

Address given by Leszek Miller on the negotiations for accession to the European Union (Warsaw, 18 December 2002)

Caption: On 18 December 2002, Leszek Miller, Polish Prime Minister, delivers an address to the Senate in Warsaw in which he gives a positive account of the negotiations for the country's accession to the European Union.

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Address by Leszek Miller, Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, in the Senate on negotiations on accession to the European Union — Warsaw, 18 December 2002

Mr. Marshal,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Senators!

We can add a new date to the calendar of Polish dates that changed the destiny of the nation: 13th December, 2002. On that day Poland, together with nine other countries: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia, and Slovenia, concluded negotiations and stood on the threshold of the European Union - a community of free nations, which together are building the prosperity and security of our continent. With our participation on equal rights Europe is putting an end to the division of the continent, developing confidence, partnership and common thinking of the future. To paraphrase the words of Willy Brandt, one can say that we have travelled a long road - from a sharp division, to being opposite each other through coexistence, to being next to each other, to being together. Yalta, Potsdam, the Iron Curtain, walls dividing states, cities and people are receding farther and farther into the past. The destruction of these walls and visions started in Poland. Today history is giving us the satisfaction that we fully deserve and have earned. There would be no Polish delegation in Copenhagen had it not been for Polish August and Polish "Solidarity", had it not been for the Round Table, at which we started our Polish discussion on a better Polish future and in this way overcoming the inability to work together and engage in dialogue, the symbol of which is another 13th December. The juxtaposition of those dates shows how much wiser we are today and how far we can go together. Just as Europe came a long way from Copenhagen in June 1993, when the Council of Europe decided on the possibility of enlargement of the Union, to Copenhagen in December 2002, when the negotiations with ten states concluded, so from Polish "Solidarity" in 1980 we came to European solidarity of the 21st century.

High Chamber!

We can enter the European Union on the best of all possible conditions. A detailed description of these conditions, the genesis and course of the negotiations, a presentation of the results in individual areas are contained in the Council of Ministers Report on the results of negotiations on membership of the Republic of Poland in the European Union. Soon Minister Danuta Huebner will present it to you, and it will also be available to the public.

This is good news. The Polish delegation in Copenhagen was strong with the goodwill and determination of Poles, who want their country, which lies in the centre of the European continent, to remain in the mainstream of the life of Europe and in the mainstream of European politics. When we negotiated in admittedly difficult circumstances, when we arrived at the final agreement, as head of the delegation I knew that I had not only the full authority of the government and parliament and the support of the president and of many political parties and social forces, but most importantly that I was acting in the interest of all my countrymen who support integration with the European Union. I knew that I was finalising a process in which all governments and all previous parliaments since 1989 have been involved.

Poland's diplomatic offensive, which we conducted with great intensity in the last weeks, has succeeded. Without it there would not be the Danish proposal to improve the accession conditions, the agreement to these conditions of the member states, or what we gained in the final hours and minutes of the negotiations.

Today I have the honour and duty, which I am carrying out with special pleasure, to convey to the High Senate respect and thanks. This is our common success and without our partnership it would not have been possible. I would like to express special thanks to the senators involved in this term in the work of the Foreign Affairs and European Integration Committee, who have worked hard to adapt Polish law to Union norms. Without this enormous effort it would have been possible to close the negotiations. Anyway, here we still have a lot of work to do. I express special thanks to the head of the Committee, Genowefa Grabowska.

Ladies and Gentlemen Senators,

We are taking another, very important step towards building a security system of the European continent and in large measure of world security as well. This is not too big a word to describe the process of enlargement of the European Union, in which Poles are participating with equal rights and equal duties, as a responsible and reliable partner. The government showed such responsibility to the citizens of Poland in the negotiations. We knew what we want to achieve and why we are aiming for certain goals. We also showed such responsibility to our partners. We understood the position of others, but we also demanded understanding for our problems.

Negotiations on Poland's membership in the European Union started 31st March, 1998 as a result of the decision of the Council of Europe in Luxembourg. Earlier, 16th December, 1991, the treaty of Europe was signed that established Poland's association with the European Communities and their member states. The conclusion of the negotiations, which describe precisely the prospects of joining the European Union, means that our country has taken on very concrete obligations. Most generally speaking, Poland agreed to accept the entire body of law of the European Union. However, not all of the Union standards will go into effect on the date that our country acquires membership. Some of the regulations will have to be introduced gradually, and the date of their full implementation has been postponed past the date of our country's accession to the European Union.

The government of the Republic of Poland also understands that the provisions of the Treaty on the European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Communities together with later modifications fully respect the sovereignty of the Polish state in the regulations of law of moral importance and also in respect to the protection of human life.

Many internal and external factors of both a positive and negative character influenced the shape and course of the negotiations. Among the external factors that had a positive influence on the progress of the negotiations it is worth mentioning: the will of the Union to commence talks with Poland and the determination to hold to the calendar of the negotiations; recognition of Poland as a country that promises to meet the membership criteria spelled out in Copenhagen in 1993; the creation of mechanisms and procedures necessary for conducting the accession negotiations effectively; finally - the creation by the Council of Europe in Nice in December 2000 of the institutional framework of an enlarged Union and defining accurately the prospects of membership in 2004.

The main external factors impeding the progress of the negotiations include first and foremost: uncertainty of the Union states concerning the effects of admitting states that are in a worse economic situation; the unstable level of support of the Union countries for enlargement; the perception of enlargement mainly through the prism of economic and social costs; finally the fact that the negotiations were conducted simultaneously with as many as twelve candidate states.

Conducting the negotiations effectively would not have been possible if Poland had not fulfilled a number of internal conditions, such as a continued high level of support of the society for the idea of membership in the Union, which is due to the fact that successive Polish governments, parliaments, irrespective of political option and configuration of political forces, treated as a high priority; creation of effective administrative structures and procedures necessary for conducting the negotiations; finally - keeping up a fast pace of adaptation processes. As a result, at the expected time, 31 negotiation chapters were closed, including four at the Summit in Copenhagen. We passed 219 statutes that adapt Polish law to Union standards. A tremendous amount of work has been done during the more than four years of negotiations but also during the 11-year period of Poland's actual integration with the European Union.

As a result, the negotiations as a whole give Poland a very positive result. All of the most important goals stated in the initial negotiating position have been achieved. The incorporation of the Polish economy into the common market of the European Union affords new possibilities of development, strengthens restructuring processes and a more rational utilisation of all our resources. The transition periods that we gained give sensitive sectors a longer time to adjust. Structural help that will encompass the territory of Poland will increase the possibility of expanding the infrastructure and closing up the development gaps at

the regional and local levels. Poland will strengthen its political and economic position and have greater influence on the policies and future of the European Union.

High Senate,

The European Union stands for the choice of a civilisation. It is more than economics and the economy; it also is values, from which we can benefit and enrich with our presence. Poland's membership in the European Union is a natural consequence of our history, of our geographical position, of our past, and of our ambitions and dreams. For more than a thousand years, from the beginning of Poland's statehood, Poland's national identity has been connected with Europe. The roots of Europe are our roots. We are conscious of the dangers and difficulties before us, the known and the unknown. However, I know that for Poland presence in united Europe is the best investment in the future. All of us gain from this. That is true in equal measure for residents of the villages as well as of the cities. This new perspective will determine our destiny for many years to come. It only depends on us whether it will become a reality.

The Polish negotiators have finished their mission. However, that does not mean that the fight has ended for Poland's place in the family of 25 states and 450 million citizens. Now it's up to us to prove that we can take a place commensurate with our potential, our dreams and ambitions. We will have to demonstrate that this great potential that has been accumulated under Polish skies may make our country an important member of the European Union, a country that will not merely watch what is going on from the back rows of the grandstand, only describing reality, but will contribute to shaping this reality. For this great goal it is worth uniting and thinking together.

After Copenhagen the time begins of tapping new possibilities. Just as before Copenhagen, there is hard work to be done and we need a common effort above divisions. The government has finished the negotiations, but the government will not decide Poland's presence in the European Union. The nation will do that in a referendum. I have confidence that the result of the referendum will confirm our European aspirations. This time no one is going to force us to do anything; no one is going to decide for us. That is a sovereign decision that will be made solely by the citizens of the Republic of Poland. We can take it up and say yes to the offer for which we have fought. We can also say - no. On this crucial day that is before us it is important that as many Poles as possible will vote in the referendum; and it is also important that all of them would make the right decision in accordance with their conscience and on the basis of accurate knowledge. I appeal for a continuation of our common efforts in the Polish road to Common Europe, the more so as it already has brought a common success.

Is such a non-partisan coalition possible? A number of initiatives, such as "Charter of the Future" inaugurated last Sunday proves that this is possible. I believe that co-operation above divisions in order to win the referendum and bring Poland into the European Union is necessary, possible and beneficial for our country. After all, much more divided Poles in the past than today. However, we have managed to perform great acts of the imagination and will to act for the common good. After the conclusion of the negotiations, we can say that Europe said "yes" to us. Now let us say "yes" to Europe.