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**PUBLIC OPINION
AND EASTWARD ENLARGEMENT**

**EXPLAINING DECLINING SUPPORT
FOR EU MEMBERSHIP IN POLAND**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how EU membership will impact on domestic political debates within Poland, the largest of the EU applicant countries from the former communist bloc. It begins by examining the changing pattern of support for EU membership in Poland. There is already evidence that this has declined steadily since the accession negotiations began. In the second section the possible reasons for this decline are considered while the third section examines what particular concerns underpin Polish euroscepticism, before considering the possibility that Polish public opinion may turn even more decisively against EU membership. The paper argues that we should not be surprised that Poles have become more cynical about EU membership but that overall levels of support remain high. Apathy and low turnout rather than outright rejection are likely to pose a greater threat to Poland successfully ratifying an accession treaty in a future referendum.

PUBLIC OPINION AND EASTWARD ENLARGEMENT EXPLAINING DECLINING SUPPORT FOR EU MEMBERSHIP IN POLAND

Commentators and academic specialists are increasingly turning their attention to the issue of EU eastward enlargement. Useful scholarly work is appearing on issues such as: the Europe Agreements, the dynamics of the enlargement process and the implications (particularly the costs and benefits) for both existing members, applicant countries and the EU's relations with the wider world.¹ However, one of the more neglected aspects of eastward enlargement is the question of: what impact is the issue of prospective EU membership likely to have on domestic politics and public opinion in the applicant countries themselves?² This is regrettable given that this dimension is likely to assume a much higher profile in their internal political debates as the accession negotiations proceed.

This paper focuses on how EU membership will impact on domestic political debates within Poland, the largest of the EU applicant countries from the former communist bloc.³ Poland is an interesting case study because: it will be one of the most difficult applicants to accommodate; has traditionally had one of the highest levels of support for EU membership; and, most importantly, the issue has a much higher profile, and political debate on this issue appears to be more advanced, than in other applicant countries.

The paper begins by examining the changing pattern of support for EU membership in Poland. As we shall see, there is already evidence that this has declined steadily since the accession negotiations began. In the second section the possible reasons for this decline are considered. The third section examines what particular concerns underpin Polish euroscepticism, before considering the possibility that Polish public opinion may turn even more decisively against EU membership. The paper argues that we should not be surprised that Poles have become more cynical about EU membership, but that overall levels of support remain high. Apathy and low turnout rather than outright rejection are likely to be pose a greater threat to Poland successfully ratifying an accession treaty in a future referendum.

¹ See, for example: G. Kolankiewicz, 'Consensus and Competition in the Eastern Enlargement of European Union', *International Affairs*, Vol. 70 No. 3, 1994; R. Baldwin, J. Francois and R. Portes, 'The Costs and Benefits of Eastern Enlargement', *Economic Policy*, No 24, April 1997, pp125-76; M. Maresceau, ed, *Enlarging the European Union: relations between the EU and central and eastern Europe*, Harlow: Longman, 1997; H. Grabbe and K. Hughes, *Eastward enlargement of the European Union*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998; A. Mayhew, *Recreating Europe: The European Union's Policy Toward Central and Eastern Europe*, Cambridge, 1998; and K. Henderson, ed., *Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union*, London: UCL Press, 1998.

² Two notable exceptions here are: *Eastward enlargement of the European Union*, pp70-89; and *Back to Europe*, pp185-273.

³ For an excellent collection of articles on how the prospect of EU membership has impacted upon Polish political debate see: L. Kolarska-Bobinska, *Polska Eurodebata*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych: Warsaw. 1999.

Changing patterns of public support

Historically, Poland has enjoyed one of the highest levels of support for EU membership and, until recently, the idea of a 'Polish eurosceptic' was something of an oxymoron. As Tables 1 and 2 show, not only did a clear majority of Poles support EU membership, they also held one of the most positive images of the EU among the ten Central and East European applicant countries. In 1997, for example, 63% of Poles said that they would vote 'Yes' in a referendum on accession, a figure second only to Romania (71%) among the applicant states and considerably higher than other 'first wave' candidate countries: Slovenia (57%), Hungary (56%), the Czech Republic (49%) and Estonia (35%). Similarly, 56% of Poles had a favourable image of the EU in 1997 compared with 46% of Slovaks, 42% of Hungarians, 40% of Slovenes and 34% of Czechs.

Table 1: Support for EU membership in candidate countries, 1997

Country	For	Against	Don't know
Romania	71	6	11
Poland	63	6	17
Slovakia	62	8	16
Average	60	8	17
Slovenia	57	18	11
Bulgaria	57	4	18
Hungary	56	9	20
Czech Republic	49	13	26
Lithuania	40	13	26
Latvia	40	13	32
Estonia	35	14	37

Source: European Commission. *Central and East European Eurobarometer*. No. 8. 1998.

Table 2: Positive views of the EU, 1990-97

Country	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Romania		52	55	45	51	50	65	56
Poland	46	49	48	37	42	46	58	56
Bulgaria	47	46	51	42	37	27	42	50
Slovakia	43	37	35	44	37	31	34	46
Hungary	51	42	34	36	32	30	33	42
Slovenia			45	30	37	35	35	40
Lithuania		51	43	45	34	23	22	33
Czech Republic	49	46	45	37	34	36	33	34
Latvia		45	40	40	35	35	26	33
Estonia		38	32	31	29	30	24	30

Source: European Commission. *Central and East European Eurobarometer*. No. 7 and 8. 1997 and 1998.

However, the number of Poles who say that they will vote ‘Yes’ in referendum on EU membership has fallen significantly over the last few years. As Table 3 shows, since Poland formally submitted its application in 1994, the number of Poles supporting EU membership has decreased from 77% in June 1994 (and a peak of 80% in May 1995) to 59% in November 1999. At the same time, a significant segment of anti-EU opinion has begun to emerge with the number of opponents increasing from only 6% in 1994 to 26% in 1999. Precise figures vary between different polling organisations: a recent poll by the Polish Institute for Public Affairs (Instytut Spraw Publicznych: ISP) showed Polish support falling below 50% for the first time⁴ while the polls produced by another agency, the Centre for the Research of Public Opinion (Osrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej: OBOP), have shown it remaining as high as 72%.⁵ However, the overall trend over the last five years has been unmistakably downward.

Table 3: Polish support for EU membership, 1994-99

	VI 94	V 95	V 96	III 97	IV 97	VIII 97	V 98	VIII 98	XII 98	V 99	XI 99
Yes	77	72	80	72	72	72	66	63	64	55	59
No	6	9	7	12	11	12	19	19	19	26	26
Don't know	17	19	13	16	18	15	15	18	17	19	15

Source: CBOS. *Poparcie dla integracji Polski z Unia Europejska*. CBOS: Warsaw, November 1999.

Perhaps even more significantly, beneath the surface of what still remain relatively high levels of public support there are a number of potentially significant indicators that the prospect of EU membership provokes considerable anxieties even among the supposedly ‘euroenthusiast’ majority.

Firstly, there is some evidence that Poles are becoming increasingly sceptical about whether or not (and by how much) they will actually benefit from EU membership compared with current member states. Indeed, this perception of an increasingly unequal relationship is growing. As Table 4 shows, having fallen from 41% in July 1993 to only 19% in June 1996, the number of Poles who believe that EU member states will derive the greatest benefit from Polish accession has increased steadily to 47% in November 1999. At the same time 27% of Poles believe that accession would be equally beneficial to both Poland and the EU while only 8% cite their country as the main beneficiary.⁶

⁴ See: Instytut Spraw Publicznych, *Poparcie Polaków dla integracji z Unia Europejska w październiku 1999*, Warsaw: ISP, October 1999.

⁵ See: Osrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej. *Polacy o integracji z Unia Europejska*. Warsaw: OBOP. October 1999.

⁶ See also: ‘Niepewne korzyści’, *Rzeczpospolita*. 23 April 1998.

Table 4: Benefits of European integration, 1993-99

Who benefits most from Polish-EU relations?	VII 93	III 94	V 95	V 96	VIII 97	VIII 98	V 99	XI 99
EU countries	41	38	31	19	28	39	39	47
Poland	5	8	11	11	11	7	8	8
Both equally	27	26	33	46	35	30	30	27
Don't know	27	27	26	24	27	24	23	18

Source: CBOS. *Poparcie dla integracji Polski z Unia Europejska*. CBOS: Warsaw, November 1999.

This is confirmed by data on the effects that Poles think EU membership will have on both specific sectors of the economy and their living standards more generally. In May 1999, for example, 61% of Poles said it would have a negative effect on individual farms while only 17% said that it will be positive (the analogous figures for June 1994 are 24% and 40% respectively). Similarly, 42% of Poles said that EU membership would have a negative effect on the functioning of public sector enterprises compared with only 30% who felt it would be positive (37% and 32% in 1994). Even the number who believed that EU membership will have a positive effect on the private business sector has fallen from 67% in 1994 to 48% in 1999 while those who say it will have a negative effect has increased from 6% to 21% over the same period. In terms of the impact on the economy more generally, 46% said that unemployment will increase as a result of EU accession compared with 23% who said it will fall (23% and 40% in 1994). At the same time, the number who said that it will have a positive effect on their living standards has fallen from 57% in 1994 to 38% in 1999 while those who say it will have a negative impact has increased from 10% to 25%.⁷

Secondly, more in-depth polling data suggests that the 'hard core' of Polish euroenthusiasts is considerably smaller than the headline figure of those who say that they will vote 'Yes' in a referendum. Most Poles can be located in what might be termed the 'euroneutral' category. In May 1999, for example, when asked to locate themselves on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 only 25% of respondents identified themselves clearly as euroenthusiasts (1 to 3) and 29% identified themselves as eurosceptics (5 to 7) while by far the largest group (46%) comprised euroneutrals (4). However, 60% of the euroneutral category also expressed their general willingness to vote in favour of Polish EU membership.⁸ In other words, the best way to characterise the current state of Polish public opinion is that most Poles *consent* to the idea of EU membership but are not particularly *enthusiastic* about it.⁹ In the absence of more

⁷ See: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej. *Czy warto przystąpić do Unii Europejskiej – plusy i minusy integracji*. Warsaw: CBOS. July 1999.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ One Polish commentator has characterised this as a "shallow consensus" in favour of EU membership. See: Elzbieta Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, 'Poland on its Way Towards Membership of the EU and NATO: Hopes and Anxieties in a View of Public Opinion Polls,' *Yearbook of Polish European Studies*. Warsaw: Warsaw University Centre for European Studies, 1998, pp243-263.

detailed empirical research specifically on this group, it is difficult to tell precisely how solid or brittle the ‘soft’ pro-European segment of Polish public opinion really is. This data could be crucial, however, because it is precisely these ‘soft’ pro-Europeans who represent the battleground on which a future referendum on EU membership could be won or lost.

Explaining declining public support

However, there are a number of reasons why, hypothetically, we should not be surprised that the level of Polish support for EU membership has fallen (or even continues to fall further) during the course of the accession negotiations.¹⁰

Firstly, although there are clearly varying degrees of enthusiasm and nuances in their different approaches, the issue of Polish EU membership has been the subject of an overwhelming consensus among the main political parties, groupings and elites. Until recently, no major Polish political grouping has (openly at least) questioned EU membership as a major objective of Polish foreign policy and all the parties and electoral blocs that won parliamentary seats in the most recent September 1997 elections declared their support for it.¹¹ Given the existence of such an overwhelming consensus among political elites, Polish eurosceptics may have been reluctant to identify themselves as such up until now and earlier polling data may have artificially overstated the true level of public support for EU membership. In this sense the current figures are, it may be argued, simply a more realistic reflection of the true level of support for Polish accession.

Secondly, given the existence of this elite consensus, there has also been very little serious debate about the potential costs and benefits of EU accession and the issue has had virtually no resonance in the day-to-day lives of individual Polish citizens. Rather, the debate has been couched in very abstract and broad geo-political or historical terms relating to general notions such as ‘returning to Europe’ and ending the post-war division of Europe into East and West. As Table 5 shows, while, in August 1997, 41% of Poles felt that EU membership would bring Poland more harm than good, the number who said it would benefit them or their families personally fell to 27% while nearly one third (31%) did not know how the process would affect them. Consequently, the hitherto high levels of Polish support for EU membership did not really represent a conscious and considered declaration of support and were constructed on extremely shaky foundations.

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion on this see: L. Kolarska-Bobinska. ‘Rozmowa z Unia Europejska’, *Rzeczpospolita*. 18 March 1998.

¹¹ See, for example, the useful survey of Polish parties’ attitudes to EU membership in the run up to the September 1997 elections: Instytut Spraw Publicznych. *Political Parties Towards Prospects for European Integration: ‘Yes, and Furthermore No!’*. ISP: Warsaw. undated.

Table 5: Benefits of Polish EU membership, August-September 1997

What will EU membership mean?	For Poland	For you/your family
More good than harm	41	27
Same of both	33	34
More harm than good	10	8
Don't know	16	31

Source: CBOS. *Opinie o integracji Polski z Unia Europejska*. CBOS: Warsaw. September 1997.

Thirdly, it was almost inevitable that the beginning of the actual accession negotiations would reduce the level of support for Polish EU membership. As noted above, Poland will be a difficult new member for the EU to accommodate and having to conform to the requirements of membership will mean painful economic and social consequences. As the prospect of accession becomes a more realistic one, the negotiations will, given the difficult issues which need to be tackled, inevitably focus to a large extent on the concessions which have to be made by the Polish side. This will raise the profile of the European issue in Polish politics in a very negative way, with Brussels viewed increasingly as a focus for both conflict and hostility.

Moreover, there is an added danger that Polish governments may attempt to shift the blame for many unpopular decisions onto Brussels by claiming that these were forced upon it by having to conform to the requirements of EU membership. Painful economic and social reforms may, therefore, become inextricably linked with EU membership in the popular consciousness. In October 1999, for example, research undertaken by the ISP revealed that an equal number of Poles (38%) believed that economic and social reforms were being imposed on Poland as believed that they were essential to modernise the country whether the country joined the EU or not. However, among supporters of Polish EU membership a clear majority (58%) were convinced of the objective necessity of reform and only a minority (28%) felt that it was being imposed, while these proportions were reversed among EU opponents (70% blaming the EU compared to 17% who saw the reforms as inevitable).¹² Any further attempts by the Polish government to blame the difficulties associated with economic and social reform on the EU is bound to lead to a further erosion of support for Polish membership.

Fourthly, this (in some senses inevitable) decline in public support for EU membership has been exacerbated by the way the Polish eurodebate has been conducted in the months since the September 1997 parliamentary elections (and is likely to evolve in the near future). In the first place, a crack has appeared in the previously overwhelming pro-EU elite consensus with the formation of the Polish Agreement (*Porozumienie Polskie*: PP): the first organised and potentially significant political force to adopt an overtly anti-EU stance. The Polish Agreement was set up in

¹² See: *Poparcie Polaków dla integracji z Unia Europejska w październiku 1999*.

April 1999 (and registered formally as a political party in November) by a number of individuals and groupings associated with Catholic nationalist right.¹³ The party is allied to a seven-member parliamentary caucus who left the parliamentary fraction of the main government coalition partner, Solidarity Electoral Action grouping (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarnosc: AWS), in July 1998 and who have provided the main focus for opposition to EU (and NATO) membership in the Polish legislature. The Polish Agreement is still in an early phase of development, although it is planning to field a candidate in the 2000 Polish presidential elections.

It is questionable what impact the Polish Agreement has actually had on the Polish political scene and its potential significance and ability to mobilise a significant segment of public opinion remains unproven. Its leaders (such as parliamentary deputy Jan Lopuszanski) have, in the past, been closely associated with the Catholic fundamentalist broadcaster Radio Maryja which is the fourth most popular radio station in Poland (with 2.7 million listeners representing 8.9% of the total) and has a closely aligned daily newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* ("Our Daily" - with a circulation of 600,000).¹⁴ Some commentators credited Radio Maryja with a crucial role in helping AWS to win the September 1997 parliamentary elections by mobilising support for them among the (not insignificant) 'religious right' electorate.¹⁵ In fact, about 20 of the 250 AWS parliamentarians elected in 1997 were elected with Radio Maryja's overt backing. However, in its first outing as an independent electoral force in the October 1998 local elections an organisation closely linked with Radio Maryja (the Polish Family Association) won only 5% of the votes nationally (translating into only 151 out of a possible 63,765 council seats) leading some commentators to speculate that the broadcaster was a spent force politically.¹⁶ Although these derisory results certainly exposed the limitations of Radio Maryja as a putative mobilising force for Polish euroscepticism, it is still premature to write the off this milieu (and the Polish Agreement, in particular).¹⁷

However, a potentially much greater threat to continuing Polish public support for EU membership is the way that the debate on Europe has been conducted among those political forces that are ostensibly pro-EU. Recent months have seen a striking 'politicisation' of the debate on Polish EU membership not so much about whether or not Poland should join *per se* but about the terms on which (and the kind of EU that) it should join. As one commentator has noted, this has resulted in a tendency to turn political debates about EU membership into 'ideological' confrontations between the right-wing AWS grouping and the left-wing communist successor formation the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej: SLD) over, for example, the (rather artificial) issue of whether Poland should join a 'Christian' or a 'secular' Europe.¹⁸

¹³ See: 'Razem przeciw integracji', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 April 1999.

¹⁴ See: "'Claudia" z "Przyjaciółka"', *Rzeczpospolita*, 11 December 1998.

¹⁵ See, for example: M. D. Zdort. 'Kandydat katolicki i radykalny', *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 June 1998.

¹⁶ See, for example: J. Paradowska. 'Długie liczenie', *Polityka*, 24 October 1998.

¹⁷ See: A. Szczerbiak. 'The October 1998 local elections and the development of the Polish party system', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 15 No 3, September 1999, pp80-100.

¹⁸ See: J. Kucharczyk, 'Porwanie Europy,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 March 1999. Religion and the role of the Church in public life is one of the most potent cleavages in post-communist Polish politics. See: A. Szczerbiak, 'Interests and Values: Polish Parties and their Electorates', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol 51

One of the most important aspects of this politicisation of the Polish debate on EU membership has been the division of the pro-EU camp into those who are (allegedly) 'soft' and prepared to give in to Brussels and those who are (allegedly) favour a 'tough' negotiating stance. The latter, while falling short of opposing EU membership outright, hedge their general support with strong qualifications and underline the necessity of achieving certain essential pre-conditions. There are two significant examples of this kind of 'eurorealist' thinking among the main parties and groupings currently operating on the Polish political scene.

Firstly, the Christian-National Union (Zjednoczenie Chrzescijansko-Narodowe: ZChN), one of the most influential components within the AWS coalition with 31 parliamentarians (out of 235 in the AWS fraction) and a number of its nominees located in key ministries.¹⁹ The ZChN, as its spokesman Michal Kaminski put it, "does not look at the European Union with unbounded enthusiasm"²⁰ and has even included a significant minority who were outright opponents of EU membership (until their defection to form the Polish Agreement grouping). However, the party's consensus view was expressed succinctly by ZChN General Secretary Artur Zawisza who, describing himself as a "Euro-sceptic-on the-Vistula," rejected "a federal super-state led by Brussels without discussion" in favour of "a Europe of free nations seeking their inspiration in the Bethlehem grotto." Zawisza set out seven "conditions" which the ZChN placed on its support for Polish EU membership including: freedom to opt out of the euro, the maintenance of legal sovereignty in certain spheres, the retention of the veto, rejection of European citizenship, a subordinate role for the Commission, future EU enlargement into the Ukraine and Belarus, immediate and equal access to the European single market for Polish agricultural products and appropriate derogations in "sensitive" areas such as the sale of land to foreigners.²¹ Recently, the ZChN have added another condition: that Poland should have the same number of votes as Spain in the European Council of Ministers.²² Interestingly, the formation of the Polish Agreement has shifted the centre of gravity in the Polish EU debate in a way that makes the ZChN's views appear more moderate and mainstream.

Secondly, the agrarian Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe: PSL). The PSL emerged in 1990 as the successor to the former communist satellite, the United Peasant Party (Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe: ZSL) - although it has also attempted to draw on the traditions of the pre-war (anti-communist) peasant movement. It was the second largest parliamentary fraction in the 1993-97 parliament and the former communist SLD's junior coalition partner (its leader Waldemar Pawlak was premier between October 1993-February 1995). Although its share of the vote was halved to 7.31% and its parliamentary representation slashed from 132 to only 27 in the 1997 elections, the party re-established itself as a major force following the October 1998 local elections when it won the third largest share of votes and seats across the country at the head of the Social Alliance (Przymierze Spoleczne: PS) election committee. It is also easily the largest party in terms of individual members

No 8, pp1401-1432.

¹⁹ See: M.D. Zdort, 'Nie musimy byc w AWS', *Rzeczpospolita*. 21 December 1998. At one time these included the Chairman of the Government Committee for European Integration, Ryszard Czarnecki.

²⁰ Speaking in a parliamentary debate on the EU, 19 March 1998.

²¹ See: A. Zawisza, 'Euro-sceptyk nad Wisla', *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 17 December 1998.

²² See: 'Twarde warunki ZChN', *Rzeczpospolita*. 5 July 1999.

(estimates vary between 120-150,000) and has the highest level of social implantation, particularly in rural areas where most other parties have very few branches or local organisation.

The PSL has traditionally adopted a twin-track approach towards EU membership. Officially it has always been in favour. The party voted in favour of Poland's EU Association Agreement in 1992 and it was the PSL premier Pawlak who formally submitted Poland's application to join the EU in 1994. On the other hand, the PSL has also argued that Poland should not, as the party's leader Jarosław Kalinowski has put it, join the EU "at any price" and not necessarily immediately.²³ Kalinowski has argued that while "common sense and so-called peasant wisdom prompt one to conclude that you can't close yourself off from the world," Poland should only accept EU membership "on condition that it is mutually advantageous."²⁴ In other words, at the same time as supporting the broad objective of EU membership, the party has also attempted to tap into the fears and misgivings of those who have reservations, particularly among its 'natural base' in rural areas, and convince them that it is the only genuine and effective defender of the Polish national interest. The PSL has, for example, argued in favour of transitional periods for Poland's large and highly unprofitable agricultural sector (more than 25% of Poles are employed in farming, mainly in peasant small-holdings) with simultaneous access to the same kind of farm subsidies currently available to other EU member states.²⁵

As one Polish commentator has argued, the overall effect of this kind of 'eurorealist' rhetoric - that places numerous conditions upon and posits reservations concerning support for EU membership, as well as arguing that one needs to adopt a 'tough' negotiating stance in order to properly defend the Polish national interest - is likely to create the impression that Poland is negotiating with an enemy and that EU membership is a regrettable necessity rather than something to be sought positively.²⁶ This kind of political discourse, that encourages parties to compete with one another for the mantle of most effective 'defender' of national interests, will obviously not have the same impact as that of a major political force campaigning overtly against Polish membership. However, by implicitly arguing that the EU is attempting to undermine the Polish national interest, it could chip away at the overall level of support and undermine the position of the Polish EU negotiators. For example, an OBOP survey revealed that the number of Poles who said that they trusted their EU negotiators to defend the national interest fell from 51% in December 1998 to 42% in October 1999 while the number who said that they didn't trust them increased from 36% to 42% over the same period.²⁷

Paradoxically, such a 'tough' negotiating stance may produce an outcome that is precisely the opposite of what those who favour it set out to achieve. Poland may, for example, be granted a transition period on the issue of sale of land to foreigners but only in exchange for (arguably more significant and desirable) immediate access of

²³ Speaking in a parliamentary debate on EU accession, 19 March 1998.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See: J. Kalinowski, 'Proponujemy trzecia droga', *Rzeczpospolita*. 16 December 1998.

²⁶ See: *Porwanie Europy*; and J. Kucharczyk, *European Integration in Polish Political Debates 1997-1998*, Warsaw: ISP, February 1999.

²⁷ Osrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej. *Ocena Negocjacji i Opinii o skutkach przystąpienia Polski do Unii Europejskiej*. Warsaw: OBOP. November 1999.

Polish workers to West European labour markets. This could mean that the Polish anti-EU lobby will be able to present the outcome of the accession negotiations as a 'second class' membership package and this could, in turn, have a further negative impact upon Polish support for EU membership.

This trend towards the politicisation of the Polish debate on EU membership is likely to be exacerbated in the run up to the 2000 Presidential elections. A candidate from the post-Solidarity right may be tempted to portray themselves as a supporter of a 'tough' negotiating stance in order to distinguish themselves from the unequivocally pro-EU incumbent, former communist Aleksander Kwasniewski. Even a solidly pro-EU AWS-backed candidate, such as Solidarity trade union leader Marian Krzaklewski, may be forced to make eurosceptical overtures towards the anti-EU elements on the Polish right that are clustered around Radio Maryja and whose support he will need to mobilise in order to have any chance of victory.²⁸

Implications and future prospects

So there has clearly been a decline in Polish support for EU membership since the accession negotiations began and an increase in uncertainty about what it is likely to mean for Poland. But what are these anxieties rooted in? What kind of issues represent the greatest threat to the pro-EU camp and could potentially mobilise even greater numbers of Poles to oppose EU membership? And how likely is it that Polish public opinion will turn decisively against EU membership in any future referendum?

Polling evidence suggests that is fear of the socio-economic consequences of EU membership - and particularly the negative impact on certain sectors of the economy such as agriculture, state-owned heavy industry, small and medium-sized businesses and the banking sector - that lies at the root of Polish anxieties. These socio-economic arguments relate to the direct interests of significant segments of Polish society, many of whom have already lost out from the transition to a market economy and who may now feel threatened by the impact of having to conform to the requirements of EU membership. The fear that Poland will not be able to cope successfully with accession and have to pay huge social costs is, therefore, likely to provide, the most fertile recruiting ground for any putative Polish eurosceptic lobby.

Firstly, polling data suggests that it is precisely these socio-economic arguments that are most likely to strike a chord with the Polish public. As Table 6 shows, 30% of Polish eurosceptics cited the potentially negative impact of EU membership on various sectors of the Polish economy as the most important reason why they were against it (including 20% of respondents who specifically referred to the impact on the agricultural sector) compared with only 13% who cited non-economic factors such as loss of sovereignty.²⁹

²⁸ See: J. Majcherek, 'Najwieksze wyzwanie,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 21st October 1999.

²⁹ Obviously, in reality it is difficult to completely separate economic issues from those relating to national sovereignty. However, it is possible to distinguish between those anti-EU Poles who are primarily motivated by fears of loss of sovereignty (and who, implicitly, would oppose EU membership even if they accepted that the net economic effects were beneficial) and those who are mainly fearful of the economic consequences rather than any loss of sovereignty *per se*. Polish opponents of EU membership are, I would argue, principally located in the latter category.

Table 6: Motives for Polish Euroscepticism, April 1998

Negative economic effects	30%
Effects on Polish agriculture	20%
General effects on Polish economy	13%
Effects on Polish industry	7%
Too early, Poland unprepared for EU membership	22%
General – no benefits for Poland	17%
Negative effects for Polish people	14%
Non-economic/emotional factors (eg loss of sovereignty)	13%
Fear of exploitation by EU	8%
Poland too poor, EU too expensive	7%
Don't know	3%

Source: CBOS. *Opinie o negocjacjach Polski z Unia Europejska i poparcie dla integracji*. CBOS: Warsaw. May 1998.

Secondly, as Table 7 shows, the importance of socio-economic factors is also reflected in the profile of the pro- and anti-EU camps, particularly the strong correlation between support for (or opposition to) Polish EU membership and age, place of residence, education, distribution of income, assessment of personal financial prospects and certain occupations. The highest levels of support are among the ‘winners’ or potential winners of the economic transition: younger and better-educated Poles who live in larger towns or cities, have the highest incomes, are most optimistic about their own personal financial position and among managers, businessmen and students. Opposition to EU membership, on the other hand, is most firmly rooted among the ‘losers’: older, less well-educated Poles living in rural areas, earning the lowest salaries and who are most pessimistic about their financial prospects, together with pensioners and (particularly) farmers. Indeed, those Poles that make their living from agriculture are currently the only socio-occupational group where there is actually a clear majority opposed to EU membership (58% to 34%).

Table 7: Socio-economic profile of Polish euro-enthusiasts/sceptics, May 1999

Age	Pro	Anti	Don't know
18-24	73	19	8
25-34	62	27	11
35-44	57	31	12
45-54	59	25	16
55-64	57	26	17
Over 65	51	24	25

Place of residence	Pro	Anti	Don't know
Villages	51	34	15
Less than 20,000 inhabitants	61	24	15
21-100,000	67	17	15
101-500,000	62	24	14
Over 501,000	65	21	14

Education	Pro	Anti	Don't know
Primary	47	30	23
Vocational	56	29	15
Middle	68	22	10
Higher	72	21	7

Occupation	Pro	Anti	Don't know
Managers	73	17	10
Intellectual workers	57	31	12
Intellectual-physical workers	64	30	6
Qualified workers	57	28	16
Unqualified workers	62	18	20
Farmers	34	58	8
Businessmen	78	17	5
Pensioners	45	32	24
Retirees	59	19	22
Students	74	22	5
Unemployed	60	26	14
Housewives	70	15	16

Weekly earnings	Pro	Anti	Don't know
Less than 275 z ³ oties	53	30	17
276-399	56	30	14
400-549	57	24	19
550-799	61	25	14
More than 800 z ³ oties	73	17	10

Assessment of own position	Pro	Anti	Don't know
Bad	46	35	19
Average	59	25	16
Good	76	17	7

Church attendance	Pro	Anti	Don't know
Several times a week	63	27	10
Weekly	59	26	15
Several times a month	57	26	18
Several times a year	57	30	13
Never	71	18	11

Source: CBOS. *Poparcie dla integracji Polski z Unia Europejska*. CBOS: Warsaw, November 1999.

Thirdly, such concerns about the economic impact of EU membership are likely to underpin the anxieties of the majority of Poles who oppose what they see as 'pre-mature' accession. As Table 8 shows, the number of Poles who believe that their country should seek the earliest possible date for EU membership has fallen from 34% in January 1997 to only 21% in October 1999, while the number who do not see the need for any particular urgency has increased from 54% to 59% over the same period.

Table 8: Speed of Polish EU accession, 1997-99

	I 97	V 97	II 98	VI 98	IX 98	XII 98	V 99	X 99
Poland should join the EU as quickly as possible	34	31	29	24	25	27	19	21
Poland should not be in any special hurry to join the EU	54	51	53	56	60	55	61	59
Poland should not join the EU	3	6	7	9	8	8	11	10
Don't know	9	12	11	11	7	7	9	10

Source: OBOP. *Polacy o integracji z Unia Europejska*. OBOP: Warsaw. October 1999

Fourthly, not only do the majority of Poles (probably quite realistically) appear to believe that their country is currently unprepared for EU membership but, perhaps most worryingly from the perspective of the pro-EU camp, they do not necessarily see a connection between accession to the EU and the process of economic modernisation. As Table 9 shows, the number of Poles who support the earliest possible EU membership as a *means of precipitating* the modernisation of the Polish economy has fallen from 40% in April 1997 to 27% in November 1999, while those who believe that modernisation should *precede* (and, therefore, by implication is a separate process from) accession has increased from 48% to 62%. Similarly, in October 1999, the OBOP polling agency found that 74% of Poles believed that their country should implement reforms *before* it joined the EU compared with only 12%

who felt that the two processes should run concurrently.³⁰

Table 9: Polish readiness for EU membership, 1997-99

	IV 97	VIII 97	XII 98	V 99	XI 99
Poland should modernise its economy and then seek EU membership	48	43	50	58	62
Poland should seek earliest possible EU membership as a means of accelerated modernisation of the Polish economy	40	39	34	26	27
Don't know	12	19	16	16	11

Source: CBOS. *Poparcie dla integracji Polski z Unia Europejska*. CBOS: Warsaw, November 1999.

But how realistic is the prospect that the pro-EU camp could actually lose a referendum on Polish membership? Clearly, there are also countervailing tendencies that need to be taken into account when considering how the debate on Polish EU membership is likely to unfold over the next couple of years.

Firstly, and fairly obviously, although the level of support for EU membership could decrease even further between now and the date of a referendum, the pro-European camp are starting from a very high base and can cope with some further slippage. In spite of recent falls in support, a clear majority of Poles remain in favour of EU membership and, barring a shift in public opinion of landslide proportions, are likely to do so in the near future.

Secondly, while this paper has principally addressed the attitudes associated with, and prospects for, the eurosceptic and 'eurorealist' camps, there is obviously another side to the debate. Polish 'euroenthusiasts' will, no doubt, also be undertaking their own efforts to promote the benefits of EU membership and mobilise pro-EU sentiments among the Polish public. In particular, if the main Polish parties and groupings could agreed to undertake a non-partisan campaign then this would undoubtedly help to stem the tide of opposition and boost support for EU membership. The Polish government's decisions to launch a Public Information Campaign in March 1999³¹ and a broadly based Council for European Integration in November 1999,³² together with some tentative cross-party parliamentary co-operation to secure the speedy passage of legislation to bring Poland into line with EU norms,³³ suggest that there may be a basis for such a campaign. The fact that the influential Catholic Church hierarchy have become increasingly vocal in their support for EU membership will, no doubt, also help to counter the influence of Radio Maryja on the Catholic rank-and-file. Indeed, on his most recent visit to Poland in June 1999 the Pope used his address to the Polish parliament to spell out explicitly the Church's pro-EU stance.

³⁰ See: *Polacy o integracji z Unia Europejska*.

³¹ See: 'Z mysla o dobrym czlonkostwie,' *Rzeczpospolita*, March 1 1999.

³² See: 'Naradowa Rada Integracji Europejskiej,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 November 1999.

³³ See: J. Bielecki, 'Koalicja bedzie wspoldzialac z opozycja,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 November 1999.

Thirdly, the mere existence of a body of anti-EU (or potentially anti-EU) public opinion is not, of itself, a sufficient condition for the pro-EU camp to face the realistic prospect of defeat in a referendum. The absence of an organisation capable of tapping into this otherwise passive current of public opinion and channelling it into a coherent political movement will act as a significant brake on the development of the Polish anti-EU camp. However, the recent emergence of the (as yet electorally untested) Polish Agreement notwithstanding, there is still an overwhelmingly pro-EU consensus among Polish political elites and no significant political party or grouping is prepared to stand at the head of an overtly anti-EU movement.

The future attitude of the PSL will be critical in this respect and it is still unclear precisely how this will evolve over the next couple of years. Given that opposition to EU membership is particularly striking among those living in rural areas (and especially those employed in the agricultural sector) we can expect the PSL (for whom peasant farmers represent the party's core electorate) to develop an even more critical tone towards the EU as the accession negotiations proceed. However, it remains extremely unlikely that the PSL will take the ultimate step and adopt a stance of outright opposition to EU membership, thereby placing itself outside what is still an overwhelming pro-European elite political consensus.

Fourthly, there is evidence that Polish accession to NATO has only had a minimal impact on Polish support for EU membership. In so far as Polish support for EU membership was rooted in a concern to lock Poland into Western institutions in order to secure Polish international security, it was possible that the level would fall once Poland had been admitted into NATO and these two issues became de-coupled. However, as Table 10 shows, only 6% of respondents cited external security concerns as a reason for supporting Polish EU membership and these issues do not seem to be linked in any significant way.

Table 10: Motives for Polish Euroenthusiasm, April 1998

General economic benefits	29%
Benefit for ordinary people	25%
General unspecified benefits	16%
General benefits for Poland	14%
Opening borders and free movement of labour	14%
Returning to Europe	13%
Historical necessity and inevitability	6%
External security	6%
Conforming Polish law to European law	4%
Don't know	2%

Source: CBOS. *Opinie o negocjacjach Polski z Unia Europejska i poparcie dla integracji*. CBOS: Warsaw. May 1998.

Fifthly, and perhaps most significantly, the pro-EU campaign's strongest argument is the eurosceptics' lack of a convincing, and potentially appealing, foreign policy alternative. As Table 11 shows, when presented with a range of possible Polish foreign policy options, although the number of supporters of EU membership fell from 64% to 55%, it was still a much more popular option than the 12% who chose isolationism, 6% who choose forging an alliance with the USA and only 5% who chose developing closer links with Poland's Eastern neighbours (22% did not know).

Table 11: Main Polish foreign policy objective, December 1998

What should be the main objective of Polish foreign policy?	
Close links membership of EU	55%
Alliance with the USA	6%
Alliance with Eastern neighbours	5%
No alliances	12%
Don't know	22%

Source: CBOS. *Na drodze do Unii Europejskiej*. CBOS: Warsaw. January 1999.

Consequently, although Polish support for EU membership may suffer some further slippage, it remains extremely unlikely that Poles will vote 'No' in a referendum held within the next two or three years. The greater danger is that the way that the Polish debate on EU membership is being conducted may simply breed apathy and resentment towards the whole European integration project and that the referendum will not secure the 50% turnout required by the Polish Constitution to ratify the accession treaty.³⁴ Given that two out of the last three parliamentary elections did not achieve such a turnout this could prove a difficult hurdle to surmount. As Table 12 shows, the number of Poles who said that they will take part in a referendum on EU membership has fallen from 76% in June 1998 to 65% in October 1999 - with only 35% saying that they will definitely do so.

Table 12: Participation in EU membership referendum

Would you participate in a referendum on EU membership?	VI	IX	XII	V	X
	98	98	98	99	99
Definitely Yes	46	47	39	33	35
Probably Yes	30	28	31	32	30
Probably No	8	7	11	16	15
Definitely No	8	8	10	9	8

³⁴ According to Article 90 of the Polish Constitution, it is also possible to ratify an accession treaty through a two thirds majority of both houses of parliament (sitting as the National Assembly). However, Poland's political leaders have committed themselves to a referendum, a commitment that it will be virtually impossible for them to retract from. Theoretically, they could fall back on the parliamentary option if, for example, turnout fell just short of 50% but an overwhelming majority of those participating voted 'Yes'. However, such a decision would be open to challenge both on legal grounds and (perhaps more importantly) on the dubious political legitimacy that it would confer on a decision of such historic proportions. See: 'Porwanie Europy'.

Don't know	8	10	9	10	12
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Source: OBOP. Polacy o integracji z Unia Europejska. Warsaw: OBOP. October 1999.

The 'euroneutrals' and particularly the 'soft' pro-Europeans (those who are supportive of the EU in principle but not particularly enthusiastic about the prospect), therefore, constitute the main 'battleground' in terms of winning over Polish hearts and minds in the run up to a referendum on EU membership. It is precisely these Poles whose final decision is likely to be most strongly influenced by the progress of, and political climate surrounding, the accession negotiations. Unfortunately, most Polish research has tended to focus on which issues motivate *current* (rather than potential) euroenthusiasts and eurosceptics. This makes it extremely difficult to make too firm judgements about just how 'soft' the pro-EU bloc of public opinion really is. Clearly more information is required on precisely which issues could dislodge this 'soft' pro-EU segment and cause them to 'defect' to the don't knows or the anti-EU camp or simply not to turn out and vote at all.

Conclusion

The number of Poles who say that they will vote 'Yes' in a referendum on EU membership has, therefore, fallen significantly over the last few years. There are also a number of potentially significant indicators that the prospect provokes anxieties even among the supposedly 'euroenthusiast' majority and that Poles are becoming increasingly sceptical about whether or not (and by how much) they will actually benefit from EU membership. In-depth polling data suggests that the 'hard core' of Polish 'euroenthusiasts' is considerably smaller than the headline figure of those who say that they will vote 'Yes' in a referendum and that the best way to characterise the current state of Polish public opinion is that they *consent* to the idea of EU membership but are not particularly *enthusiastic* about it

In many ways we should not be surprised that the level of Polish support for EU membership has fallen. Earlier polling data may have artificially overstated the true level of public support for EU membership. The hitherto high levels of Polish support for EU membership did not really represent a conscious and considered declaration of support and were constructed on extremely shaky foundations. Once it became apparent that EU membership would involve costs as well as benefits, this level of support was bound to fall. At the same time a crack has appeared in the previously overwhelming pro-EU elite consensus with the emergence of the first organised and potentially significant political force to adopt an overtly anti-EU stance. A potentially much greater threat to continuing Polish public support for EU membership, however, is the way that the debate has been conducted, among those political forces that are ostensibly pro-EU. One of the most important aspects of this 'politicisation' of the Polish eurodebate has been the division of the pro-EU camp into those who are (allegedly) 'soft' and prepared to give in to Brussels and those who (allegedly) favour a 'tough' negotiating stance. This kind of political discourse, that encourages parties to compete with one another for the mantle of most effective 'defender' of national interests, could chip away at the overall level of support for EU membership.

Polling evidence suggests that it is fear of the socio-economic consequences of EU membership that lies at the root of Polish anxieties and the majority of Poles who oppose what they see as 'pre-mature' accession. They appear to believe (probably quite realistically) that their country is currently unprepared for EU membership but, they also do not necessarily see a connection between accession to the EU and the process of economic modernisation. The importance of socio-economic factors is also reflected in the demographic profile of the pro- and anti-EU camps. The greatest danger, therefore, for Polish supporters of EU membership is that a stereotype develops of the kind of person and socio-occupational groups that are likely to benefit from it, with certain segments of the population clearly defined as (and perceiving themselves to be) 'winners' and 'losers'. For many Poles, this would re-inforce the popular stereotype of EU accession as an elite-driven process from which only a narrow, wealthy section of the population will benefit or which simply doesn't affect their day-to-day lives at all.

However, in spite of recent falls in the level of support, a clear majority of Poles remain in favour of EU membership and are likely to do so in the near future. There is still an overwhelmingly pro-EU consensus among Polish political elites and no significant political party or grouping is prepared to stand at the head of an overtly anti-EU movement. Although we can expect the PSL to develop a more critical tone, it remains extremely unlikely that the party will take the ultimate step and adopt a stance of outright opposition. Polish 'euroenthusiasts' will also be undertaking their own efforts to promote the benefits of EU membership and mobilise pro-EU sentiments among the Polish public. Above all, the pro-EU camp's strongest argument is the eurosceptics' lack of a convincing, and potentially appealing, alternative foreign policy. Although Polish support for EU membership may, therefore, suffer some further slippage in support, it remains extremely unlikely that Poles will vote 'No' in a referendum held within the next two or three years. Apathy and low turnout rather than outright rejection are likely to be pose a greater threat to Poland successfully ratifying an accession treaty in a future referendum.

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