

Poland's Accession to EU. Hope and Challenge

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Mr/Mrs Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today you have asked me to have a speech on Poland's accession to the EU. However, I would like to talk not just about my own country, important though it is, but about the whole Central European region and indeed about the enlarged European Union itself.

I would like to deal with four points:

- The European Union in the next millenium and enlargement as a catalyst for change
- The importance of understanding the uniqueness of central European countries
- I will then say a few words on the title of my speech in the program: progress and prospects for the negotiations between countries of Central Europe and the Union
- Finally I will deal with the state of the negotiations on reforms within the existing Union

The European Union in the new millennium

When you read the Presidency conclusions of the Vienna European Council held in December last year, you would be pardoned for assuming that enlargement was no longer a major concern of the Union. It was treated only in fifth place after points such as reducing unemployment in the Union, the successful launch of monetary union and Agenda 2000 reforms.

There are two points worth noting here.

The first is that it is impossible to isolate the problems faced by the Union today - everything is interrelated. Reducing unemployment in the Union is an important condition for the support of the general public in the Union for enlargement. In other words enlargement is more difficult when unemployment in the Union is at 10% than if it were at 5%. That monetary union works smoothly in the first few critical years is important for similar reasons. Crises in EMU might throw the timetable for enlargement into disarray. Enlargement is just one of the enormous challenges facing the Union as it starts the new millennium. It is a challenge, like the others, which has to be met. There is no way that the Union can evade finding solutions to these intertwined problems and emerge stronger into the next century - and finding a solution to one problem is part of the solution for the others.

The second point is that these Presidency conclusions underline the extent to which the Community has to change to survive and develop in the next millennium. Since the end of the nineteen-fifties the Community has grown through accretion - simply adding new bits of law, procedure or

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institutions to what already existed. The very word 'acquis' suggests that there is a body of law, which cannot be changed but can only be added to. Great progress has been made in this way it must be acknowledged - the European Single Act was passed, the internal market was completed, the beginnings of a European Union foreign policy appeared in the nineteen-nineties and of course economic and monetary union is in an advanced state of realization.

But in my view it is doubtful whether the union can successfully continue in this way. The challenges of the next decade are so numerous and so complex that new methods of operation will have to be developed. Enlargement is just one of these challenges. They also include the full operation of monetary union and its impact on economic management, which I believe, is only barely appreciated today. Technology is also advancing at such a rate that the European Union can no longer catch up with progress. It is continuously racing to understand the implications of new technologies and to regulate them where necessary. Questions such as the regulation of genetically modified organisms are only the tip of the iceberg. The integration of telecommunications, computer technology and audio-visual technology are revolutionizing society. The Community regulator is several years behind the frontier of technology, trying to establish whether there is anything which needs regulating. And the process of globalization of the economy and society cannot be stopped, as some people would wish. A new round of trade liberalization negotiations in the World Trade Organization next year will increase global integration.

Enlargement at the beginning of the next century will change the nature of the Community and it would be astonishing if it did not. Those who believe that new accessions should not change the essential nature of the Community should evaluate how the accession of Spain and Portugal in 1986 and the EFTA accessions of 1995 affected the Union. The accession of Spain and Portugal enhanced the Community's relations with Latin America and the Mediterranean immeasurably and it led to a rapid increase in the level of the structural funds in the Community. The EFTA countries, though relatively small in population, have had an important impact on the way in which the Union and its institutions operate, through their attachment to the transparency of the political process and to direct democracy. The Nordic countries have pushed Baltic Sea cooperation to the foreground within the Union to an extent that had not been possible before.

Enlargement to Central Europe will similarly propel the European Union in new directions and this is natural and to be welcomed. The vision of the founders of the Community was to unite the continent, not to develop barriers between its different parts. So I would hope that enlargement to Central Europe would change the nature of the Union's relation to Eastern Europe. We should not simply move the boundary between west and east a little bit to the east. We should take the opportunity of changing the quality of the Union's relationship to the rest of Europe. Enlargement will be a catalyst for reform and development, which will benefit the whole of our continent.

Enlargement, technology and globalization will create therefore a radical new environment in which the European Union will develop in the next century. These vast changes in the way our society operates will, I am sure, lead to a different European Union, and hopefully an even more successful one in the coming years.

This brings me to my second point which is the need to stress that the Associated Countries in Central Europe are not 'white areas' on the map, but that they all have histories, traditions, cultures and languages which make them as unique and special as any of the existing member states. But sometimes we feel the need to make this point to politicians and civil servants in the European Union. I will only talk about my country, Poland. Our constitution of 1791 was the first on the

European continent and was characterized by a religious tolerance which was remarkable for the period but already had a long tradition in Poland. The period between the two world wars, when we regained our independence, was one of great activity in fields as diverse as literature and law making; indeed many of the valid laws in Poland today date from the period between the wars. All the countries of central Europe after the second world war suffered from Soviet domination, but even during this period they developed in some ways which have lasting value - in Poland the rise of Solidarnosc and the great strength of the opposition movement to Communist rule are still important factors in political life today.

As the countries of central Europe prepare for accession to the Union, the Community side should consider these distinctive characteristics of our countries for two reasons. The first is that we must obviously use our existing institutions, laws and procedures in adjusting to the Community acquis, just like the existing member states. Sometimes I feel that we are indeed treated as 'white areas' on the map where 'ideal' member states can be developed with new institutions and a completely new legal code without reference to our traditions and our histories.

The second is that we have our own acquis, some of which is worth taking into the European Union. In other words the European Union should change in order to preserve that which we have built up in our countries and which will be of value to the whole of the enlarged Community. For instance my country has spent a lot of effort on ensuring by treaty that we have peaceful relationships with all our neighbors. This different quality of relationship with countries to the east will be of value to the Community but it will be lost if the EU insists on the creation of an impenetrable frontier between central Europe and the successor state to the Soviet Union in the east.

This brings me naturally to look at the state of the negotiations. Here I must say that progress under the British, Austrian and German presidencies has been good. By the summer of this year, we will have finished the process of screening the acquis and by the end of the German Presidency in June we will have opened fifteen chapters of the negotiations.

The negotiations began, for obvious reasons, with the easy chapters where there is very little acquis - small and medium-sized business, research and development and education for instance. But they are now moving on to more complex areas such as fisheries, the free movement of goods and competition policy and state aids. In Poland we have already agreed some sixteen position papers. These positions have been proposed by the line ministries, considered by my office, discussed in the ministerial negotiating team and the Committee for European Integration and finally approved by the Council of Ministers. The Union has adopted common positions on the first position papers submitted by the Associated Countries, and in one or two areas the negotiations have been closed. In the majority of areas the Union side has proposed to return to the chapters if necessary at a later stage. Of course there have been very few requests for transitional periods or temporary derogations from the acquis in these early chapters. This is not only because these were easy chapters, but also because the negotiating countries are all attempting to keep requests for such special arrangement to a minimum. As the negotiations advance, the need to discuss such specific arrangements will clearly increase.

I would like to leave you therefore with a positive impression of progress achieved to date. However, I must also mention two worries that I have.

The first is procedural. The negotiating sessions so far have been rituals rather than negotiations. The Union has negotiated several chapters with all six countries, including Cyprus, all on the same

day! Clearly this meant that each associated country was allocated around an hour for its Inter-Governmental Conference session and the session consisted of formal speeches. This does not constitute a real negotiation. My worry is that the Community side will find it increasingly difficult to mobilize the necessary resources to seriously negotiate difficult chapters of the acquis. Obviously much of this negotiation takes place outside the formal negotiations. Nevertheless the member states will have to mobilize considerable numbers of officials if the negotiations are to progress smoothly.

My second worry is that because of differences between the member states, the negotiations will be proceeding without the degree of flexibility necessary for them to succeed. The new member states are all committed to implementing the acquis communautaire. However, we will need time to do the whole job because of its complexity and because of the need to raise the enormous capital sums to implement the more expensive parts of the acquis and the infrastructure investment required, without endangering our macro-economic stability. But accession itself cannot wait this long, so we will need flexible arrangements in a few areas at accession. This should not worry the Union; indeed it should be taken as a sign of our seriousness. But this may be used by those in the Union who are less enthusiastic about enlargement to slow down or block the negotiations.

This brings me to my fourth and final point: the key to our accession lies in **the successful completion of reforms in the EU itself**. It is here that our main worry lies and it brings us back to where I started this talk. The challenges to the Union in the next decade are enormous and meeting these challenges will take political courage and a great deal of policy innovation. Agenda 2000 is only a small part of the changes which must come - and we know from the current state of the discussions within the EU how difficult these relatively small changes are.

Sometimes it is a weakness of the European Union that the member states think collectively and constructively as a Union only in periods of great crisis. Between the crises the position of the Union as a whole fades into insignificance and the member states think of their own narrow interests as members of a club. In most clubs when a new member applies to join, there is a vote and the majority wins. In the EU club all have to agree and all have to feel it is to their advantage. This opens the way to all sorts of conditions being set by individual member states for their agreement to enlargement. This seems to be the danger today.

I hope that we will not need another major crisis for the Union's member states to realize that this great historical step must not be held up by skirmishing over significant short-terms but fundamentally secondary questions. And I wonder if the Union does not need to make major changes in the way it operates and in its policies rather than the traditional small steps which are expressed in the word 'acquis'.

Today the European Union is already benefiting from the additional credibility given to it by the enlargement to the east. Let it then take the courageous political steps which are necessary to justify this credibility.

Thank you.