations which entail ”responsibility to protect”. It is about the international community being effective without exceeding the mission’s mandate and inciting disputes on that count.

This is a particularly important consideration for us in Poland. Our nation more than once was falling victim to crime perpetrated on a mass scale. Prompted by that kind of sensitivity, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, UN special representative for crimes in the Balkans, embarked on his mission twenty years ago. The effectiveness of international community when faced with flagrant violations of human rights on a mass scale, crime and suffering that call for rapid reaction, as in Syria these days, depends largely on credibility of our action in previous situations of that kind. We must always act in good faith and in line with the mandate given to us.

Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

I am speaking on behalf of a country which in the last twenty years managed to cover a difficult road from totalitarian regime, collapse of its economy and mass social unrest that was being curbed by force, to a democratic stability, economic growth and ability to support peaceful transformations beyond its borders. Thirty years ago, when martial law was imposed in order to crush the Solidarity revolution, it was suggested that Poland's attempt to enter the world of democracy would entail potential imbalance between the East and West, and even a war between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, i.e. the world war. Fortunately, those days are gone. Hardly anyone would think in such terms nowadays. Today Poland as a free country that develops its relations without limitations, shares its experience and spreads the word about benefits derived from our transition to democracy, offers development and humanitarian aid. We are a country that has been featuring a positive economic growth rate for the last twenty years. We share this ability with all the interested parties. Poland's engagement for the sake of stability of European integration mirrors our understanding of the process as the one which serves security of whole Europe and its neighbourhood. We are active in our efforts to bring together the two parts of Europe once divided in the Cold War. The EU programme of Eastern Partnership has been designed to this end with Poland and Sweden being its initiators and promoters. Poland readily offers support to and shares experience with the countries and societies who embark on a road of democratic transformation in North Africa, Asia or Eastern Europe. To the extent permitted by our possibilities, we involve ourselves in developing contacts with countries from different regions and different civilisations. Among others, my visit to China last December which covered a wide spectrum of areas for potential dialogue and cooperation, served this purpose. By using all of those measures, we fulfil our obligations arising from our membership in the United Nations.

Chairman, our policy in this regards stems from the conviction that the effective United Nations is what our world of today needs as badly as it did in the days of the Cold War. The world cannot be driven by a bi- or multi-polar concert of powers. Of course, the powers will not cease to exist but stability and regulation of international legal order will require a more extensive engagement of multilateral institutions, as well as norms and mechanisms securing their observance. Only the United Nations system may ensure all of those. In order to improve its effectiveness, we need to reform the Organization en route, respect norms agreed upon and honour our commitments once adopted in good faith. Taking

the opportunity afforded by the 60th anniversary of the UN, someone wrote that a return to the Hobbesian World is always possible and some people are even actively working to bring it about. This is why Poland so sorely tried in the dramas of the 20th century is committed to work for the observance of UN rules, for the integrity and full implementation of the output of our Organization, for its effectiveness in exercising the tasks that we ourselves impose on it, so that the UN may meet the expectations that we have in store for it.

Thank you for your attention.