

**POLISH SOCIETY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS
INTEGRATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION¹**

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IN THE EUROPEAN WAITING ROOM

A complete integration of Poland with the European Union, scheduled (in May 2001) for 2004, will undoubtedly be another momentous process in the country's history, after its withdrawal from the Soviet (and later Russian) sphere of interests and after the implementation of the rule of law and the Western-style civic liberties. These processes started twelve years ago. European integration can contribute to the final break with the, mostly economic and civilization, processes of "long duration," processes which, already at the end of the 15th century (the "long 16th century" in Fernand Braudel's terminology) gradually began to locate Poland on the Europe's peripheries. Those processes were strengthened by the political dependence, first in the form of partition among Russia, Germany and Austria (1772, 1775, and finally 1795) and later by the domination of the Soviet Union which lasted since 1944 for nearly half a century. The process of European integration is in the case of Poland (but also in the case of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia, to name the main regional candidates), simultaneous with the other process, that of systemic transformation toward liberal democracy and market economy. The successes in each of those two processes (taking place according to different rules, though) speed up the latter process, while failures of each contribute to the slowing down of another one.

It is worth noting that some countries which had belonged for at least two hundred years to the European peripheries, managed to improve their overall situation to a significant extent during the last fifty years. Although Spain and Portugal were not politically dependent on the other powers, Greece and Ireland were. Those four countries were accepted by the European Union (earlier—Community) mostly for political not economic reasons, but later on

the membership in the Union gave them a chance for a considerable civilization advancement. On the eve of its access to the Union, Poland should compare itself with those four, and not with much better economically developed countries like Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, or England. Economic (particularly agricultural) problems that the former four had twenty years ago are similar to the problems Poland faces at present. It should be added that even the well developed European countries had, in the past, to cope with some conflict-generating problems which Poland faces nowadays, such as economic, social and cultural revival/reconstruction of the "old industrial regions."

CIVILIZATION BACKWARDNESS IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In addition to the problems posed by traditional industrial regions and by agriculture, the basic problem of Poland on its way to the united Europe is its civilization "backwardness" (in terms of economy, technology, technical infrastructure, organizational and social infrastructure). Historically consolidated and subordinated to the rules of the "long duration," that backwardness has manifested itself for several centuries in a clear and unilateral adaptation of Polish economy to the demands of the better developed countries, regions, and even cities of Europe (like England, the Netherlands, the Hanseatic cities), and later of big continental organizations (European Community and then Union). Recently, for nearly fifty years, Poland had to adapt to the economic, structural and cultural system of the Soviet Union. The backwardness had also revealed itself in the too slow process of emergence of new social classes, particularly of the urban middle class (bourgeois) which—in the historical perspective—could have organized the economic growth and development and could have, therefore, helped depart from the mono-cultural economy and inefficient, in terms of variety, export of goods (like grain, timber, hem, and later on coal, copper and steel). In spite of political successes and a great liveliness of its symbolic culture, already in the 17th century Poland was, in comparison to the leading European powers, a backward country in terms of economy and civilization. Today, after several centuries, this historic Polish backwardness which can hopefully disappear now, due to European integration, can

be described by the use of many indicators and through presentation of many significant processes. In our opinion, the most important manifestations of this backwardness are:

1. The structure of the labor force is antiquated. Industry and agriculture still dominate and the "third sector," both in a traditional sense of commerce and craftsmanship and in a modern sense of banking, health service, insurance, real estate, information technology, etc., is weak. The percentage of people employed in the third sector has not increased during the period of systemic transformation.

Poland is still an industrial country, but hopefully the perspective of reaching a postindustrial stage does not seem to be very remote.

2. The ownership relations in the field of production means are also antiquated with too big a share of the state ownership and insufficient—despite the numerous positive signs—private sector. From the strictly legal point of view, the share of the private sector in Poland is smaller than in the Czech Republic or in Slovakia. However, the class structure has been, since 1989, undergoing radical transformations, for the second time during the fifty years (the first time took place immediately after World War II and the Communist takeover).

3. The structure of export (mostly relatively unprocessed goods such as raw materials and agricultural products) and import (mostly highly processed goods like machinery, electronics) is disadvantageous. Polish products do not compete successfully with foreign products, either on the domestic market or abroad.

4. Resources in the state sector of economy, particularly in heavy industry (for instance in mining) are still wasted or insufficiently managed.

5. Technology in many enterprises is archaic and the level of technological innovation in Poland is low. Investments in Polish science remain very inadequate, also the share of Polish scientific and scholarly publications in their global production is decreasing.

6. Efficiency of labor is low and the ties between efficiency, skills and qualifications, on the one hand, and income on the other are still weak, particularly in the state sector of economy.

7. The demographic structure of Polish population is disadvantageous. Due to the former "baby-boom," the young Poles will soon make up about 40% of all people looking for jobs in both Central and Western Europe. Moreover, in order to achieve the European Union standards in the labor force

structure, it is necessary to find alternative employment for about 2.8 million people once working for agriculture, for about 300,000 who now find jobs in the oil, coal and energy industries, for about 350,000 are likely to make redundant in traditional heavy industry, and for about 400,000 of those who are bound to lose their work in the traditional light industry. In this situation, the number of the unemployed can increase dramatically and the increase is estimated at 600,000 to 1.2 million people. Already, about 700,000 Poles (mostly young) work abroad, and only 200,000 of them do it with formal work permit.

8. The Gross National Product (GNP) per capita is low. While in 1999, according to the *Eurostat 2000* and in terms of buying power, it amounted, for instance, to: in Luxembourg – \$33,800; in Denmark – \$25,000; in the Netherlands – 23,800; in Germany – \$21,000; its value in poorer countries of Western Europe was: in Spain – \$17,300; in Portugal – \$15,900; in Greece – \$14,200; in Ireland – \$9800; in Poland it was hardly \$7,700.

Thus, in 1997, a “statistical Pole” contributed 37% of the GNP per capita of what an average inhabitant of the European Union’s member states contributed, and this coefficient was lower than that in Slovenia (68%), in Hungary (49%) and even in Slovakia (46%). In 1998, according to the same edition of the *Eurostat*, the Polish coefficient rose to 39-40% of the EU average. As compared to some individual EU countries, a “statistical Pole” contributed 24% of the income produced by a Luxembourgian, 34% of a Dane, 36% of a German, and – 42% of a Spaniard, 56-57% of a Greek and a Portuguese.

9. Poland is dependent on the most developed countries in terms of economy, capital, technology, and science.

10. Many measures of the civilization development are disadvantageous in Poland: high infant mortality, very high mortality in many age categories, low life expectancy, very modest social infrastructure, deformed educational structure. The educational capital of the labor force is obscure. According to the latest statistics, about 8% of adult Poles have completed university or professional higher education, another 2% have the college education, 25% have the high-school education and about 65% have the primary school (completed or incompleting) education or vocational education. The school curricula still do not meet the demands imposed by modernization processes. It should be added, however, that in the school year of 1997/98, for the first time Poland met the European Union standards in terms of percentage of primary school graduates who continued their education in high-schools (80%). Since then, this positive trend has continued.

11. Inequalities in regional development are conspicuous, particularly the distance (or even gaps) between some larger regions (Central Poland vs. so-called Eastern Wall) or between various administrative units (Mazowsze province vs. Podkarpacie province).

It is also worth pointing out that there are some manifestations of a poor adjustment of Poland to the Western world, in terms of mentality and social folkways and mores. We shall return to them later on.

Looking at the Polish public scene from the perspective of socio-organizational dimension of economy, it seems that a strongly elitist way of making decisions concerning democratic and market-oriented transformations toward the European Union poses a real social problem having various aspects. A more democratic way of reconstruction of the hybrid (state-private, partly monopolized and partly based on the principles of free market) economy as well as wider and deeper discussions regarding strong and weak points of the programs put forward would be of help. Public debates obviously slow the accommodation process down, but without such debates it would be difficult to persuade people that they must face great efforts once again, and the resulting social protests and conflicts are much more probable (they are already quite overt). Economic transformation is an arena of economic game with various actors. It is not possible to eliminate them, so it is necessary to take their gains and losses into account. On the other hand, European integration is only to a small extent a mutual adaptation. In our case, it means the accommodation of Poland to the existing Western European standards. These standards are in the permanent, slow process of modifications, but the candidates to the Union can hardly influence the direction and content of those changes. The current public debates must, therefore, have rather a character of unilateral public education than a discourse of equal partners—Poland and the Union. As mentioned before, it does not facilitate the mobilization of people for activities which are often considered by them as those once more inspired from the outside and contradictory to their immediate interests.

As we have already mentioned, the European Union is a diversified and dynamic structure. Therefore, and most probably, the problem of Polish participation within its frameworks does not have to

be treated only as a process of unilateral adaptation to the ready given solutions. The Union, when analyzed in the historical perspective, is not a ready-made and unchangeable product offered to the Poles, but a process, to the participation in which they were invited. Poland is a candidate now, but after 2004, and particularly after 2009 when the country hopes to reach the full membership (defined among other things, by unlimited labor force mobility), it will fully participate in the decision-making process.

PEASANTS, FARMERS, AND THE AGRICULTURE PROBLEMS: ADAPTATION AND CONTESTATION

The problems of Polish agriculture are a very important obstacle in quick modernization of the country and in its European integration. They have both socio-cultural and economic/political dimensions. The first has consisted of, first of all, the sense of threat experienced by peasants/farmers continuously since the end of World War II. Since that time, they have been uncertain if the political and economic system would guarantee the stability of family farms. Even the constitutional changes in the 1980s (i.e. under socialism), according to which the family farm system became guaranteed by the state Constitution, did not diminish the sense of danger. During nearly 50 years of the socialist system in Poland, peasants invented and elaborated a number of resistance strategies which, on the one hand, stabilized the very inefficient ways of food production and processing but, on the other, accustomed the socialist economy and policy to the private ownership of means of production in agriculture. Statistics, particularly international, can hardly be a precise measure for an analysis of the situation of Polish agriculture. It should be noted, however, that only one fifth of the family farms reveals today, at the beginning of the 21st century, after ten years of pro-market transformations, any relatively high accommodation possibilities. The remaining farms find themselves on the peripheries of the economic system, living in poverty and generating income only from pensions and disability pensions of older farmers, as well as from other state subsidies. Poland, with 16% of its active population working in agriculture (Hungary – 10%, the Czech Republic – 7%) finds itself close to Greece and Portugal in terms of many measures concerning the role of

agriculture in economy, but the concentration of land and production is much higher in the latter two countries than in Poland.

It should be borne in mind that in the face of new economic and social challenges, the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union is already changing and will continue to change in future. Subsidies will decrease and the priorities will be modified. After 2004, Poland cannot count on such an amount of subsidies as Greece, Spain or Portugal used to enjoy. Poland will have to continue its process of modernization of agriculture, including the increased concentration of production and the improvement of its efficiency. Poland will have to create much more jobs in the rural areas but outside agriculture (this problem has been mentioned earlier). These two processes will have to be stimulated and assisted by the educational campaign on the part of the state authorities since distrust towards any agricultural policy (as mentioned above) is traditionally very substantial in Poland. The creation of strategies for multifunctional development of rural areas, strategies based on the assumption that farms do not have to confine themselves to food production but can also sell other qualities of the countryside, is also indispensable. It does not mean a "return to nature and tradition," but rather the beginnings of postindustrial, postmodern conditions in villages. This process will not be easy and, as in Western Europe, social protests and conflicts are already overt and will continue to be visible. Another task facing the inhabitants of Polish villages is the elaboration of planning skills regarding local collective behavior, skills necessary to apply for European community development grants and to use those funds in practice. Acceptance of Poland by the European Union will undoubtedly speed those modernization processes up.

THE CONVINCED, THE UNCERTAIN, THE OPPONENTS

Fears that occur in some social groups, first of all among unskilled and elderly blue collar workers, as well as among those peasants who will not be able to adapt their farms to the demands of market economy, are strongly connected with the unemployment rate which reached 16% at the beginning of 2001 (which is lower than in some European Union countries, though), with the growing class differentiation (which is not accepted by major political forces and by

the society at large) and with the stabilization of poverty areas. We must remember that there is not only the "old" (inherited from the socialist times) but also the "new" poverty and its social transmission. High, for the Polish standards, unemployment rate results in very large financial costs in the unemployed benefits (they are as high as the whole budget deficit of 1995) for the state to bear, but also in the degradation and marginalization of numerous social groups. About one third of the Polish population declares living in poverty. Research indicates that defining one's social, cultural and economic position as a low tends to be a factor that strengthens a sense of deprivation. Families living in poverty do not only have problems with meeting their basic (in Polish socio-cultural situation of the beginning of the 21st century) needs but they also experience the effects of accumulated deprivation. Social disorganization (such as old and new kinds of crime, including organized crime, international crime syndicates, drug dealing, new forms of institutional pathology, corruption, Internet-related crime) is the next important by-product of the systemic transformation, having a growing impact on the perception by Poles of the sense of transformation and of the process of European integration.

Looking at the latter process, let us pay attention to some opinion polls. Different experiences of Austria and of the Scandinavian countries show how important the public opinion is for the success of the application process and later of the membership in the European Union. Stimulation of the sense of social participation and responsibility is very important for the process.

Public support for the enlargement of the Union is relatively low in its member states. According to the *Eurobarometer Spring 2001*, 44% of the citizens of the Union member-states support "generally" its enlargement into East and South. However, as an important and concrete goal to be achieved soon, enlargement is supported by 26%. General support is declared by, first of all, Greeks, Italians, Spaniards, Swedes, Danes and the Irish. On the other pole of the spectrum we have Great Britain with 31% of supportive citizens. If asked (still quite generally) about the concrete candidates (ten from Central and Eastern Europe as well as Malta, Cyprus and Turkey), 34% of the citizens of the Union member-states would support the access. Swedes, Greeks and Danes are relatively enthusiastic. The least

enthusiastic are the French. The support was given first and foremost (about 70%) to Switzerland and Norway (these two countries do not apply). Malta receive 48% of the support, Hungary 46% and Poland was on the fifth position with 44% of the support. Swedes are the most supportive for Poland (68%) and Austrians (25%) are the least supportive. In comparison to the *Fall 2000 Eurobarometer*, the support for the Polish access to the Union dropped by 1%.

Within the candidate states, the support for the integration is not very substantial, either. It is very high only in Romania and high in Poland. Since February 1997, even if still high, it has been decreasing in Poland, though, since the fears of losses have prevailed over the hopes of gains. The "anti-modernistic attitudes" have strengthened. Contrary to the opinions of the modernizing social and political elites, the public consensus around the program of the Polish participation in the Union seems to be shallow. It can be characterized rather as passive acceptance than as active approval. This acceptance fluctuates, and it is easily modified by immediate domestic and foreign events.

European integration means for Poland a dramatic transformation of the legal system. The legal systems of Poland and of the European Communities developed, for many post-World War II decades, in different directions. Again, what is necessary now is not a mutual adaptation of these different systems but the unilateral acceptance by Poland of the Western European package of laws. It should be added that this package is being continuously enriched independently of the process of the Union enlargement. The accommodation process develops successfully yet slowly. It will have to take many years. It has already become a significant factor in the modernization of many areas of public life in Poland. The obstacles in the speeding up of the process of accommodation are not limited to the above mentioned internal dynamics of the European Union's law, but they also result from the deep differences between the "legal culture" of Poland on the one hand, and that of Western Europe on the other. Those cultural differences have developed during many centuries and will not be easy to eliminate. In both regions there exist different social rules of the application of law, different attitudes of the populations to law and to law enforcing institutions, different "legal skills" of ordinary people and their capacities to understand legal texts and to use them in their everyday lives.

The problem of legal culture leads us to the issue of the democratic culture and the way the political system operates in Poland. The process of democracy building rests here on the simultaneous deconstruction of the pre-1989 system and construction of a new system. The process is "unclear," complex, and multidimensional. This results in the fact that democracy is "dim" for its participants. When analyzing democracy, it is necessary to pay attention both to the issue of procedures and the issue of participation. Democratic procedural rules have already been implemented in Poland. Participation is still limited, though. "Theoretical" and practical civic competence is inadequate: reluctance to participate in the political process, reluctance to the membership in political parties, passive attitudes all prevail. Political activity is often a manifestation of a group egoism extending legal procedures. Democracy is to some extent valued, but rather as a way of solving of problems more important for the population than as itself. We could therefore say that democracy is relatively shallow in Poland.

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND ITS DYNAMICS

The political systems of Central and Eastern Europe have recently become more and more composed. The above mentioned democratic procedures have played an increasingly important role in them. The Polish political system which in various aspects reflects many Western European arrangements still differs from them significantly. Political parties, when they win elections, nowhere and never fully keep their pre-election promises. However, in Western Europe the function of representation and transformation of citizens' interests by political parties plays a crucial role in the democratic system; the state is pragmatic; it has information strategies which are much better than in Poland; it has some convincing institutional tools to present the government's policies as rational. Therefore, disillusionment does not occur in the Western democracies as often as it does in Poland. For the Polish politicians and constituency, the past is much more important than for the Western European constituencies, even in those countries which have only recently got rid of authoritarianism. As a consequence, the transition period in the West lasted shorter than in Poland. In comparison with the European Union, the respect for

political opposition is very low in Poland, but the level of conflicts and emotions which politics stirs is very high. Polish corporatism is different than that in Western Europe as well. In Poland, the political authorities and the employers mean very often the same body, and corporatism is a covert way to retain the former political privileges by strong actors of the political process, neglecting democracy and the rules of free market. Informal sphere of influences is larger here than in the Union and there is nearly no division between private and public interests. Polish politics and Polish politicians are not regarded high by a majority of the population. Opinions about the widespread corruption are being heard very often, and they are shared by many Union and other international screening institutions, such as Transparency International.

The division of real competence between the central state authorities and regional and local self-government is a very important aspect of the political system. In Poland (unlike, for instance, in Germany or Italy) there are no political regions but only some cultural regions, most of them of a relict character. In terms of social consciousness, regionalism is a marginal matter. Therefore, separatism does not constitute any real danger. It seems rather that the whole political tradition of the 20th century independent Polish state (since 1918) has been a centralist one. Territorial reforms of 1975 (under the Communist system) and of 1990 (at the beginning of the democratic transformation; this reform liquidated the local self-government on the provincial level which had a very seeming character at that time) were also centralist. For the citizens to involve in the functioning of the democratic system, it is very important that the territorial reforms and the formal re-establishing of the self-government effective since 1 January, 1999, actually break with centralism. After two years, at the beginning of 2001, we can say that the hopes have only partly come true. The central state government transferred many administrative functions to the local councils but did not transfer financial means necessary to fulfil them. The local councils duplicate the central political party arrangements and rarely reflect the local interests. Corruption and clientelism are wider than expected.

In the context of European integration, Poles very often discuss the European character of their culture and of the necessity of survival of their specific national identity. The particular kind of "mod-

ernization" as carried out by the Communist authorities until 1989, had an interesting peculiarity: it promoted the continuation of traditional culture and even "return" to its more elementary forms, specific for pre-modern societies. The everyday life of Poles was based to a large extent on legends, myths, unrealistic images of the outside world. The provisional character of the institutional arrangements (including political systems, socioeconomic structures, economic systems, and even state borders), which continued throughout the last several generations due to the lack of sovereign state organization, contributed to a strong position of the political mythology. Being of a foreign origin, many of those institutional arrangements challenged the Polishness as a value or even attempted to eliminate it. In the consciousness of Poles, the very existence of their nation was in jeopardy. This situation led to the "identity nostalgia," including the sanctification of the national tradition, and extended exegesis of the tradition in which the background of the true identity of the nation was to be found. The Polish sense of identity was characterized by stressing the continuation, with few realistic comparisons to other nations. And if any, then based on ignorance, those comparisons maintained national good feelings and bred negative attitudes towards other nations.

Since 1989, however, the emerging market economy and democratization of the political system have weakened traditionalism in the field of attitudes and social images. Increasing opportunities of real contacts with the outside world have enforced everyday comparisons. Those comparisons lead to positive changes in the perception of the neighboring countries and nations (positive attitudes of Poles to the "strangeness" is still a rare phenomenon, though). Another change is the increase in negative self-perception of various Polish social milieus. As we know, there is a correlation between the increase of self-confidence, on the one hand, and the increase of positive or at least neutral attitudes to the others, on the other. It seems that many individual and public activities of Poles are connected with the above mentioned identity crisis, with the problems they have to accept the new, worse self-image.

THE CHURCH AND THE YOUTH OF THE PRE-ACCESS PERIOD

The problems discussed in the former paragraph lead us to the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the European integration of Poland. Due to historical conditions, in Poland as in Spain or Ireland, Catholic faith is a significant marker of the national identity. Poland is beginning the process of integration with the European Union when a Pole is the Pope, the highest authority in the Church. During the pontificate of John Paul II, who supports the enlargement of European unity in Central and Eastern Europe, the Church has engaged in the process of integration, linking it with its own mission of the "new evangelization" of Europe. The Roman Catholic Church sees its chance in the opportunity to participate in the process of shaping the new European identity. At the same time, institutional collaboration with the European Union is to serve the realization of the Church's interests.

The Polish episcopate, following the teaching of the Pope, reveals a positive attitude to the integration, promoting the idea of Europe as a "fatherland of national fatherlands" (but not "fatherland of regions"). This positive attitude is important since the role of the Church as a factor legitimizing public activities is still very strong in Poland. Moreover, the Church uses the "language of moral community" (as different from the language of formal institutions), indispensable to evoke emotions of trust and loyalty, the emotions which cannot be stimulated only by bureaucratic structures of the state. The Church has actively engaged into the dissemination of the idea of European unity and into the process of breaking the fears of the integration. The Roman Catholic clergy in Poland strongly supports integration. Among the faithful, the opinion that the place of Poland is in the European structure, dominates. When some Catholics, who have problems with the acceptance of philosophical pluralism and who fear moral relativism, actively question the sense of the integration process (which happens quite often), they are admonished by bishops.

Support of the Church for European integration of Poland seems to be more functional for the state and for European institutions than for the Church itself. This support means a strong political involvement of the Church, which is, formally speaking, contradictory to its mission. It also means that the Church will be co-responsible for

social costs of the integration. On the other hand, it is possible that new challenges will inspire some internal modifications within the Church depending, for instance, on increased revival of the laymen faithful.

The youths are a crucial social category from the point of view of functioning of the process of integration. It is the young generation who will implement it in future. The success of integration depends on its education, attitudes and activities. The Polish system of education demanded for decades the radical reforms (they partly began in the Fall of 1999 and will continue during next few years), for instance in the fields of stimulation of self-education; information about Europe and the whole world of modern civilization; command of foreign languages. Some positive tendencies have already been presented in this article. Moreover, in the 1990s, the number of freshmen in Polish institutions of higher education increased by about 100% in comparison to the 1980s. The number of schools, mostly private (students must pay tuition), granting the bachelor's and master's degrees has also dramatically increased (but, interestingly, the number of college and university teachers has not increased). Education, particularly higher education, became an important value and in the mid-1990s it became evident that it could positively correlate with one's income. This trend has not continued at the very end of the 1990s, though. Moreover, in 1999 and 2000, the university education was no longer a guarantee of a success on the jobs market.

Since the mid-1990s, two thirds of the Polish youths (between the age of 18 and 24) have considered the Polish application to the European Union advantageous for their own careers. Youths as a social aggregate have particularly positive attitudes to the integration. However, the information they have on the ways the Western European institutions operate is still inadequate. On the other hand, this knowledge is substantial enough to perceive the fact that the integration will hardly be a simple process, not leading to any social conflicts. Therefore, a "positive thinking" about the future is accompanied by pessimism.

THE "DECALOGUE" OF THE POLISH ASSETS

In the "European integration discourse" we must not neglect some very important Polish resources, even if they are now tied with negative phenomena discussed above. If the deficiencies presented in this article are put into the perspective of "long duration," many resources result first of all from current processes of systemic transformation. In our opinion, the most important Polish resources are:

- 1) large internal market, together with internally convertible currency;
- 2) relatively cheap (only in comparison to Western Europe, though) labor force and other means of production (such as land);
- 3) advantageous geographic and communication location between west and east, north and south;
- 4) relatively quickly growing, if compared to most of European Union countries, Gross National Product and growing well-being of the rising percentage of the population;
- 5) participation of Poland in the NATO structures and its presence in the "European security system" as well as its active participation in major continental and global institutions (e.g. OSCE or OECD);
- 6) relative stability of the democratic system and the legal—in the Weberian sense—legitimation of the political authorities;
- 7) growing educational and professional aspirations of a large percentage of the population;
- 8) progress in the unification of the Polish legal system with the Western European systems;
- 9) relatively strong public support for the European integration of Poland;
- 10) very strong cultural European identification among a large part of the population.

CONCLUSIONS: A FEW WORDS ON THE FUTURE

A difficult accommodation process and following membership in the European Union are the future of Poland. Future should not be fought against, particularly when we accept the basic assumption of the Union. We should merely be very well prepared. Today we can already talk about a Polish success because the basic criteria, making the invitation of Poland to formal negotiations possible, have been

met. The negotiations continue. It seems possible that Poles will participate in the 2004 general elections to the European Parliament.

There is, however, a constant need to screen these facts and dynamic tendencies which will play an important role in the process of integration. It is worth debating if there is a realistic alternative to the aspirations of Polish integration with Western structures. There is always a choice but alternative possibilities mean either isolation of Poland or its closer ties with those Eastern European countries which have, in the foreseeable future, no chances for being accepted by the Union. In the light of this alternative, it seems to us that only the full membership of Poland in the European Union can speed up the modernization of the country, which is so much expected.

NOTE

1. This article is a revised and updated version of our "Introduction" to the volume (*Spółeczeństwo polskie w perspektywie integracji europejskiej*, edited by Janusz Mucha, Warszawa: IFiS PAN 1999) on the Polish society in the perspective of its integration with the European Union. The volume was commissioned by the Committee on Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The "Introduction" draws in part upon the individual chapters of the volume. The authors of these chapters are: Zbigniew Boksański, Kazimierz Doktor, Krzysztof Gorlach, Grzegorz Gorzelak, Elżbieta Hałas, Bohdan Jałowiecki, Maria Jarosz, Kryspin Karczmarczyk, Andrzej Kojder, Joanna Kurczewska, Jacek Kurczewski, Edmund Mokrzycki, Andrzej Sakson, Elżbieta Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, and Bohdan Szklarski. Sources and literature can be found in that volume. The authors of the article wish to thank Professor Elżbieta Hałas for cooperation.