

Honorary doctorate for Radoslaw Sikorsky

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Nuno Severiano Teixeira

On the 25th of April of 1974, it began, in Lisbon, what years later Samuel Huntington would call, in his now classic work, “the third wave”. The third wave of democratization that expanded across all of Southern Europe in the 70s, Latin America in the 80s and finally reached Eastern and Central Europe in 1989, continuing throughout the 90s.

Portugal and Poland belonged to different geopolitical spaces and had likewise different historical heritages. However, they came to share, ever since the third wave, the experience – decisive for both national destinies – of the transition to democracy.

One located in the westernmost end of Europe and facing the Atlantic, while the other standing in Europe’s easternmost edge, occupying that strategic place between Germany and Russia. Both, however, recently delivered from authoritarian regimes. Surely very different regimes, in their political core, yet close enough as far as the experiences of authoritarianism are concerned. Both, also, very distant, in their economic development, from European standards. Again, different in their economic systems, but both significantly behind the average European growth.

Despite the 15 year gap between the two historical moments, it was the advent of democracy that allowed both Portugal and Poland to experience what became a joint destiny – European integration. Both sought, in Europe, a way towards the consolidation of democracy and the modernisation of economy, that is, a future for their citizens.

The words above are meant, primarily, to stress that, out of dissimilar pasts, we share today a common destiny which is Europe's destiny. Also, that we Portuguese understand and cherish the ideals that we know are also Poland's – the democratic ideal and the European ideal. I say this, first and foremost, because the same ideals of Freedom and Democracy and of a Strong and United Europe are the reason and give meaning to the academic, professional and political path of that to whom the Nova University awards its highest Honoris Causa doctorate - Radoslaw Sikorsky.

Born in February of 1963, Radoslaw Sikorsky was soon summoned by the imperatives of civic and political life. In March of 1981, while still a student, he heads a student strike committee in his hometown of Bydgoszcz. Not long after, in June of the same year, he seeks exile in England and, following the declaration of Martial Law by General Jaruzelsky's government, the United Kingdom granted him political asylum. He enrolls as student in Oxford University' Pembroke College and proceeds with his academic education in Philosophy, Political Science and Economy. In his Oxford years, besides his studies, Sikorski is actively involved in the civic and intellectual life of the University. He was president of the Oxford Union Society Standing Committee, President of the Oxford University Polish Society, and, in the good British tradition of the gentlemen's clubs, he was a member of the Canning Club, a conservative debating society, and of Bullingdon

Club, a student dining society, where he met some of the future leading figures of the British political elite, such as the current Prime Minister, David Cameron.

Six years of active intellectual and social life in Oxford granted Sikorsky British Citizenship, awarded to him in 1987.

In the mid-1980s, a new period in his now professional life begins – perhaps his most adventurous. He becomes a freelance journalist and travels to Afghanistan as war correspondent. The fight of the *mujahedin* against the Marxist government and the Soviet troops was still raging, and it is precisely a photograph by him of an Afghan family killed in an air bombing that won the young correspondent a World Press Photo award in 1987. He wrote as a journalist for *The Observer*, *The Spectator* and, in 1989, he becomes chief foreign correspondent for the American magazine *National Review*, continuing his work in theatres of war such as Afghanistan and Angola.

However, 1989 would be the year of the great turning point. The dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the post-Soviet drift in Central and Eastern Europe changed not only the international scene, but also, and especially, the lives of millions of Europeans in Central and Eastern Europe.

Radoslaw Sikorsky was definitely one of them. In August of 1989, he returns to his native Poland and begins a new, essentially political, cycle in his life. He serves a number of governmental offices and will be one of the actors involved in the construction of a new Poland – in the consolidation of democracy and in Poland's rapprochement with and integration in international – Atlantic and European – institutions.

In 1992, he serves as deputy defence minister in the Jan Olszewski government. In 1991, the Atlantic Alliance had changed its strategic concept. Slowly, it was welcoming the old enemies of the Warsaw Pact, now prospective members, and the first discussions concerning a “partnership for peace” were being held. In this term of office, Sikorski not only argues for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Polish territory, he also initiates Poland’s rapprochement with Nato, thus leaving the first mark of his atlanticism.

Between 1998 and 2001, Sikorski serves as deputy minister of foreign affairs in the Jerzy Buzek government, overseeing the consular service and issues concerning Polish communities abroad.

From 2002 to 2005 he takes a break in his active political life. He travels to the United States as a resident fellow of the American Enterprise Institute, the notorious conservative think-tank based in Washington, and as executive director of the New Atlantic Initiative, designed to enlarge and further, in the Atlantic framework, the community of democracies. And, once again, he provides ample evidence of his atlanticism.

His stay in America was rather brief. In 2005, he returns to governmental demands, now in the quality of Minister of National Defence in Marcinkiewicz’s government. Yet, a Polish Minister of Defence should not be a foreign citizen – thus spoke his patriotic conscience and he renounced to his British citizenship. It was while he held this office that we had a chance to meet, side by side, in the seats of the Council of Ministers of the European Union (members sit alphabetically, so that Poland and Portugal are adjacent). We met briefly, however, for I arrived in July of

2006 and he left in February of 2007. Sikorsky left and I remained, for three more years, next to his successor and my friend, Bogdan Klich.

He returned, in November, to Donald Tusk's government, as Minister of Foreign Affairs and, as such, he left his mark both in transatlantic relations and in the European context. Bilaterally, with the United States, and multilaterally, with NATO, in the difficult issue of the missile defence system, he managed to reach a consensus and sign an agreement with the U. S. Secretary of State, in 2008.

Within the European context, he steadied and reinforced Poland's relations with Germany and Russia. And yet, whenever needed, he knew how to be firm with Russia and level-headed with Germany. With Russia, during the Georgia and Ukraine crisis, and with Germany, during the euro zone crisis.

A good thing it would be to heed his sensible voice. Dialogue is certainly necessary, in the West's relation with Russia, but as important, or perhaps more, are firmness and decision. He called for German action in dealing and overcoming the European crisis. "Germany", he said, "is the biggest beneficiary of the current arrangements [in the EU, that is] and therefore under the biggest obligation to sustain them." To lead the way, however, a sense of the future is required, as well as an awareness that leadership has a price. In 1945, the United States outlined the international order, but paid the price of their hegemony – with their nuclear umbrella they ensured our security and, with the Marshall Plan, our development.

Today's united Europe has not yet managed to find what Western Europe was able to rely on, in 1945 – a hegemonic stabiliser, as International Political Economy and the Theory of International Relations have shown, from Kindleberger up to the present date.

As one other Polish thinker – Jan Zielonka - also a Professor at Oxford and a long-time friend, has said in his latest book (Is the EU Doomed?), more than the economic and financial crisis of the single currency, the true crisis in the European Union is a political one. It is, firstly, a crisis in cohesion – between North and South; and secondly, a crisis of trust – between institutions and citizens.

This is why Europe is, today, searching for a direction for its future. And that is why it needs, now more than ever, a true European leadership.

That is also why examples of level-headedness, courage and a steadfast belief in the democratic and European ideals are today so much needed and urgently so.

It is on behalf of those examples, Magnificent Rector, that I petition for Dr. Rodoslaw Sikorsky the awarding of the title of Doctor Honoris Causa by Nova University of Lisbon.