

Statement by Andrzej Olechowski on Poland's application for accession to the European Union (Warsaw, 7 April 1994)

Caption: On 7 April 1994, Andrzej Olechowski, Polish Foreign Minister, outlines to the Polish Parliament in Warsaw the reasons why the Republic of Poland is applying for accession to the European Union.

Source: Oświadczenie ministra spraw zagranicznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Andrzeja Olechowskiego wygłoszone w Sejmie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na temat przystąpienia Polski do Unii Europejskiej, Warszawa, 7 kwietnia 1994 r.

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Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Olechowski to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on Poland's Application for Accession to the European Union, Warsaw, April 7, 1994

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

I have the honour to submit to the House the government's motives for Poland's application for accession to the European Union. On 29th March, the Council of Ministers, in the presence of the President of the Republic of Poland, authorised Prime Minister Pawlak to make this request.

Aspiration to membership in the Communities, and thereafter in the European Union established with effect from 1st November last year, has been the basis of Polish foreign policy since the radical turn of 1989.

Poland's movement towards the European Union is proceeding dynamically. The Agreement between the Poland and the European Economic Community on Trade and Commercial and Economic Co-operation, signed in September 1989, normalized trade and economic relations which had not been regulated until then. The Agreement with the European Coal and Steel Community of 1990 extended the provisions of this Agreement to cover co-operation in the fields of metallurgy and mining.

Poland was the first state of Central Europe to put the issue of association with the Communities on the agenda. This issue was raised in a letter dated 29th March 1990 from Prime Minister Mazowiecki to the President of the Commission of the Communities Jacques Delors. On 25th May that same year, Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski made a request to Irish Foreign Minister Gerard Collins, President of the Council of Ministers of the European Community, to start negotiations. Shortly thereafter, Poland submitted to the Brussels Commission a memorandum on the principles of association with the Communities.

Behind this initiative lay a belief in the imperative of fast advancement of political and economic co-operation with Western Europe. We were acting on the assumption, as we are now, that the role of the Communities would steadily grow in step with political and economic reforms, with the necessity to modernise the state, with the increased demand for modern technologies, organisation and management methods. We recognised the fact that the effectiveness of the reforms would depend to a large extent on their correlation with the integration processes in the Communities. In addition, we believed that the deepening of integration in the Community would turn it into one of the major actors in international political and economic relations. Consequently, the establishment of close relations with the Communities would determine our political and economic position in Europe and in the world.

It was with appreciation that we received the offer extended to us, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to conclude Europe Agreements. The Communities showed admirable understanding of the new situation confronting these countries. It was fully reflected in the Agreements Establishing an Association between the three states of the then Visegrad Triangle and the Communities signed on 16th December, 1991.

The Europe Agreements provide a framework of co-operation in nearly all fields of social and economic life. They are an instrument helping to deepen this co-operation. Along with the direct benefits, which follow from their provisions, their merit is that they define the direction of indispensable reforms in the countries of Central Europe.

The Interim Agreement, constituting the trade part of the Europe Agreement, came into force on 1st March 1992. A timetable of gradual changes in the conditions of trade between Poland and the Communities came into force as of that date. Duty-free quotas for sensitive goods were relaxed, thanks to which Poland was immediately able to export about 70% of her industrial goods duty-free. Poland, for her part, lifted tariffs on manufactured goods which accounted for about 27% of total imports from the European Community. The next reduction of tariffs will take effect on 1st January 1995. This will be the second reduction out of a total of five equal reductions, which will totally eliminate tariffs in imports from the European Community. I would like to point to the asymmetric nature of the tariff reduction timetable, which is of advantage to Poland. The timetable of the total elimination of customs duties has been negotiated in such a manner as to

facilitate the adjustment of the Polish economy to the requirements of the European Community, an adjustment which is necessary for Poland's accession to the European Union.

The entry into force of the whole Europe Agreement was expected on 1st January 1993. Parliament ratified the Agreement on 4th July 1992. The European Parliament ratified the Treaty on 16th September.

Despite the prolonged ratification process in the Community countries, its basic provisions were implemented, not only those concerning trade. Among other things, political dialogue was going on dynamically. Its major forms were the periodic meetings of ministers of foreign affairs and political directors from the Associate Countries with the Troika of the Community and meetings of experts from the Associate Countries with the Troika, on the issues of security and co-operation in Europe. Of great importance was Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka's visit to the Commission of the European Community in Brussels and the meeting of the Prime Ministers of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary with the British Prime Minister John Major and the President of the European Council Jacques Delors in London.

The co-operation of Poland, France and Germany within the so-called Weimar Triangle is a particular form of this dialogue.

Honourable Members,

The Europe Agreement came into force on 1st February, Prime Minister Pawlak was on a visit to Brussels on 2nd and 3rd February. The Association Council, the main organ established under the Agreement, held its first session on 7th March. The Joint Commission of the lower and upper houses of the Republic of Poland and of the European Parliament has been recast into a parliamentary body of the Association Agreement. The process of association has got under way.

Following the entry into force of the Agreement, the Council of Ministers passed a resolution requesting the Minister of Foreign Affairs to continue action in order to ensure propitious external conditions for Poland's admission to the European Union. Pursuant to this resolution, I have drawn up a proposal adopted by the Council of Ministers to make Poland's application for accession to the Union which, after the association, is the next step on the road to membership.

I have been guided by the arguments put forward in the report presented to the House. I shall not repeat them here. I am acting on the belief that Poland is ready to start making efforts towards membership.

The Treaty of Maastricht says that, I quote, "Any European State may apply to become a Member of the Union. It shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament, which shall act by an absolute majority of its component members. The conditions of admission and the adjustment to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the Contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements". Unquote.

In June 1993, the Copenhagen Summit laid down economic and political conditions which a country applying for membership in the Union has to satisfy: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, respect for human rights and for the rights of minorities, rule of law, adjustment of national laws to those of the Community, existence of a functioning market economy able to cope with competitive pressures within the Union.

It is the belief of the government that Poland meets these criteria. We can think in real terms about meeting in the future the criteria of convergence put forward in the Treaty of Maastricht. Let me recall that they provide that the budget deficit cannot exceed 3% of GDP, public debt cannot go over 60% of GDP, and inflation cannot be higher than 1.5 times the average interest rate and rise by more than 2 points over the respective indicators in the three member countries having most stable prices.

The distance, which today still separates Poland from fulfilment of these criteria, is not greater than, for instance, that of Portugal, Greece or Spain when those countries were acceding to the Communities.

Mr. Speaker,

The road to the Union will still be long, difficult and uncertain. It will open with a decision by the Council of the Union to transmit our application to the Commission of the Communities for its opinion. This may take 2 to 3 years. In case of a positive opinion, formal negotiations could get started in 1966/1967. A ratification procedure would follow once the negotiations are concluded. In the year of 1999 or eventually in the year 2000 Poland would obtain the status of a member, with special provisions for the interim period which would take from 5 to 10 years depending on the field concerned.

Real adjustment measures and macro-economic policy bringing us closer to the criteria of Maastricht would still be more important than these formal, institutional efforts. We embarked on adjustment processes as early as 1992. A Commissioner for European Integration was appointed. A government programme for action to adjust the Polish economy to the requirements stemming from the Europe Agreement was worked out and adopted in 1993.

The request for membership is therefore a first, small step seen given the tasks awaiting us. However, this is a decision having the significance of a deep-reaching symbol and having an essential practical dimension.

On the one hand, it is a formal confirmation of our will to full participation in the European Union. It is further proof of the durability of our country as commitment to the road it chose in 1989. It is yet another confirmation of our immutable belief that it is only participation in the community of states which build their development on the principles of democracy, rule of law, private ownership and competition that will allow us to fully satisfy our civilizational and material aspirations.

On the other hand, Poland reaffirms that she is ready to enter negotiations on the terms of membership in the European Union. We realize that negotiations will take a long time. It is only when they have been concluded that we shall know for certain that we can accede to the Union and on what terms. It is only then that we shall, each of us, decide in a referendum whether we want this participation. The present decision is therefore the beginning rather than the end of the second stage, after the association, of relations with the European Union, a stage of efforts towards membership.

Honourable Members,

Diplomatic enquiries in the states of the Twelve show a generally favourable disposition towards Poland's application for membership in the Union. The dominant view is that its submission today would be justifiable and positively received.

Therefore, I ask the House to take note of this statement and thereby to express support to the decision of the Council of Ministers.

Thank you for your attention.

Translated by Andrzej Niedzielski