

Address given by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz on Poland and the European Union (Copenhagen, 1 February 2002)

Caption: On 1 February 2002, in Copenhagen, with a view to the imminent conclusion of the accession negotiations, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Polish Foreign Minister, emphasises the importance of European integration for Poland.

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Address by Mr. Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Foreign Minister of The Republic of Poland, Copenhagen, 1st February, 2002

"Poland - a Future Member of the European Union"

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here with you now, with the accession negotiations drawing to a close and Denmark to assume the Council Presidency in five months' time. If everything goes as planned, in December 2002 I shall be delightedly signing here in Copenhagen a treaty on Poland's accession to the Union. Thus the mantra "from Copenhagen to Copenhagen" will have been translated into reality - for it will be remembered that it was during the June 1993 session of the Copenhagen Council that the accession process took off. I would like the Danish people to be sure that by accepting Poland as a new member, the European Union will be gaining a loyal and trustworthy partner nation which will enrich it with its own values, and spare no effort to ensure the success of the common project of European unification.

Poland is - and, indeed, has always been - a European country. Since its baptism in the late 10th century, my country's culture, economy and polity have followed the development of Western Europe. At some stages of its history, my country, in fact, moved ahead of the rest of the continent. Suffice it to mention the year 1791 that saw Europe's first and the world's second written constitution signed into law in Poland. So there is no doubt about the European character of Polish culture or Polish mentality.

Regrettably, the tragic developments of the last century cut Poland off from Europe's political and social mainstream. In other words, when the countries of Western Europe were busy carrying into life the great idea of Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Alcide de Gasperi and Paul-Henri Spaak, Poland could only eye these efforts from beyond the Iron Curtain and dream about joining European nations one day in their pursuit of unity. But even back in those days when Poland was unable to act independently, some Poles did, in fact, commit themselves to the process of the continent's unification. Let me mention at this juncture ambassador Retinger, Paul-Henri Spaak's close friend and associate, whose name is enshrined forever in the annals of European integration.

So it was only after the collapse of communism in our part of Europe in 1989 that the Polish people could freely chart the course of their country's domestic and foreign policies. Back in 1989 there was no doubt in the public mind that integration with Europe's economic and political structures would provide a compass to that policy. And let me stress that all social, economic and political reforms Poland has since been implementing with such an immense expenditure of effort - have been in furtherance of Poland's return to the family of free, democratic and prosperous European nations.

Membership of the European Union has therefore been a principal objective of Polish foreign policy. In December 1991 Poland signed the Europe Agreement, which - while associating Poland with the European Communities - created for my country a real chance of integration. In April 1994 Poland officially applied for accession to the European Union.

However, integration with structures of the Western world is not only about striving for membership of the European Union. A very important early step down this path was, in fact, taken when Poland joined the Council of Europe. This reaffirmed Poland's rapid advance towards the European standards of democracy and human rights triggered by the reforms of the late eighties and early nineties. The subsequent membership of the OECD was proof of a positive assessment by that organisation of economic reforms in our country. Poland's accession to NATO was of similar importance politically. It has provided us with the guarantees of military security. So, our forthcoming membership of the Union is, logically, the last step to be taken down this path that will crown all that has happened in Poland in the last 13 years

The accession negotiations, which have been in progress for four years now, are, as we know, drawing to a close. It is our desire to meet the deadline laid down for us in the strategic paper of the European Commission. This is no easy task, but the present Polish government of Prime Minister Leszek Miller,

which I am honoured to serve as minister of foreign affairs, displays great determination in its pursuit of this goal. This determination found its expression in the government's new negotiating strategy adopted as one of its earliest decisions after taking office.

Poland is the biggest of the candidate states. Which also explains why problems we have run into in the course of the negotiations are not infrequently much bigger than those encountered by other countries aspiring to EU membership. The process of adjustment to the *acquis communautaire* often necessitates Herculean efforts on the part of the Polish authorities, of Polish society first and foremost. We do realise that adjustment is necessary for Poland to become a credible member state. But it will be remembered that Poland's transformations of the past 13 years have dwarfed those carried out by quite a few Western nations since the Second World War.

However, the end result of the negotiations must be geared to the pursuit of two paramount goals following enlargement. The efficient functioning of the single market is one of them. Goal number two is preserving what is most valuable in the economic transformation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, namely, their potential for rapid economic growth, to enable them to attain in the foreseeable future a level of development comparable with that enjoyed by the Western part of our continent. That is why periods of transition in some rigorously defined and prudently selected areas are a must.

Now, with the negotiations drawing to an end, in Poland we apply our minds to the quality of our future membership.

And let me assure you that contrary to ungenerous comments making rounds in some quarters in Europe, Poland is not seeking EU membership motivated by financial considerations alone. These are important and pretending otherwise would be strongly suggestive of hypocrisy. But then our part of Europe suffered much more widespread wartime devastation than the West of the continent. And after the war, when Western Europe enjoyed the fruits of the Marshall Plan, for thirty years riding the high point of the economic cycle, the Central and Eastern part of our continent paid a very high price for the painful experiments of central planning and "people's democracy". So it stands to reason that without an infusion of substantial assistance from wealthier partners we shall not succeed in overcoming the developmental delays we have run into through no fault of our own.

But by far the most important motivation for our EU membership aspirations has been prompted by a vision of Europe we cherish in Poland. This is a vision of an economically sound and politically strong Europe dealing on an equal footing with the biggest players on the international scene. Of a united Europe, creating a single space not just for its goods and services, but also for its people. It is a vision of a Europe committed to solidarity between nations and states expressed not just by budgetary transfers to its poorer members. A salient point of its message is the solidarity of people living in different countries on which the European social model has been founded. And, last but not least, this is the vision of a Europe which has taken into its embrace both modern democracy and human rights.

How then will Poland set about realising this vision following accession? The matter is obvious considering Europe's position on the international scene. A strong Europe is a Europe that enjoys internal cohesion. We give our full support to new European initiatives, such as the Lisbon process and modernisation of the European economy, the cohesion of social policy, the common security and defence policy, as well as cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs. It is our intention to gain the earliest possible membership of the Economic and Monetary Union. In our opinion, only a Europe set along these lines can be an equal partner to the United States, as well as to Japan and - in the future - to China and other powers.

To us, constraints imposed on travel, especially to the countries of Western Europe, were among the greatest discomforts of the communist era. These were not only the consequence of the restrictive policies of our authoritarian governments, but also of the hurdles raised for us by Western governments. These included visas, written invitations and other administrative procedures. That is why one of the greatest achievements of European integration, as seen from our perspective, is the opening of state borders not only to free travel but also to those wishing to settle anywhere in Europe. In my view, the extension of the Schengen system to

Iceland and Norway was an excellent idea, because there is no rationale for confining the freedom of movement to the strictly defined European Union when it should actually benefit the whole of Europe.

It is also for this reason that we find it difficult to accept the restrictions in the free movement of persons proposed to us during the negotiations. We do try to understand the concern of the citizens of some countries, lest Polish labour should swamp their markets, even though we are sure their fears are completely unfounded. But we have accepted these restrictions, anyway, all the more grateful to Denmark and other countries for their promise to open to us both their borders and their respective labour markets upon Poland's accession to the EU.

Which brings us back to the question of solidarity and the European social model. As you will know, the anticommunist opposition in Poland had solidarity emblazoned on its banners. This idea is still very much alive across Polish society. That is why in our pursuit of reforms which are to deliver sustainable growth to our economy we accept guidance from Europe's dominant model built on universal prosperity and - yes! - on solidarity. In this particular context, solidarity is not just about social policy in a narrow sense of the term. It also has a meaning for agriculture and rural areas generally, preserving the family farm being one of our aims. Anxious to prevent a depopulation of rural areas, we have spelt out a farm policy committing the country's modest resources to improved performance of agriculture and a balanced development of the countryside. By virtue of this policy, Polish agriculture enjoys a considerable capacity for environmentally friendly production of healthy food, this being fully consistent with the latest trends in the common agricultural policy. Therefore, I do not think that integration of Polish agriculture into the CAP will be fraught with insurmountable difficulties, assuming that it is conducted with scrupulous adherence to the principle of equality of all those concerned.

As we know, the democratic form of government and observance of the highest standards of human rights is a norm in Europe. In 1989, these also became a norm in Poland. However, some countries do not take democracy or human rights for granted as we do in this part of the world. Others read an entirely different meaning into them. Therefore, democratic countries are duty-bound not only to observe the principles of democracy and human rights at home, but also to propagate them elsewhere. For obvious historical and geographical reasons, in Poland we attach particular importance to the development of relations with our Eastern neighbours. I have in mind at this point first of all Ukraine, where democracy is not yet firmly established, and Belarus, which will need much more time and effort to achieve democracy. Poland is also making every effort to develop the best possible political and economic relations with Russia. I am confident that following our accession to the EU, and with the Union's full backing, we shall be even more successful in this field of endeavour.

It goes without saying that a reform of the Union's operations will become a must following enlargement. The reforms implemented at Nice are not sufficient. In Poland we also try to visualise a European Union of the 21st century. For Poland does intend to actively participate in the ongoing discussion on the future of the Union and get involved in the Union's reform. This is one of the reasons why we are so anxious to join the Union in 2004 and take part in the Intergovernmental Conference as its full member. We do not want decisions about our future to be taken in our absence - as has been the case in the past.

Poland should join the EU, and in the first wave of enlargement, too, because not only Poland stands to benefit from that. The Union will derive tangible benefits from our accession as well. Our country will contribute to the European Union a vibrant economy, a young and very well educated society. Then comes the growing Polish market from which West European companies reap enormous benefits. To the European Union Poland will provide a window on our neighbours in the East, primarily on the vast Russian market. No less important is the prospect of entire Central and Eastern Europe achieving economic and political stability - courtesy of enlargement. It is difficult to say how our region of Europe would have developed after the collapse of communism had it not set its sights unwaveringly on accession to the Union.

In a nutshell, a brief look at the map of Europe and a smattering of its history are enough to make one realise that enlargement without Poland would be half-baked at best and certainly not a political success story.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.