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## **Reluctantly European? Ideological and Structural Sources of Euro-Skepticism in Poland**

Research Report

### **1. Topic of research and countries visited**

This project is devoted to the analysis of popular attitudes regarding Poland's accession to the European Union, with the special attention given to the ideological and structural sources of "Euro-skepticism" (attitudes questioning Poland's membership in the EU). I visited Poland in June 2002.

### **2. Relevance and contribution to field**

When and how (and, indeed, if) Poland enters the EU is important not only for herself, but also for her neighbors and Atlantic allies. Poland's population, at 38.6 million, exceeds the combined population of all other nine countries confirmed as candidates for the EU membership in 2004 at the EU summit in Seville in June 2002 (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, and Cyprus). It is a vast consumer market, an attractive place for foreign investors, and potentially a major contributor to European commerce and manufacturing. Furthermore, Poland is situated on the crossroads of Europe, halfway between Paris and Moscow, Stockholm and Athens. How her citizens will vote in the referendum on the EU membership (expected in 2003) remains an open question worth of a thorough and continued investigation.

In addition to addressing important policy issues, this project also contributes to the scholarship on political attitudes and mass political behavior in new democracies. Publication and dissemination plans include a preliminary report at the 2002 AAASS Convention in Pittsburgh and a chapter on attitudes toward European integration for a book on mass political behavior in Poland I am currently working on.

### **3. Research methodology**

This project focuses on secondary, multi-variate analyses of public opinion polling data. Such analyses allow one to sort out the net impact of each independent variable (structural or cultural) on the dependent variables (here: views on Poland's entry to the EU), controlling for the influence of all other variables. In addition to variables reflecting demographic and socio-occupational status of respondents (gender, age, education, place of residence, occupation, employment status and sector, income, etc.), and those describing their ideological (religiosity, self-placement on the Left-Right continuum) and political (party allegiance, voting patterns) preferences, I use also variables reflecting one's views and opinions on a number of specific issues.

I have secured access to the Polish National Election Study 2001 (PGSW 2001) data set (available in the public domain), which contains several variables measuring attitudes toward the EU. In addition, I reviewed several published and unpublished research reports on opinion polls conducted recently by institutions such as CBOS, OBOP, PBS, or Demoskop. Upon a careful review, I selected for purchase several variables from polls conducted by the CBOS and the PBS. Currently, I am in the process of negotiating the terms and conditions of purchase and use of these data sets.

In addition, I visited several institutions conducting programs and projects on European integration and held extensive discussion with their personnel. Among the visited institutions were: Institute for Political Studies and Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Public Affairs, the Sejm Chancellery, Bureau of Studies and Analyses of the Sejm, Institute of Political Science and Institute of Sociology at Warsaw University, and the Department of Sociology of the Central European University. At these institutions, I have purchased or received several publications and pamphlets related to Poland's forthcoming membership in the EU, problems stemming from integration of Poland's economy and polity to the framework of European institutions, and popular attitudes related to these issues.

#### **4. Summary of research findings and preliminary conclusions**

These conclusions are indeed preliminary, since, due to the nature of the methodology adopted here, my visit to Poland was devoted almost exclusively to data gathering, while the actual statistical analyses will be performed later this summer and fall.

Most Poles are in favor of joining the European Union, but the number of supporters has decreased since the mid-1990s. At that time, support for EU membership regularly exceeded 70 percent, even reaching 80 percent in May 1996. It fell to the low of 53% in July 2001, to rebound slightly in 2002, reaching 62% in May (all data from CBOS polls). The preliminary analysis of the factors influencing these attitudes confirms the hypotheses outlined in the proposal submitted to receive this grant: structural factors seem to dominate over ideological ones. Euro-enthusiasts tend to be well-educated young urban professionals; they are in the minority among poorly educated and older rural dwellers. Euro-skeptics predominate among those who perceive themselves as losers in the transition from communism. These are people who feel vulnerable in the face of the potential challenges to their families and communities posed by Poland's accession. Such people make up the core constituency of Self-Defense, which in the 2001 election managed to attract support from the urban as well as the rural population. On the other hand, while there is a clear positive correlation between religious attitudes and Euro-skepticism, attitudes toward the EU do not split along a clear left-right axis. Today, Euro-skeptics would lose a referendum by a substantial margin across the political spectrum. Indeed, the left appears, if anything, more reluctant than the right to enter the EU.

It is a truism that public opinion is volatile, yet in this case it may be even more so. The potential for such volatility is well illustrated by certain data from the PGSW 2001 survey (October 2001). While 60% of respondents would vote in a referendum in

favor of Poland's EU membership and 62% agrees that the very existence of the EU is beneficial for Poland, the people tend to be quite skeptical in assessment of more specific consequences of Poland's entry to the EU. For instance, only 41% believes that they personally and their families would in any way benefit from this development; even more doubtful are they with regards to the prospective benefits for Polish agriculture (36%), state-owned industries (26%), or Polish private companies (46%), while almost everybody (85%) agrees that foreign owned companies in Poland would rip off the benefits.

With the referendum expected some time next year, political and economic developments in the country between now and then will have a critical impact on the way people will vote. The opinion polls cited above indicate that, due to an association of the EU with market friendly neo-liberal economics, Euro-skepticism tends to gain with negative economic trends such as high unemployment (currently standing at 18 percent). These dominate in the media and in the mind of the public over positive trends such as low inflation or a strong domestic currency. Any worsening of economic indicators on the eve of the referendum may swing public opinion, and the consequences may be both swift and far-reaching.

## **5. Suggestions for future research agendas**

Given the importance of the EU membership for the current Polish politics and the future policy agendas in the country, a thorough investigation of the sources of both Euro-skepticism and Euro-enthusiasm is essential. In particular, a post-referendum survey of attitudes and opinions on a nation-wide representative sample would bring a wealth of information for interested scholars.

## **6. Recommendations for the US Policy Community**

Polish popular attitudes regarding the country's EU membership should be given a close attention by the American policy-makers not only for the demographic and economic reasons outlined above (section 2). Poland is not only a candidate for the entry to the EU, but also a recently admitted member of NATO. Unlike in the case of the EU, country's membership in NATO enjoys almost universal popular support (89% in the PGSW 2001 survey). Furthermore, the people of Poland have traditionally seen the United States as their fatherland's most important ally. In a "popularity contest" (PGSW 2000), Americans, with the mean ranking of 5.35 on a seven-point scale, scored the first among twenty-four nations, ahead of the French (5.27), Italians (5.18), Englishmen (5.12), and Hungarians (5.00), not to mention the Germans (4.25), or Russians (3.75). In a Europe where anti-American resentments grow strong, Poland and her people should be viewed by the American foreign policy community as a valuable asset.