

**ADDRESS BY MINISTER WŁODZIMIERZ CIMOSZEWICZ AT THE
HUNGARIAN INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN BUDAPEST DURING
HIS OFFICIAL VISIT TO HUNGARY (FEBRUARY 7, 2002)
„POLAND ON THE THRESHOLD OF EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP“**

Excellencies, Mr. Minister,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to have this opportunity of sharing remarks with such a distinguished audience and to give some information about the Polish road to European Union membership. I hope that this meeting will allow our Hungarian friends to become better acquainted with the way Poland is coping with the challenge of integration. I hope that the whole this visit of mine to Hungary will become yet another stage in shaping effective cooperation between our countries, in the spirit of the traditional Polish-Hungarian friendship, to enhance attainment of our common European goal.

The political changes in Europe and Poland after 1989 opened the path to unification of the European continent. All of Europe encountered historic challenges. The Germans made their bid to unite their western and eastern parts into one state organism, the states of Central Europe and the Baltic states intensified their striving for independence. The countries of Central Europe, including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, initiated systemic transformations and the building of democratic foundations for their state institutions.

At that time our country found itself in a unique situation. Poland, like Hungary, was this country in Europe, which faced the necessity of arranging relations with completely new neighbourhood. We had seven new neighbors, following the unification of Germany and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The respective Polish governments dealt with the task effectively, concluding bilateral treaties that settled sensitive international issues, including those pertaining to minorities. At the same time, we patiently nurtured various forms of bilateral, cross-border and regional collaboration. That was accompanied by persistent effort for integration with Euro-Atlantic and European structures, and at home - by consolidation of democratic institutions and the rule of law. In consequence, Poland became a stable state, with a well-developed network of contacts with neighboring countries, unburdened by quarrels that could weigh on relations with them. That is a contribution we have made to the North Atlantic Alliance, and we also wish to bring it to the European Union.

Poland, as Hungary, began striving for membership of the European Communities in the early Nineties. So, we have behind us more than ten years of adaptation of our economies and administrations, and of preparation of our citizens for European Union standards. We are now approaching the conclusion of that historic process of real reunification of Europe.

European Union membership is a profound challenge. Meeting it will not only require fulfillment by the candidates of the membership criteria defined in Copenhagen. It is also essential to thoroughly change the mentality of our societies and to prepare them for life in the Union. Being „a citizen of Europe“ not only implies benefits, but it also requires political maturity and responsibility.

The new Polish Government is fully aware of the challenges connected with European Union membership. That is reflected by the European Strategy of the Government, adopted on November 15, 2001.

Obtaining Union membership in 2004 remains a priority for Poland. The Strategy not only identifies the basic ways of achieving that goal, but also spells out the Government strategy for ensuring that Poland can function effectively in Union structures from the first day of membership. It provides for accelerated legislative work and negotiations, while seeking the broadest possible backing and involvement of society in the process of accession. I am convinced that success of this undertaking requires participation of society, its support and conviction as to the benefits of membership. The acceleration of negotiations, envisaged in the Strategy, will permit their conclusion by the end of 2002.

In line with the European Strategy, Poland wishes to play a significant role while creating a vision of united Europe. Accordingly, we intend to be actively involved in the debate on the future of European integration. The outcome of that debate will have deep impact on decisions about the future shape of the European Union - soon to be joined by Hungary, Poland and other countries. Poland fully accepts the idea of the Convention, whose formula permits involvement in the discussion of broad social circles. In particular, we welcome the fact that the candidates will be able to participate in the work of the Convention on equal footing with the members. That will give that forum appropriate legitimacy.

The results of the discussion on the future shape of the Union should have authentic public support. With that in mind, our Foreign Ministry has proposed establishment of a Forum on the Future of the EU.

The Forum participants will include representatives of territorial self-government, non-governmental organizations, the academic community, the media, the Church and political parties. Its activity will be correlated with the work of the Convention. Poland's representatives to the Convention will be regular guests of the Forum. Its first session is due to take place in mid-February.

However, before we attain our priority goal and become a full-fledged member of the European Union, we have to meet the conditions of membership. The better we are prepared for accession, the easier it will be for us to operate in the framework of the single market. We are already well-advanced in adjusting Polish legislation to the *acquis*. In the years 2000-2001, the Polish Government adopted the drafts of 142 adjustment bills, of which parliament adopted 136. By the end of this year, parliament will have to adopt another sixty bills, thus concluding the process of harmonization of our law to the requirements of *acquis communautaire*. We have introduced a mechanism of monitoring legislative work and systematic assessment of adjustment in areas of key significance for integration. The high momentum of adjustment work was evident last year in such fields as the environment, free movement of goods, fisheries, competition policy, agriculture and justice - that is the areas crucial for efficient operation in the Union.

Even though the political role of Poland in the region is most frequently raised as the chief argument for rapid accession, Poland's membership will also have great bearing on the economic success of enlargement. Poland is the largest growing market in Central Europe. Over the last ten years our economy increased its GNP by 36%, and by the end of

the year 2000 attracted more than 50 billion Euro in direct foreign investments - including 30 billion from the Union member states.

The current economic troubles in Poland, and especially the problems with public finances, are not the best messages for the audience abroad, but - what is important - the balance of payments and the trade balance are intact, and - according to economic analysts - Poland still remains an attractive market to foreign investors. We are aware that nowadays some bold measures are necessary and crucial. And we are ready to take the risk of this undertaking.

Due to this approach, we've made recently a decisive progress in the accession negotiations. We have closed further important chapters: „Company law“ and „Free movement of persons“. Polish postulates have been taken into consideration in the closing of „Free movement of goods“. We are close to conclusion of talks on „Free movement of capital“ and „Taxation“. We expect that during the Spanish Presidency it will be possible to close all chapters, except three that have major implications for the Union budget - namely agriculture, regional policy, finances and budget. We hope that - true to its program declarations - the Spanish Presidency will ensure progress in the negotiations, permitting their conclusion in the second half of 2002.

That is not a simple goal, especially since the most sensitive and politically difficult questions are still ahead. They require political maturity and mutual willingness to compromise, as well as understanding that the scale of problems confronting Poland in the negotiations is much greater than in the case of other candidates. Alas, we do not expect preferential treatment. However, it is natural that we want to ensure the best possible conditions of membership - acceptable to our society.

Agreement still has to be reached on such difficult issues as purchase of land by foreigners, protection of investments in the special economic zones, agriculture and regional policy.

Historic, political and social considerations force us to be firm on some of those questions. Wherever possible, we have modified our positions. We have pledged further flexibility - on condition that Union members reciprocate. The number of closed chapters is the price we are paying for our firmness. However, I do not believe that the number of closed chapters could be treated as a criterion determining the timetable of accession to the Union by new members. The specific political and economic conditions of Union membership were submitted to us in Copenhagen ten years ago. As a result of a vigorous pace of transposition and implementation of Community law in 2001, we have concluded preparation of the basic package of bills adjusting Polish law to the *acquis*. In accordance with an adopted timetable, the Government is currently focusing on preparation of executive acts, permitting full implementation of the *acquis*. A positive assessment of our adjustment process is made in the latest progress report of the European Commission. It underlines the stability of our state, fulfillment of the political criteria of membership and functioning of a market economy in Poland.

Animated debate in recent days has focused on the conditions of integrating the agriculture of Poland and other candidates with the Union market, in the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy.

It is a fundamental expectation of Poland that economic entities, including farms, will have equal conditions of competing in the single market of the Union. The communiqué of the European Commission, dated January 30th, 2002, on the financial aspects of enlargement, does not guarantee complete fulfillment of that expectation. It is an initial proposal, which will be subject of discussion by EU members. However, it does determine the directions of debate on financial issues. An in-depth analysis of the consequences of the proposals will be crucial for guaranteeing an appropriate quality of our EU membership.

It is particularly significant that the European Commission document contains a proposal of guaranteeing direct subsidies to farmers in the candidate countries. The Polish Government also welcomes the proposal to make the instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy more flexible and better adapted to the conditions in the candidate countries. However, the proposed initial level of the direct subsidies (equal to 25 per cent of the present subsidies in the Union) is not satisfactory and will certainly be subject of further negotiations after the member states adopt their final position. Likewise, the proposed 10-year transition period for introduction of full subsidies does not meet our expectations.

We are conducting in Poland a comprehensive analysis of the Union proposals. That analysis will be used to elaborate our negotiating position on „Agriculture“. At the same time, the Government will undertake actions addressed to EU members and the European Commission to ensure the most advantageous outcome of the negotiations. We are also in favor of close cooperation between the EU candidates on financial issues. Those matters will be on the agenda of today's meeting in Brussels between the Chief Negotiators of the Visegrad Group, the meeting of Visegrad Group Prime-Ministers here in Hungary in the near future, and the meeting of the Luxembourg Group Chief Negotiators in Warsaw, in March.

I am convinced that collaboration in the framework of the Visegrad Group can facilitate attainment of common goals on the road to EU membership. From the beginning this cooperation reflected a strong sense of community among the Visegrad Group member states. Our cooperation is rooted in shared historic experiences and similar aspirations, so it can be a significant component of unification of Europe. Our close collaboration can bring about a new image of Central Europe. We share the same goals in foreign policy.

The Madrid Three together strove for NATO membership, now we are supporting Slovakia's bid, and all of us are on the path to European Union membership. Exchange of integration experience and mutual support should be a key component of our relations. Accordingly, cooperation between Visegrad members - both bilateral and multilateral - is a test of our political responsibility and indicator of our readiness to fulfill future tasks as Union members. The passing of that test cannot be hampered by the competition in negotiations between some candidates.

Our wise collaboration and coordination is highly desired - both now, during the final stage of negotiation, as well as during the time of ratification. Consistent and effective collaboration between Central European states is a means of promoting our interests and European aspirations. We must give a clear signal to our partners in the European Union and NATO that Central Europe is ready to cope with the challenges of membership.

The accession negotiations have entered the decisive stage, requiring engagement by the political elite, governments and parliaments of the candidates, as well as their societies.

Some issues under negotiation call for political decisions that are socially difficult to accept. It is, therefore, essential to ensure ongoing, exhaustive information for the public on the progress of the accession process, the adopted solutions, their benefits and costs. In addition to selling EU membership to our own citizens, it is also crucial to find support for enlargement among the citizens of the Fifteen. It is a key task to promote ourselves as a group of politically stable states, which are developing market economies and thus making a contribution to the stability of the region.

We could try to do that separately, though our voice will be stronger and more eloquent if we speak as a group.

As the President Vaclav Havel has said: „One cannot compare the voice of the choir and the voice of soloist“. Our common voice should convince our partners in the Union and NATO - and especially their citizens - that cooperation in Central Europe not only enhances integration with the Union and Euro-Atlantic structures, but also helps consolidate the stability and security of all Europe.

Thank you for your attention.

[Quelle: http://www.msz.gov.pl/english/statement/2002_02_07_bukareszt.html]