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## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT: THE CLEANUP OF EASTERN EUROPE

*William K. Reilly\**

President Vaclav Havel of the Czech and Slovak Federated Republic has said, regarding the environment, that "we are still under the sway of the destructive belief that man is the pinnacle of creation, and not just a part of it, and that therefore everything is permitted . . . . We are still destroying the planet that was entrusted to us, and its environment." In the countries formerly behind the so-called Iron Curtain, we are confronted by the legacy of the past forty-five years. We see it in the faceless statues of Krakow, melted by acid rain. We see it in the sulphurous skies of Ostrava and the contaminated waters of the Danube, the Vistula, and the Oder. We see the devastation wrought by a system that has alienated people from individual responsibility and fostered a reckless disregard for the environment, and we recognize now as never before the vital link between a prosperous economy and a healthy environment.

This is the legacy. This is the past. Time, like the great rivers, carries us forward. The task before us is staggering, and the choices are difficult. Now more than ever, it is a time to get things right. It is a time for cooperation, for partnership—a time for transition to a new way of doing business. We in the United States offer our hand in this venture. A great French citizen once referred to America as "the daughter of Europe." We Americans understand that we share with Europeans not only a common culture but a common global environment. We recognize that the economic interests of all nations increasingly are converging, and that they require the harmonious and compatible environmental regulation of activities affecting trade and investment.

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\* Administrator, United States Environmental Protection Agency. Mr. Reilly originally presented a version of this address on June 21, 1991, at Dobris Castle in Czechoslovakia.

First, there is the formidable process of cleaning up after years of neglect. The magnitude of this cleanup is unprecedented—it *must* begin with each nation targeting the most serious risks to human health and the environment. We need to consider new, appropriately scaled technologies that are cost-effective. To make tough decisions in light of limited resources, we sometimes may have to delay the cleanup of lesser risks while we work to bring the major threats under control. Restoring the environment, however, cannot wait until the economy is fully recovered—that kind of thinking is what got Eastern Europe into this environmental mess.

Over the last few years in the United States, we increasingly have become convinced of the value of using risk assessment and budget priorities. By risk assessment, I mean the common-sense use of all available information on the effects of pollutants on human health and ecology. It helps to put into perspective the episodic alarms that so often drive public policy on the environment by providing a basis for distinguishing between the most serious problems and those that matter less, between the broken bones and the simple bruises and abrasions.

Second, at this intersection in time between the establishment of free markets and the growth of a new commitment to the environment, nations must provide clear signals and the right incentives for industry. I recommend an orientation toward pollution prevention. Industry in the United States is learning that preventing the generation of pollution in the first place—by, for example, adopting new technologies and processes, recycling and recapturing chemicals and hazardous substances, and replacing oil-based solvents with water-based solvents—not only saves materials but also frequently saves money by reducing future liability and avoiding regulation. In government, we need to reinforce this trend: to set sound standards, outline industry's obligations, and, where possible, use the marketplace to provide incentives for environmental protection.

Our Clean Air Act of 1990, based on President George Bush's proposal, has provided industries with up to six years of relief from further regulation of toxic air pollution if they agree to make early voluntary reductions of ninety percent in their air toxics emissions. The Act also provides an innovative system for trading emissions of sulfur dioxide pollution within a permanent cap on total emissions that is fifty percent below current levels. The market mechanisms that we have adopted in the United States may not be appropriate for Central and Eastern European economies. Nevertheless, I believe that economic tools and analysis are vital to the development of sound environmental policies.

To those who say we have made no progress on the environment I must respond that, under our previous Clean Air Act, the United States reduced airborne sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide by thirty percent, cut particulates by sixty-four percent, and removed ninety-seven percent of emissions of lead. During this same period, the nation's gross national product grew by sixty percent. The economic growth made the environmental progress possible, and the resulting growth has been healthier and more protective of our natural systems. It is that progress, in both the economy and the environment, that gives us confidence in our ability to achieve new and ambitious goals. So, those who advocate ever more ambitious environmental goals would do well to acknowledge what progress we already have made, even when, as in our case, it has not been enough. People asked to pay more for environmental protection need to be reminded that previous tax burdens for the environment in fact did purchase good value.

Third, I urge the new democracies of this region to recognize the importance of the free flow of information. In the United States, both our law providing for an annual Toxic Release Inventory and our Community Right-to-Know laws require every plant to measure and report their lawful releases to the environment of two hundred odd chemicals. Each year local media give prominent coverage to their area's toxic releases. Neighbors of the plants, workers, shareholders—all are jarred by the news. One chief executive officer of a major chemical company told me that until he saw his company's toxic release inventory report, he had no idea how much high-value product the company was sending up the smokestack. This law that has no teeth has revolutionized company performance, leading facilities dramatically to reduce their toxic releases well beyond what pollution laws require. The kind of information that the law provides thus drives progress and stimulates economies.

There is yet another benefit from the unhindered flow of information that will encourage progress. As private, nongovernmental organizations have greater access to information about the environmental records of industry, they will keep the issues of human health and environmental protection before the public and high on the political agenda. This openness, this vitality for private groups, is essential to environmental reforms and advances, even where, as here, the government now includes so many leaders of nongovernmental environmental groups.

Finally, environmental progress only can be accomplished with cooperation, with regional and even global participation and partnership. Yet, in spite of our good intentions and enthusiasm—or

perhaps as a result of them—I fear that we already have duplicated efforts and wasted resources. Working together, the governments of Eastern and Western Europe, Japan, Canada, and the United States need to agree on a strategy for short-term aid that takes advantage of our information, our resources, and our desire to improve environmental quality in this region.

Let me now make a different point. Environmental protection requires a formidable array of analytic tools, but it is not purely a technocratic affair. Cost-benefit and risk analysis are vitally important, but there is something more fundamental too: an ethical imperative to restore and preserve the natural order. The changes in Eastern Europe did not spring from purely political or economic considerations. The legitimacy of these revolutions rests on the values they advanced about the dignity of the person and his or her sphere of unencroachable privacy and freedom, worship, work, reward, and property.

We enter into the dimension of morality here, morality that instructs politics and stands above economics. One of the first concerns of a moral order must be to clarify and uphold principles of conduct that promote the survival and fulfillment of the species. That compels us to recognize and correct the disharmony in the relationship between nature and humankind, not just in the discredited communist systems, but also in our own systems, though to a far lesser extent.

We must recognize the need to improve both the efficiency and the quality of our efforts to promote regional cooperation on the environment. This was the goal behind President Bush's proposal to establish the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe. In less than one year, the Center has become a focal point for environmental groups across Central Europe. It is supporting important work in information collection and dissemination, institution building, emergency preparedness, and environmental education, as well as in the areas of environmental health, energy efficiency, pollution prevention, and agriculture. Most importantly, the Center is creating new links and strengthening existing bridges among government, business, and environmental groups.

President Bush has said, "our shared heritage is the Earth, and the fate of the Earth transcends borders." Without forgetting the past, let us look to the future, to safeguarding for generations yet to come the planet that is in our care: a planet now dependent on human stewardship as it has never been until this century, even while humankind continues to depend on the health of its natural systems, which sustain all life.