

ATHENA

FOREIGN POLICY SPEECH

MSc Course

"The EU and the Post-Soviet Space"

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Pauer

AS

Her Grandmother



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Foreign Policy Speech

Viktória Anna Pauer

Context:

This speech is told from the perspective of my grandmother, an ethnically Polish woman born in what is now modern day Belarus. Her family fled to Poland and she went on to attend university in Warsaw in the wake of the annexation and final waves of deportation in 1960 where she met my Hungarian grandfather, who through an effort to avoid military conscription became the reason she moved to Communist Hungary. She has raised her family far away from home, facing hardship due to language barriers, stereotyping and a struggle to keep her family afloat financially without the help of extended family, while having to accept that most major decisions of her life were not hers at all.

While Poland is part of the post-Communist countries as opposed to the post-Soviet space where she only lived for 19 years, I believe her life experience of fear, insecurity and loss of multiple “homes” due to world events outside of her control, in light of her current political beliefs contrasted with contemporary events in this speech serve as a reminder and a lesson for all of us. Perhaps a lesson of adapting to circumstance and having to accept “defeat” to be able to accept reality, but that is partly up to the listener what they would like to take from this piece. For the speech, imagine the setting as the end of a family dinner, where you are taking the role of a grandchild. After seeing the news, you receive a lesson on history and contemporary politics from your grandmother, jumping from topic to topic in a slightly disorganized manner, as it often happens in a family setting.

Speech:

Sit down, kids, find a place. Did everyone have enough to eat? Don't worry, we'll have coffee in a moment and of course there's chocolate—but look, the news is on. It's that war again. Such a senseless tragedy, isn't it? You'd think by now there'd be peace, but no. Just like Orbán Viktor says, sometimes you must endure and survive. You give up a little, but at least you are alive.

I mean, we knew this, when the deportation order came, we knew we had to leave. This was back where I was born, it's in Belarus today. The police chief himself came to find us to say we could choose from the Gulag, Siberia or the train to Warsaw, that leaves in an hour, but we cannot stay. We only got the warning because he was a family friend. So, we took what we

could carry to catch that train. Turned out, it was the last one. I'll never forget how quickly life changed. We didn't know anyone, we barely had anything, but we didn't have a choice.

By god, I didn't even speak proper Polish when we arrived! All my studies had been in Russian before, how else. We could only speak Polish at home. Have I not told you this before? Oh, well, it was a struggle at university to study basically in a new language. But, let me tell you, at least education was free, and I had a place to stay. And work? We didn't worry about careers back then, not like people do today, you worked where you were needed, where you were assigned. Then I met your grandfather, and, well, the rest is history. But I'll tell you something: if the Poles thought I was a Soviet spy, can you imagine what the Hungarians thought when we came here? It's no wonder Orbán talks about all these foreigners in the city now - walking around Budapest, you can hardly hear a word of Hungarian anymore, it's what Brussels wants.

But back then, we could live! We even traveled. Life felt safer. It's not like today, you have to think about where you go with these protests, immigrants and liberal politics. Your father, he was such a sweet boy. He always loved the motherland. When we visited my mother on holiday, he was what? Six? He got so tired of eating milk soup every day, he demanded some real food. My mother just laughed, gave him a few coins, and sent him to the store. He came back, in utter disbelief, and said, "There's nothing on the shelves to buy!" At least in Hungary, you could blame a lack of money for an empty stomach at that time. Not like now, not with these prices. With this war inflation, I think twice before even buying chicken-back! Brussels doesn't care, they don't want peace. I'm sure their salaries can buy the stars and the moon, and pay for heating in the winter. Try that on a pension! And don't get me started on that old man Biden.

Just like Orbán says, Brussels is just a bad copy of Soviet Moscow. But even that they can't do right.

But you know, what's lost is lost. There's no point in fighting a lost fight. There should've been peace already. And still, we wait. This is not good for anyone, it cannot be. I just think sometimes there's sense in surrender. But what can you do? Just survive, like always.

Would you like some chocolate?