

Roundtable of Women Entrepreneurs  
at the ACUS "Caterina" Textile Plant

Warsaw, Poland

10/5/99

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

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Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**Warsaw, Poland  
October 5, 1999**

I want to say first how pleased I am to be back in Poland. I have enjoyed very much my previous visits with my husband, and being here is a wonderful experience for me to see how much progress has been made. It was Poland that led the way in 1989, and it is Poland that continues to lead the way here in Europe and throughout this region.

It is also the first visit I have been able to make since Poland became a member of NATO—we had an incredible celebration of that expansion of NATO at the White House in April. And I am pleased to not only commend the Polish Government and the Polish people, but to thank you for being part of NATO and for being so strongly supportive of NATO's efforts in Kosovo.

I have a very full day, starting with the conversation here and then going on to a school—the Lauder Morasha School here in Warsaw, where Poland's historic Jewish community is being revived through its children—and then to a USAID conference where I will speak about the role that NGOs are playing in building stable democracies in civic societies. But I think it is fair to say that no group is more important to the future of Poland, of Europe, and indeed of the world, than the entrepreneurial class and those who are willing to take the risks necessary to create jobs and opportunities for themselves and their fellow citizens. So it is particularly exciting to start today with a group of entrepreneurs—who just happen to be women—and to be in the business of a successful woman entrepreneur. I have just toured with Maria her production facility and design rooms here, and I am incredibly impressed. I've urged her to try to get her fashions to the United States—I think particularly of Chicago, where many Polish Americans would be very eager customers. Each of the women around this table is doing things that are making a great contribution to the Polish economy.

From 1989 to 1995, the percentage of female employers in Poland rose dramatically—from 5 percent to 39 percent. That is the pattern that exists in the United States as well; the number of women-owned businesses has just exploded, and more women-owned businesses are creating jobs than any other sector of the economy.

So I am looking forward to hearing from each of these entrepreneurs and learning about their experiences—the challenges they faced and successes they have had—because it is really the engine that has driven Polish growth, and it is the example that people look to when we talk about success stories since 1989. Poland is always at the top of the list. So I'd like to have a chance to hear from our panelists.

(Roundtable discussion omitted.)

The individual stories that we've heard around the table are inspiring and encouraging. What I am very excited about is how each of these stories stands for thousands of other stories. I especially appreciate the emphasis that several of the speakers have had on making sure that the attitudes and the mindsets for entrepreneurial activity and for risk-taking are not only modeled but spread throughout the population, particularly into the countryside where it is a more difficult challenge.

I have written down a few of the things that several of you have said, and I am very struck by the way that your personal aspirations and ambitions sort of met opportunity. Whether it was opportunity meeting people—clients—who had bigger business challenges; or opportunity with the change in a government or USAID support that was there; the key is to create enough opportunity that enough people would respond to it, thereby creating more opportunities.

One of you said we are the opportunity, which I like. I think that is a very good way of describing it and keeping the focus on positive change and positive energy. It is true that underneath most successful economic activity is optimism. If you don't believe you can sell something, you won't make it. If you don't think it's worth going out to the marketplace, you are not going to. So believing in yourself and having that kind of optimism are keys, and it's one of the changes that have been happening to women around the world in the last 10 years. More and more women have felt that confidence to venture out into the world in a variety of ways. And you all are the examples of how positive that can be, both for you individually, but also for your employees, for your communities, and I would think as well for your country. Because enough people having that optimistic, risk-taking attitude creates a stronger economy.

So I am very impressed by what I've heard and the kinds of activities you are engaged in, and I also thank many of the people in the audience, who have their own stories to tell about their move toward entrepreneurial economic activity. And I especially want to thank June, who has been a wonderful representative of our country's commitment to the economic well-being of the Polish people. Because truly it is something that the United States feels very strong about and that my husband and his government feel is a great investment for America: creating more business opportunities for people here. And that is why someone like June is such a great representative of the United States—because of her willingness to work with anyone who is willing to create a better economic future. So I want to thank you particularly, June.