



## **REFERENDUM BRIEFING NO 5 THE POLISH EU ACCESSION REFERENDUM 7-8 JUNE 2003**

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### **Key points**

- In line with all predictions and the trend in other post-communist candidate states, Poles voted overwhelmingly to join the EU by 77.45% to 22.55%.
- More surprisingly, the 50% turnout required to make the referendum constitutionally valid was also comfortably reached, with 58.85% of Poles voting.
- The fact that most opposition parties (with varying degrees of enthusiasm) and a range of civic organisations campaigned for a Yes vote also helped to de-couple the issue of EU membership from that of confidence in the extremely unpopular government.
- The Yes campaign was short on specifics and presented the referendum as a civilisational choice, with EU accession part of an inevitable historical process of ending Cold War divisions.
- The No campaign had difficulties in staying focused on its most powerful arguments and suffered from a lack of access to the public media. The relative stability of underlying Polish attitudes towards the EU and lack of a convincing alternative made it difficult for them to have made any significant impact.
- In spite of the low levels of party identification in Poland, partisan cues rather than socio-demographic factors appeared to be the most powerful explanatory variables in determining how Poles voted.

### **Background**

EU membership has been the top priority of Polish foreign policy for over a decade and pursuit of accession has overshadowed all other aims since the country gained NATO membership in March 1999. Poland signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 1991, formally submitted its membership application in June 1994 and began accession negotiations in March 1998. Eurobarometer polls taken throughout the 1990s showed Poland to have one of the highest levels of support for EU membership among the post-communist candidate states. This was matched by an overwhelming

political elite consensus in favour of EU membership. However, once the accession negotiations began and the issue began to develop a higher political profile, support for EU membership started to decline and, for the first time, a significant segment of anti-EU public opinion began to emerge. Figures from the CBOS polling agency showed that Polish support for EU membership fell steadily from nearly 80% in June 1994 to between 55-60% in the middle of 1999. At the same time, the number of opponents of EU membership increased from a negligible 5% to a more substantial 20–25% bloc of the population. (The number of ‘don't knows’ remained steady at around 15-20%).

There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, given the existence of an overwhelming pro-EU consensus among political elites, Polish opponents of EU membership may have been reluctant to identify themselves and earlier polling data may have artificially overstated the true levels of public support. Secondly, since there was also very little serious debate about the potential costs and benefits of EU accession, the previous very high levels of support may not have represented conscious and considered positions. Levels of support were always in danger of falling once it became apparent that conforming to EU norms would involve negative economic and social consequences as well as benefits. Thirdly, in the light of the difficult issues that needed to be tackled, the accession negotiations themselves inevitably focused to a large extent on the concessions that had to be made by the Polish side. This, in turn, raised the profile of the European issue in Polish politics in a very negative way. Fourthly, the beginning of the accession negotiations also saw the development of a crack in the previously overwhelming pro-EU elite consensus and the subsequent politicisation of the debate on EU membership. This was seen in both the emergence, for the first time, of significant anti-EU political forces and, perhaps even more importantly, divisions among the pro-EU camp about the effectiveness of respective governments in progressing the accession negotiations or securing the most favourable membership terms.<sup>1</sup>

After failing to make any impact on party politics initially, this shift in Polish public opinion appeared to feed into the emergence of a substantial vote for Eurosceptic parties at the September 2001 parliamentary election. Two parties that were openly hostile to Polish EU membership, the radical agrarian-populist Self-Defence (Samobrona) and the Catholic nationalist League of Polish Families (LPR), won 10.2% (53 out of 460 seats) and 7.87% (38 seats) of the vote respectively (although Self-Defence claimed not to be opposed to the EU per se). At the same time, two more parties that were broadly pro-EU but highly critical of the conduct of the accession negotiations, the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party and the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), also won 9.5% (44 seats) and 8.98% (42 seats) of the vote respectively.

Indeed, some (mainly Western) commentators interpreted the success of these parties, particularly Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families, as symptomatic of a broader 'Eurosceptic backlash' in Poland. This was far too simplistic an interpretation. The two most successful groupings in the September 2001 election - the ex-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), that fought the election in coalition with the smaller social democratic Labour Union party (UP), and the liberal conservative

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<sup>1</sup> See: A. Szczerbiak. 'Polish Public Opinion: Explaining Declining Support for EU membership.' *Journal of Common Market Studies*. Vol 39 No 1. March 2001. pp107-124.

Civic Platform (PO) - were also the most supportive of EU membership. These groupings won 41.04% (216 seats) and 12.68% (65 seats) of the vote respectively. Moreover, although it had a much higher profile than in any previous parliamentary election, by virtually any measure, EU membership was not a particularly salient campaign issue. Most parties devoted very little time to it in their campaigning and very few Poles (3-7%) cited it as a major factor in determining their voting behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the September 2001 election outcome did mean that critical voices were better represented in parliament and that, for the first time, the anti-EU political groupings had a significant platform from which to put forward their case. This contributed to the barrage of negative publicity that the EU received in Poland during the final year of the accession negotiations. This was partly due to the November 2001 decision by the new government, a coalition led by ex-communist Leszek Miller and comprising the Democratic Left Alliance-Labour Union and the Polish Peasant Party, to adopt a new, more flexible negotiating strategy. Although Poland was part of the advanced 'Luxembourg group' of candidate states that began negotiations in 1998, as the largest of the candidate countries it proved difficult to accommodate and by 2001 there was a perception that it was 'falling behind'. There was even some (rather fanciful) speculation that Poland could actually be excluded from the next enlargement wave. Consequently, the new government decided that it was time for a change of approach that could accelerate Poland's progress. Specifically, this involved accepting that current EU member states could place restrictions on Polish workers' access to their labour markets for a period of up to seven years, as well as softening the lengthy restrictions on the sale of Polish land to foreigners that the previous Solidarity-led government had demanded. This was strongly criticised at the time, predictably by Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families but also, more opportunistically, by the pro-EU opposition parties, Civic Platform and Law and Justice and even within the government by the Peasant Party.

Moreover, as the year progressed, suspicions that Poland would be treated as a 'second class member' grew. A key event here was the Commission's January 2002 announcement that farmers in the candidate states would not receive full agricultural subsidies for the first nine years of membership and that initially they would be paid only 25% of what farmers in member states received in so-called 'direct payments'. This was to develop into a touchstone issue during the negotiating 'endgame' with the Peasant Party threatening to leave the coalition over it on more than one occasion. Finally, in the run up to the December 2002 Copenhagen summit it emerged that EU accession could provoke a state budget crisis in the early years of membership and that there was a danger that Poland actually could end up being a net contributor to the EU budget. This was because full contributions to the EU would have to be paid from the central budget from day one, whereas most EU aid would go to local authorities or individuals. This was one of the factors that led the Law and Justice party to declare that it would call for a No vote if the membership terms being offered were not substantially improved at the Copenhagen summit.

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<sup>2</sup> See: A. Szczerbiak. 'After The Election, Nearing The Endgame: The Polish Euro-Debate In The Run Up To The 2003 EU Accession Referendum'. Opposing Europe Research Network Working Paper No 7/Sussex European Institute Working Paper No 53. Brighton: Sussex European Institute. May 2002 – available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/SEI/oern/WorkingPapers/index.html>.

However, opinion polls suggested that Poles were unmoved by this barrage of negative publicity. Indeed, it is striking how, from mid-1999 onwards, Polish support for EU membership appeared to have stabilised at a relatively high level. Poles appeared to be well aware that they were not going to join on the most favourable possible terms and that there would be negative consequences to accession but remained broadly pro-EU anyway. This boded well for the pro-EU camp, suggesting a much greater solidity in Polish public opinion than in other candidate countries where the negotiations were subject to less scrutiny and the issue may, therefore, have been less salient. Moreover, the Polish negotiating team was also able to portray the final deal that was secured at the Copenhagen summit as a great triumph at a press conference that was timed to appear on Polish television just before the main evening news (although, on closer scrutiny, it did not look quite as attractive).<sup>3</sup>

On the downside, the government that had negotiated the deal was now deeply unpopular. By the time that the referendum campaign began in April its 10-15% approval ratings were a record low for any post-1989 cabinet. This led to fears that voters may use the referendum as an opportunity to register their disapproval with the government's performance by voting No or, more likely, staying at home. To make matters worse, the governing coalition collapsed at the beginning of April when Peasant Party deputies failed to back the government in a crucial parliamentary vote. This led to fears that the Peasant Party could end up adopting an anti-EU stance in order to distance itself from the unpopular government and avoid being outflanked by Self-Defence, its main rival for the rural-agrarian vote.

## **The Campaign**

The referendum campaign really got underway towards the end of April after the signing of the Athens treaty, which was covered with much pomp by the Polish media. During the previous three months the Iraq war and parliamentary hearings into a domestic corruption scandal known as the Rywin affair had overshadowed coverage of European issues.

While virtually all of the Polish political establishment lined up solidly in favour of accession, there were, in fact, several Yes campaigns running concurrently. The most visible and high profile of these was probably the one run by the ex-communist President Aleksander Kwasniewski, on the slogan 'Yes for Poland'. With approval ratings of 70-80% Kwasniewski was easily Poland's most popular politician and a formidable campaigner, and he drew on all his personal authority to secure a Yes vote and high turnout. His campaign was based on a nation-wide programme of local town visits and public meetings together with a leaflet delivered to every household putting the pro-EU case and a final televised broadcast appealing for a Yes vote. The government also ran a separate campaign, the formal objective of much of it being simply to inform the public about the facts and encourage them to vote, although it was clear that the subtext was that people should vote Yes. In addition, both the

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<sup>3</sup> Under the agreement Polish farmers were given up to 55% of the direct payments received by those in existing member states in 2004, 60% in 2005 and 65% in 2006. The difference between this and the EU's original offer was made up by funds from the Polish budget and transfers from the EU rural development fund. In addition, the government budget was to receive EU funds of 500 million euros immediately in 2004-2006 rather than receiving the money through structural funds at a later date, thereby easing the pressure on the Polish state budget.

governing Democratic Left Alliance and the Labour Union ran separate party campaigns that enthusiastically, and more explicitly, called for a Yes vote.

However, with the government so deeply unpopular it was particularly significant that most of the opposition parties also called for a Yes vote. The Civic Platform ran a vigorous and positive pro-EU campaign. Law and Justice and the Peasant Party also called for a Yes vote, but ran more low key and reserved campaigns aimed more at reassuring their own supporters. Law and Justice contained a significant Eurosceptic minority and, as noted above, had criticised the Miller government's handling of the accession negotiations. However, it eventually came out in favour a Yes vote at a special party Congress held in January 2003 and campaigned on the slogan 'A Strong Poland in the European Union'. The PSL also contained anti-EU elements and prevaricated for a long time, although it was very unlikely that it would ever really consider calling for a No vote given that its leader Jaroslaw Kalinowski actually negotiated the controversial agriculture chapter when he was Deputy Premier and Agriculture Minister. The party ended up linking its support for EU accession to the passage of a land turnover law that was approved just before Easter and campaigned on the rather half-hearted slogan 'Don't fear the Union. We are with you'! All of the opposition parties attempted to de-couple the issue of EU accession from that of general confidence in the government's performance.

In addition to the official presidential, government and party campaigns, the pro-EU camp was also able to engage the support of a wide range of local and national civic organisations. Along with the Catholic Church (whose role is discussed below), the most significant of these was the umbrella grouping 'Civic Initiative YES in the Referendum' which brought together local government, business and other non-governmental organisations and advertising agencies with celebrities from the media, culture and show business. The activities of these organisations were critical in engaging the interest of a Polish public that felt increasingly alienated from its political elites. Indeed, paradoxically, the fact that the Poles held their political elites in such low esteem actually made them more inclined to look favourably upon Brussels as a relative haven of honest and efficient administration!

Sensibly, the Yes campaigners avoided getting bogged down in the details of the accession treaty and presented the referendum as a civilisational choice, with EU accession part of an inevitable historical process of ending Cold War divisions and returning Poland to its rightful place at the heart of Europe. Although the Yes campaigners tended to be short on specifics, the economic benefits of accession were also stressed by arguing that Poland was joining a club of the richest countries in the world. More negatively, they also highlighted the lack of realistic and attractive alternatives to EU membership and stressed the danger of Poland ending up isolated or in limbo, in effect becoming 'another Belarus'.

Another important theme in the Yes campaign was its emphasis on young people. This was partly because they were a politically apathetic segment of the electorate where there was average support for EU accession, and therefore a key target group for mobilisation. But the focus on youth, including school children, in Yes campaign publicity was also aimed as presenting the pro-EU case as future-oriented. This was important because many less enthusiastic pro-EU voters said that they would probably

end up voting Yes because they thought that future generations would benefit from accession, even if they were dubious that they would gain much from it personally.

There was certainly a more substantial Eurosceptic lobby in Poland than in the other post-communist states that had held accession referendums previously. The most high profile No campaign was run by the League of Polish Families and spearheaded by its young and articulate deputy leader Roman Giertych. However, although the anti-EU campaign was quite visible, and a plausible case could be made that the terms of accession represented a 'second class membership' package, it never really made much of an impact.

The League of Polish Families made a sensible tactical decision to focus primarily on anxieties about the potentially negative economic impact of Polish EU accession, either on particular sectors such as agriculture or on the macro-economic effects by, for example, arguing that prices would increase. This was probably the issue most likely to resonate with potential waverers in the Yes camp. They also stressed that a No vote would hasten the downfall of the unpopular SLD government, drawing attention to a pledge that premier Miller gave in 2002 that he would resign if he lost the EU referendum. However, the No camp often fell back on less salient emotional and ideological themes that were unlikely to mobilise support beyond a relatively small and committed hard core. For example, they argued that: EU accession would lead to the liberalisation of the abortion laws and legalisation of euthanasia and gay marriage, that Germans would buy up Polish land in the western territories or that Poland's independence was under threat, using slogans such as 'Yesterday Moscow, Tomorrow Brussels'.

Significantly, the controversial leader of Self-Defence and best known critic of Polish EU membership, Andrzej Lepper, ran a much less high profile anti-EU campaign than the League of Polish Families. Indeed, in spite of his often bitter anti-EU invective, Lepper argued that his party was not opposed to Polish EU membership in principle but simply against the unfavourable accession terms negotiated by the government and Self-Defence campaigned on the rather enigmatic slogan, 'The Choice is Yours'.

The anti-EU camp was also hamstrung by its minimal access to the publicly owned media, especially state TV, compared to that enjoyed by the Yes campaigners. Although various anti-EU groupings appeared in the bloc of specially produced official EU referendum broadcasts and the formal TV debates, the No campaign received only perfunctory coverage in the main evening news programme *Wiadomosci* from which most Poles get their current affairs information.

The only mass medium that gave strong backing to the anti-EU camp was the radical Catholic nationalist broadcaster Radio Maryja. With nearly 3 million listeners, Radio Maryja has in the past been critical in mobilising the 'religious right' that accounts for around 10% of the Polish electorate. However, Radio Maryja came under intense pressure from the broadly pro-EU Catholic Church hierarchy to tone down its anti-EU coverage. Indeed, towards the end of the campaign its director, Father Rydzyk began to send out mixed signals about the broadcaster's stance; for example, describing the EU as 'purgatory' rather than 'hell'!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Although he subsequently denied that he had shifted his position and Radio Maryja continued to broadcast a fairly unambiguous diet of anti-EU commentary.

Indeed, the Catholic nationalist critique of EU accession became even more difficult to sustain after Pope John Paul II's dramatic intervention into the referendum debate. The Pope had already made his support for Polish EU accession clear on a number of occasions, most recently during his August 2002 visit to Poland. However, on May 19th, speaking to a crowd of some 20,000 Poles visiting Rome to celebrate the Pope's 83rd birthday and the 25th anniversary of his papacy, he repeated it in the most unambiguous terms. Coining the slogan 'From the Union of Lublin [which united Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Sixteenth Century] to the European Union' he thereby re-inforced the message that Polish EU membership represented a civilisational choice of historic proportions.

The Pope's intervention was the single most significant event during the referendum campaign. Not only do Catholics comprise 90% of the Polish population (with over 50% attending Church services at least once a week), but John Paul II also remains the one absolutely unquestioned moral authority for virtually all Poles. As well as providing a huge boost to the Yes campaign, his intervention disoriented the anti-EU campaigners and made it extremely difficult for them to use moral or ideological arguments with any credibility. The Pope's message was re-inforced by a letter from the Polish Episcopate that was read out in every parish church on the Sunday before the referendum. Although, Polish bishops did not back a Yes vote explicitly, they said that participation in the referendum was a moral obligation and called upon the faithful to be guided by the Pope's teachings on this issue.

However, arguably, underlying structural factors made it extremely difficult for the No camp to make much headway even if they had been more tactically astute, enjoyed more favourable media coverage or if the Pope had not intervened in such a dramatic way. The problem was that the No camp's strongest and most plausible argument was that Poland would be joining the EU as a 'second class member'. However, as noted above, most Poles were already quite pessimistic (realistic?) about what the short-term benefits of EU accession would be but were still prepared to vote Yes. This was either because they largely accepted the argument that this was an inevitable civilisational choice or because they saw the benefits of EU accession as being primarily medium to long term. Moreover, as in the other referendum campaigns held in post-communist candidate states, the anti-EU camp struggled to posit an alternative foreign policy scenario that most Poles regarded as realistic and/or attractive. Indeed, the fact that, as noted above, opinion polling on this issue had been extremely stable since around mid-1999 suggested that most Poles had actually made their minds up about it a long time ago. In other words, there was probably little 'new' that the anti-EU camp could come up with at this stage to make them shift their opinions.

As the referendum outcome was rarely in doubt, most attention focused on the question of whether it would achieve the 50% turnout required to make it constitutionally valid. This remained on a knife-edge until the very end. Poles have a poor record of turning out to vote, with less than 50% of them doing so in three out of the last four parliamentary elections. Only 32.4% of Poles voted in the February 1996 referendum on mass privatisation and 42.9% in the May 1997 referendum to ratify the Constitution (which, interestingly, did not require a 50% turnout). Fears that the 50% threshold would not be reached were underscored when only 45.37% of Hungarians

voted in their accession referendum in spite of confident predictions of more than 60% turnout.<sup>5</sup> The pro-EU camp therefore created an escape hatch for itself by passing a new referendum law (which was challenged unsuccessfully by the anti-EU camp in the Constitutional Tribunal) that allowed parliament to approve the accession treaty by a two thirds majority in the event of the turnout falling below 50%. But they were desperate to avoid having to fall back on this option. Quite apart from the much weaker legitimacy that it would have given to Polish accession, the ratification process could then also have become entangled in moves to unseat the government.

Consequently, the Yes campaign put a vast amount of effort into encouraging people to simply turn out and vote. One particularly powerful government TV advert attempted to show how, whatever their differences, Poles always came together at decisive historical moments and - using images of Solidarity, the Pope's visits and the 1997 floods - it portrayed voting in the referendum as a patriotic duty. Perhaps most significantly, it was agreed that the referendum should be held over the whole weekend rather than just on a Sunday when nation-wide ballots are held traditionally conducted in Poland. Many sceptics such as President Kwasniewski abandoned their earlier reservations after the low turnout on Hungary and this decision appeared to be confirmed by the 63.3% turnout in the May Lithuanian referendum that was held over two days (and which did have a 50% turnout requirement). It was also felt that publishing the turnout figures after the first day had had a mobilising effect in the Lithuanian (and subsequent Slovak) referendum and a late amendment was passed to the referendum law to facilitate this. Finally, although some elements of the No camp toyed with the idea of encouraging their supporters to boycott the poll, using lack of coverage in the public media as the pretext, in the end they drew back from this. (This would, in fact, have been the most rational and effective thing for them to do.) This was partly because of concerns that they would not be able present a united front on this issue and none of them wanted to be the one to 'blink first'.

## **The Results**

Final opinion polls indicated that approximately 75% of Poles intended to vote Yes, 15% No and 10% were undecided. So it came as little surprise to most commentators when the final results, set out in Table 1, showed that Poles had voted Yes by an overwhelming 77.45% to 22.55%. Interestingly, these figures varied little from those taken at the beginning of the campaign (or, indeed, over the previous four years). This suggested that either that the campaign had done little to change the dynamics of public opinion or that the flows of opinion between the Yes, No and undecided camp had simply cancelled each other out. It also pointed to a lack of any cascade effects from the earlier referendums held in other post-communist countries where the Yes majorities were somewhat bigger ranging from 83.76% in Hungary to 93.7% in Slovakia.

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<sup>5</sup> See: B. Fowler. 'The Hungarian EU Accession Referendum 12 April 2003.' Opposing Europe Research Network Referendum Briefing No 4 available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/SEI/oern/ElectionBriefings/index.html>. Although the turnout requirement in Hungary was only that it had to be backed by 25% of the electorate as well as over 50% of those voting.

**Table 1: Results of the June 2003 Polish EU accession referendum**

	Total	% of Registered Voters	% of Valid Votes
Registered Voters	29 868 474		
Votes Cast	17 578 818		
Valid Votes	17 452 624	58.85	
Yes	13 516 612	45.25	77.45
No	3 936 012	13.18	22.55

50%+1 of valid votes required to make the referendum constitutionally valid.

Source: Polish State Election Commission, <http://www.pkw.gov.pl/>.

Final opinions also indicated that between 71%-86% of Poles would turnout to vote, with 54%-71% saying they would definitely do so. However, opinion pollsters cautioned that these had tended to over-state actual turnout in the past, sometimes by as much as 20%. It was also feared that the apparent lack of uncertainty about the outcome would also have a de-mobilising effect. These fears appeared to be confirmed when it emerged that turnout on the first day was only 17.6%, in spite of the fact that most of the political elite and many celebrities demonstrably voted on the Saturday. The Polish political establishment, therefore, breathed a huge sigh of relief when it was announced that the final turnout figure was 58.85%, comfortably over the 50% constitutional requirement.

As Table 2 shows, the exit poll revealed surprisingly little variation in voting patterns according to age, and only relatively small differences according to education and place of residence, with better educated and urban voters being more inclined to vote Yes.<sup>6</sup> The actual voting figures also revealed that the Yes vote was higher in Western regions where the left tends to perform best in elections than in Eastern regions which tend to be more conservative.<sup>7</sup>

However, as Table 2 also shows, the most powerful variable explaining voting patterns appeared to be partisan cues, in spite of the fact Poles that have very low levels of party identification and hold political parties in low esteem compared to other institutions.<sup>8</sup> Those who had voted for the Civic Platform and the Democratic Left Alliance, the two most enthusiastically pro-EU groupings, in 2001 also voted Yes overwhelmingly by 91.7% and 90.3% respectively. Supporters of the Law and Justice and the Polish Peasant parties that were less enthusiastically pro-EU and internally divided on the issue voted Yes slightly less emphatically with majorities of 80.7% and 72.9% respectively. The voters of Self-Defence, which officially called on its supporters to vote No but arguably sent out ambiguous signals, were evenly divided with a very narrow 50.3% majority voting in favour. The League of Polish Families was both the most unambiguously anti-EU party and the only one where a clear 64% majority of its supporters voted No, although as many as 36% of them ignored party cues and opted for a Yes vote instead.

<sup>6</sup> There are no separate exit poll data for occupational groups but most opinion polls taken in the run up to the referendum indicated that farmers were the only occupational group where there was anti-EU majority.

<sup>7</sup> See: [www.pkw.gov.pl](http://www.pkw.gov.pl/).

<sup>8</sup> See: A. Szczerbiak. 'The new Polish parties as membership organisations.' *Contemporary Politics*. Vol 7 No 1. March 2001. pp57-69.

**Table 2: Voting patters in the June 2003 Polish EU accession referendum**

	Yes %	No %
<b>Voting by age</b>		
18-24	80.2	19.8
25-39	81.3	18.7
40-59	82.6	17.4
60+	82.0	18.0
<b>Voting by place of residence</b>		
Villages	73.9	16.1
Small towns	83.8	16.2
Large towns	86.1	13.9
Cities	86.1	13.9
<b>Voting by education</b>		
Primary	74.4	25.6
Vocational	77.5	22.6
Middle (Post-16)	83.1	16.9
Higher	87.8	12.2
<b>Voting by 2001 party</b>		
Civic Platform	91.7	8.3
Democratic Left Alliance	90.3	9.7
Law and Justice	80.7	19.3
Polish Peasant Party	72.9	27.1
Self-Defence	50.3	49.7
League of Polish Families	64.0	36.0
<b>Exit poll average</b>	<b>81.9</b>	<b>18.1</b>
Actual average	77.45	22.54

Source: Exit poll conducted by the Social Research Workshop (PBS) for Polish TV.

## Conclusion and Future Prospects

In the end, therefore, the majority of Poles accepted the argument that this was a civilisational choice and, in spite of opinion polls predicting little uncertainty about the outcome, turned out to vote in greater numbers than most commentators (including this one!) had expected. They appeared to accept the historical significance of the referendum and the argument that voting was a patriotic duty, a message that was dramatically underscored by Pope John Paul II's intervention in the campaign. Of those who did vote, the vast majority overcame their deep antipathy towards the government and backed EU membership overwhelmingly. This was partly due to the fact that most opposition parties accepted the need to try and disentangle their specific support for EU accession from their more general (lack of) confidence in the government. It was also due to a vigorous campaign by pro-EU civic organisations that presented a 'non-political' face to the Yes campaign. Indeed, the fact that most Poles felt deeply alienated from most of their political elites more generally may, ironically, have led many of them to seek salvation in what they saw as relatively honest and efficient European institutions. There were also both short-term proximate and deeper underlying reasons why it was extremely difficult for the No camp to mount a credible and effective campaign. Indeed, the stability of the opinion polls both during the campaign and in the four years leading up to the referendum suggested that most Poles had already made up their minds about the issue a long time beforehand.

In spite of this apparently ringing endorsement of EU accession, Polish attitudes towards the EU remain quite complex and in some senses contradictory. It will be interesting to see how they will evolve and, in particular, whether Poles will become quickly disillusioned. There are clearly very high expectations associated with EU membership. Many of those who voted Yes took the argument that accession would create a civilisational leap forward on trust, so there is obviously considerable potential for disillusionment. This is certainly what the anti-EU camp are hoping for and they have already put the pro-EU lobby on notice that they will be reminding Poles of the promises made for a better future after accession when, as the confidently predict, these fail to materialise. On the other hand, the fact that most Poles appeared to be resigned to the fact that they would be joining as 'second class members' suggests that they are actually quite realistic about what they can expect from EU membership, in the short term at least. Indeed, as noted above, this apparent acceptance that many of the expected benefits would go to future generations was one of the key reasons why the No camp found it so difficult to win softer Yes voters over to its side. This suggests that most Poles may be prepared to give EU accession the benefit of the doubt, to begin with at least. The key issue here is: whether any benefits that flow from accession become obvious and tangible before disillusionment sets in.

It will also be interesting to see how the future Polish Euro-debate unfolds and whether it will develop as a political salient issue. Europe will certainly remain a feature of inter-party political discourse. Some in the anti-EU camp have already begun to move on from the issue of accession to the debate about the EU's future trajectory. But divisions will also open up within the pro-EU camp about the kind of EU that should develop focussing on the issues being raised in the Convention on the Future of Europe and, perhaps, future Polish membership of EMU. Up until now these have been very much secondary questions and even Polish political elites have, with some notable exceptions, been too absorbed in the details of the accession negotiations to give them much attention. Europe will, therefore, remain 'salient' in the sense that the media will report it and politicians will continue to disagree over it and, as they do in all EU member states. However, even during the last parliamentary election that was held in the middle of the accession negotiations, most Poles showed very little interest in European issues when it came to determining their voting preferences. Whether or not the EU will be an issue that provides a basis for political divisions among the general public, a potential 'cleavage', therefore, remains a much more open question.

*This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute OERN was established in June 2000 as an international network of scholars studying party politics. The original focus was to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party systems but the Network has widened its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/SEI/oern/index.html>*