

First up is Norman Davies being interviewed by TVN24:

Q: You knew the president personally. How do you remember him?

ND: I didn't really know president Kaczynski. I knew him better as the mayor of Warsaw and as the founder of the Warsaw Uprising museum. We only met a handful of times.

Q: Did you lose any friends in the crash?

ND: Yes, my wife and I flew to Smolensk with the government delegation on Wednesday. We travelled with several people who were on the plane which crashed on Saturday. The person I knew best was the wonderful president Kaczorowski (ex-president in exile) He was certainly one of the greatest losses of the tragedy.

Q: I ask you this as someone who knows Poland and Poles but who can also look out this tragedy from an objective distance: Do Poles always have to fight and argue amongst themselves, even in occasions such as this? I'm talking about the controversy over Wawel.

ND: I see that there is a very unpleasant fuss surrounding Wawel. I'm convinced that it is not something specific in the Polish character. However, in Poland there are people who constantly provoke controversies and arguments. Unfortunately, this has been a characteristic during recent years.

Q: Is it a Polish characteristic or can it be observed everywhere?

ND: In general I don't believe that there is such thing as a national character. It is a great myth. Every nation is made up of millions of people who each have their own temperament and personality and who all react differently, even to the same experiences.....

Q: You are a honorary citizen of Krakow, you have an honorary doctorate from Jagiellonian University, and you are an expert on Polish history. Is Wawel an appropriate place for the president to be buried?

ND: I am also an honorary citizen of Warsaw. In my opinion the ex-mayor of Warsaw, the national president who ruled from Warsaw, a son of the uprising, should be buried in Warsaw.

Q: How much time will have to pass before history can objectively pass judgement on the achievements of president Kaczynski?

ND: It's hard to say, but we can see right now how a myth is forming before our very eyes. It is impossible to be objective about someone who dies tragically. People feel a natural sympathy towards the deceased. Now is not the time to assess the president or any of the other victims.

Q: Do you think that the improved relations between Poland and Russia following the tragedy will last?

ND: Even before the disaster I had noticed a lot of progress in relations. When premiers

Tusk and Putin met in Katyn I was there and I saw it up close. I believe that it is an authentic rapprochement. One effect of the tragedy has been a wave of sympathy towards Poland and Poles amongst ordinary Russians. This is a new factor in relations and I doubt it will fade away overnight.

Q: Should we be happy about this?

ND: Of course. Poland, like every country, should have good relations with all its neighbours. I don't see any other priorities in international relations.

Q: How authentic are the words and gestures that we have seen from Putin and Medvedev in recent days?

ND: Putin and Medvedev are politicians. They have their own national and personal interests. Every politician is an actor. One cannot expect otherwise. The step that Putin took in Katyn cannot be reversed. The mere presence of the Russian president and premier at Kaczynski's funeral will have huge significance because the whole thing will be broadcast on Russian TV. Millions of Russians are hearing about Katyn for the first time. Katyn could become the means by which Russians come to terms with the Stalinist crimes committed against their own nation, which are still not as well known as they should be.

Q: What might be the next step? Will Russia finally disclose the documents for which Poland has been asking for years?

ND: It is not that bad. We already know an awful lot. Why be so negative? There are a few missing papers, that's all..... These demands from Poland that Russia should do this and that have no effect and get us nowhere.

Q: But these are reasonable demands.

ND: ...The Russians have their own historical ghosts-- their own officers and relatives who were also killed. It is difficult for them to hear people from abroad tell them what to do with these documents. It seems to me that Putin and Medvedev cannot now go back to the previous status quo. We'll see where things lead from here.

Q: Let's turn back to president Kaczynski. Do you believe that the Warsaw Uprising museum will prove to be his chief legacy?

ND: Of course. It was his greatest achievement.. It is hard to point to anything else in his career which is bigger. The Uprising museum will, in a way, be his memorial.

Interviewer: Grzegorz Kajdanowicz Source: TVN24 / Angora magazine

Translated by Czarny Kot 22/04/10

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