

## **Ryszard Czarnecki: It certainly is a better and freer Europe - but with serious problems**

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***Ryszard Czarnecki is a Polish MEP from the European Conservatives and Reformists. He was born in London, UK, in 1963. Czarnecki is a Vice-Chairman of the Delegation to the European Parliament, a member of the Committee on Budgetary Control, Committee on Transport and Tourism. Mr. Czarnecki graduated as a Master of History, University of Wrocław. He worked as an archivist and as a journalist. He also was also a Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland in the I and III terms and Minister for European Integration (1997-1999).***

*Mr. Czarnecki gives exclusive interview on the topic of 20 years after the Fall of Berlin Wall for Europe Gateway.*

**Where were you and how did you react to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the democratic changes in Poland?**

One correction: First there were democratic changes in Poland, and only then, under these influences did the Berlin Wall fall. At the time I was in London and due to the fact that Soviet troops were still stationed in Poland, I was pretty sceptical about this "peaceful revolution". And in fact the changes were very slow.

**How did 1989 change you as a person and as a professional journalist? Do you regret for something (anything) from the period before 1989?**

It certainly raised the range of freedoms. It was also a career opportunity for young journalists. At the age of 27, I became the secretary editor of an influential monthly periodical, following which I became the assistant chief editor of a national Polish newspaper. At the age of 28, I became the head of a regional periodical. The only thing I do regret is that Communism lasted too long.

**You have outstanding professional experience in various fields- you have worked as an archivist, as a journalist, (and also) as a minister. How did your point of view about the 1989 events change, in regard in relation with your various professional commitments and did it change at all?**

Previously I was very critical of any forms of compromises with the Communists. Today, I believe that we squandered a great deal of collective energy and enthusiasm and the political class established cut itself off from society. Coming into the Parliament or government a great deal of us did not have much experience.

**You were the Minister of European integration in Poland in the late 90's. How has public opinion about the European Union changed in Poland for (in) the past 20 years?**

Previously we had a greater deal of scepticism concerning the European Union. Nevertheless even today

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many Poles believe that within the Union we still have to fight our own national interests- as the Germans and the British do.

**What are the lessons which the CEE countries and the "old" Member States learned from the transition period after 1989? Can we say that the period of transition is over?**

The transitional period will last until the new Union closes the gap that exists between the richer countries the Europe. Generally, there certainly is a consciousness that today's Union is all the while a Union of political and economic interests.

**In your opinion, what is it that nourishes the nostalgia for the times of the USSR and the Iron Curtain in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe?**

This can be explained by a yearning for the past, where granted there was not a lot of consumer goods, but on the other hand, unemployment was rare and so was the fear of losing a job.

**After removing the very last obstacle for the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, how do you expect that the life of the EU citizens would change? Can we speak of a unified Europe?**

The Lisbon Treaty in reality ignites interest of the political elite or journalists but not ordinary citizens. It is too soon to speak of a united Europe. Especially since nations of the old "15" sometimes treat the nations of the "new Union" like instruments.

**What is Europe's message to the citizens of the Community 20 years after the changes- to the generations who witnessed the transition and to the young people?**

Europe is different than it was: you can travel wherever you wish, study where you wish, but you cannot yet work wherever you wish. On the other hand, many people are unemployed- but once were. Many do not have confidence in democratic institutions. It certainly is a better and freer Europe. - but at the same time containing serious problems, flaws and transgressions.