

Statement made by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz to the Diet of the Republic of Poland (Warsaw, 29 November 2001)

Caption: On 29 November 2001, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Polish Foreign Minister, delivers an address to the Polish Parliament in which he assesses the progress made to date in the country's negotiations for accession to the European Union.

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'Position of the Government of the Republic of Poland in Negotiations with the European Union' — Statement by Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, to the Diet of the Republic of Poland, Warsaw, November 29, 2001

Translation

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

The first year of this new century, one to which the international community is pinning great hopes, is drawing to an end. This century is to be different, better, more harmonious, marked by co-operation and common efforts for peace.

Yet the beginning of this century has been difficult for Poland and for the world. The global economy is entering a period of sluggish growth. The threat of international terrorism has necessitated the adoption of international-scale political and military measures. Faced with rising crime on a national and supra-national scale alike, citizens are feeling insecure and vulnerable. Globalisation processes have aroused apprehensiveness in societies which lack strong roots in global economic and political co-operation structures.

The beginning of this century has found this country on the threshold of integration with the European Union. Owing to efforts of all previous governments of the Third Republic of Poland we have arrived at a point which is just a step away from the fulfilment of dreams of many generations of Poles, namely from joining a community of democratic European nations working together towards ensuring lasting peace and bringing about prosperity, in the spirit of respect for the law and individual freedoms and solidarity with the weaker.

Yet to take this step, to conclude the accession negotiations and be ready for membership in 2004, we need great courage, the broadest possible national consensus, and huge effort. Furthermore, this unprecedented undertaking will require solving many detailed technical problems and focusing in the next — the final — stage of the negotiations on the most difficult issues of all, the financial ones. Even then, these issues should not eclipse for us the principal horizon that the completion of the historic process of Poland's accession to the European Union is.

I should like to propose that, while keeping this broad perspective in mind, we focus today on the substance of negotiations and on the negotiating technique.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland set out to obtain European Union membership early in the 1990s, even though diplomatic relations between Poland and the European Economic Community had been officially established already late in 1988. Poland commenced negotiations with the EEC on a trade and economic co-operation agreement which was finally signed in Warsaw in September 1989. That was a non-preference agreement which extended most favoured nation treatment to the both sides. It provided for phasing out quantitative restrictions in effect in the Communities in respect of imports of goods originating in Poland, and for full elimination of the same in 1994. As a result of the implementation of this agreement, already in 1990 the EEC States became Poland's chief trade partner.

The first partly free and democratic election in the post-war Poland and the promise of transition to a free-market economy met with enthusiastic response of European political elites.

In July 1989 at the Paris summit of the world's seven most industrialised countries a decision was taken on granting economic assistance, under PHARE programmes, to Poland and Hungary as first countries to have addressed the difficult challenge of reforming their systems. Also in July 1989 a Polish representation to the European Commissions in Brussels was established. This political step was indicative of Poland's intention to establish institutional ties with the Communities' structures. Less than a year later, in May 1990, the

Polish Government submitted in Brussels a formal application for the commencement of negotiations on an association agreement with the European Communities. Bilateral talks conducted since December 1990 eventually produced the Agreement Establishing an Association between the Republic of Poland and the European Communities and their Member States, known as the Europe Agreement. This treaty, signed in December 1991, has ensured a platform for a political dialogue and has enabled trade and economic relations between the parties to develop. It established a basis for Communities-provided technical and financial assistance and a legal framework within which to support Poland's further integration with the European structures.

Owing to efforts of the Polish negotiators a far-sighted statement that the final objective of Poland was to become a member of the Community and that this association, in the view of the Parties, would help to achieve this objective, was included in the preamble to the Agreement.

The Sejm of the first term of office, while recognising in its July 1992 resolution the importance of the Europe Agreement for the future of this country, expressed the hope that the association with the Communities would be conducive to the transformation and development of the Polish economy and would ensure for Poland an appropriate place in a uniting Europe. It also emphasised that the conduct of political dialogue and a close economic and cultural co-operation between Poland and the European Union required action by all State bodies.

The Association Agreement which, by its nature, offered no guarantee of European Union membership, had not prepared Poland sufficiently for the said status. It was the political decision of the June 1993 European Council in Copenhagen that had the significance of a watershed. It made it possible for Central and East European States to accede to the European Union upon the fulfilment by them of specific political and economic conditions for membership. These conditions, also known as the Copenhagen criteria, include: first, the attainment by the Candidate States of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and respect for and protection of national minority rights; second, the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to withstand competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; third, capability to adopt the obligations of membership, in particular to implement the objectives of the political, economic and monetary union.

As a formal confirmation of Poland's pursuit of Union membership, the Polish minister of foreign affairs submitted in April 1994 in Athens a formal application in the matter of Poland's accession to the Union. This instrument opened the door, on the Polish and Union side alike, for concrete efforts aimed at bringing about at the earliest possible date full integration of Poland with the European structures. As a consequence of the Copenhagen accords, the December 1994 European Council in Essen adopted a pre-accession strategy in which the Union expressed its willingness to intensify and look for new forms of co-operation with the Associated States within a 'structural dialogue'.

The appointment in August 1996, on the initiative of my government and under an Act of Parliament, of the Committee for European Integration as a ministry-level body responsible for European integration, marked a milestone in this country's preparations for Union membership.

As the next step of accession preparations, the Council of Ministers adopted in January 1997 'National Integration Strategy', a document systematising the previous integration undertakings and setting out adjustment tasks for a period immediately preceding the accession. The national strategy was based on the assumption that Poland's accession to the European Union would involve an across-the-board integration and would contribute to accelerating the growth rate and increasing the number of jobs while seeking to gradually meet the Economic and Monetary Union benchmarks.

In July 1997 the European Commission released draft 'Agenda 2000' outlining a comprehensive reform of the institutions, procedures and major policy areas of the European Union. 'Agenda 2000' represented a response to challenges the Union was confronting but, first and foremost, it was meant to prepare the Union for taking in new members. Within the framework of 'Agenda 2000' individual opinions on the preparedness of the Central and East European Associated States and Cyprus for Union membership were

presented. The opinion on Poland emphasised that profound system and economic transformations had produced a meaningful economic growth, social progress, and Poland's noticeable approximation to the standards in effect in the European Union. At the same time the Commission identified areas in which the continuation of reforms and the launching of new efforts aimed at adjusting to Community arrangements were necessary for making Poland capable, within several next years, of adopting the obligations of membership in the Union. The Government of the Republic of Poland recognised the opinion as a particularly important document which, besides having a formal bearing on the decision on negotiations, pointed to the need to step up adjustment efforts in fields in which delays occurred.

In December 1997 the European Council in Luxembourg adopted a decision on commencing negotiations on Union membership. This process was designed to involve initially five Central and East European States and Cyprus. The Jerzy Buzek government commenced actual negotiations on the Republic of Poland's European Union membership in November 1998 and in its last two years it stepped up, with a major contribution from the parliament, the legal and institutional preparations.

The Leszek Miller government unequivocally reaffirms the will to secure for this country the European Union membership. Furthermore, bearing in mind that we are now on the last homestretch, we must be aware that at this stage of preparations for membership swift, effective and determined actions will be needed. Having regard to this, on this 15 November the Council of Ministers unanimously adopted a European Strategy of the Government of the Republic of Poland as the guidelines on the directions of further negotiations and adjustment efforts. The strategy provides, on the one hand, for the continuation and enhancement of the ongoing legislative and administrative efforts with a view to completing the legislative and institution building process necessary for satisfying the conditions for membership, and on the other hand, for stepping up the accession negotiations process.

The implementation of this strategy is to further the attainment of the following targets:

- The government shall work to ensure that Poland is well prepared for the membership and that it effectively participates in the shaping of European Union activities from the first day following accession;
- The government shall complete the negotiations by the end of 2002, so as to make possible Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004;
- The government shall ensure broad public participation in the process of Poland's accession to the European Union;
- The government shall prepare Poland's position on all issues pertaining to the future of the European Union and to the common policies;
- The government shall ensure that Poland as a future member of the European Union plays a role commensurate with its situation and impact in the Central European region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have reached a very difficult point in the negotiations. For many months Poland has been placed low in advancement-of-negotiations rankings. This is a combined result of our predecessors' activities, of a different concept of negotiating tactics and of an inferior - in my opinion - co-ordination of the integration policy within the decision-making and administrative structures of the State. This is also a result of Poland being the largest Candidate State. The net outcome is that the other candidate countries have made important headway in negotiations. Their negotiating tactics has consisted of answering promptly and precisely questions posed by the European Union in EU common negotiating positions, of taking firm decisions, and of solving promptly the most difficult problems, even political ones. From the Polish standpoint it could be seen as a dramatic development that candidates which commenced negotiations two years after we had, on the basis of the decision of the 1999 Helsinki European Council, have caught up with us or, indeed, overtaken us. While the number of closed fields does not in fact determine the advancement of preparations,

it has nevertheless an important on-substance, media, and emotional tenor. I am asking, therefore, whether the tactics of saving difficult issues for the end of negotiations, in a misguided hope that by having them addressed on a package deal basis we'll be able to secure better membership terms for Poland, has been productive, or whether a preferable course of action is to sort out the negotiating field in such a manner that only genuinely important - and most difficult - issues belonging to the final stage of negotiations, notably financial transfers, agriculture and regional policy, are left on the negotiating table? Isn't it more dangerous to straggle in the negotiations and in so doing bear out opinions, which even now are more and more often voiced within the European Union, that Poland is dragging its feet and is not ready for membership? As regards our neighbours in the region, is it advisable to antagonise other candidates which, rather than perceive us as an attractive co-operation partner, could come to resent us as a country blocking the way for their membership aspirations? Poland is convinced that this enlargement of the European Union cannot come to pass without our participation, yet this position must be backed up by the argument that we have fulfilled the requisite conditions for membership. Failing this, we'll be in the danger of losing the support of key European Union States - and we'd better have no illusions about this. The European solidarity we have been calling for, while contributing financial support to Poland's agricultural and regional development, must be a give and take arrangement. We are going to enjoy the benefits of membership, but we must also fully understand the obligations that go with them.

Accordingly, the Leszek Miller government desires to steer clear of dilemmas which are dangerous to Polish interests and which put at risk our accession to the European Union already in 2004. We believe, moreover, that indulging in a race for membership is an ill-advised attitude. This November's assessment of candidates by the European Commission clearly projects the prospect of a large-scale enlargement. On this last stage of the road to membership we must maintain a closer co-operation with the other candidates. It is Poland that has been affected the hardest by the lack of all-encompassing intensive consultations. It is our position that has been made particularly difficult as a result of acceptance of certain arrangements by others. For this reason we need intensified co-operation and more readiness to consider jointly our expectations of the current Fifteen Members. The meeting of the Candidate States' foreign ministers, scheduled to convene on our initiative in Brussels on 12 December, two days before the Laeken European Union summit, will be a manifestation of a new political quality with which our relations are endowed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During its first days in office the Leszek Miller government studied meticulously the progress of negotiations, to conclude that some proposals put forward to-date in respect of transition periods were of a political tenor and did not hold a genuine promise of closing negotiations in various areas. It is very easy to portray oneself as a champion of national interests by adopting indefensible positions. It is much more difficult to face the truth and to conduct negotiations in such a manner that gains can be maximised within the existing narrow room for manoeuvre. This is the present government's goal. We assess the situation realistically; we want to achieve the best possible results while remaining aware that there are two sides to the negotiating table.

The previous government's negotiating strategy, one designed to have essential political decisions accumulate to be addressed in the final stage of negotiations, could well prove a self-arranged trap. By putting off decisions on issues which, although relevant, are nevertheless of a lesser significance, we should be laying ourselves open to a very real risk of failing on fundamentally important matters.

The Leszek Miller government does not pursue a strategy of expediting the negotiations just for the sake of acceleration. On the other hand, this government recognises fast progress of the negotiations as a prerequisite for the ultimate success of the process of Poland's integration with the European Union.

A Regular Report to be released by the European Commission in the autumn of the next year will be decisive from the point of view of determining which countries fulfil the membership criteria. All the candidates, including Poland, have 8-9 months in which to complete their negotiations and sufficiently advance their preparations for membership. The time is short. We may not treat the prospect of membership as an option we can exercise in our own good time. To our knowledge, all States which have a chance of

closing their accession negotiations by the end of the next year will take whatever decisions are necessary. This is yet another reason why we'd better not count on a concessionary treatment. If we do, we'll be left standing alone.

This government intends to clear the negotiating foreground by the middle of the next year, i.e. to close all chapters except for those with financial implications. This is a must if the final stage of the negotiations is to be focused fully on matters of utmost importance: on agriculture, regional policy, budget and finance. Arrangements adopted with regard to these matters will be critical to Polish rural areas and to less developed regions of our country. Our unique chance is linked, first and foremost, to these chapters. We must do everything in our power so as not to fail the expectations of our fellow-Poles when the time comes.

Honourable Members,

These negotiations are not confined to strategic decisions taken at the highest level. They also include difficult, demanding work which has been underway for three and a half year. On the Polish side technical and organisational preparations have been conducted, successive expert reports have been commissioned, social partners have been consulted with. This government and this negotiation team will carry on and intensify these efforts.

Negotiations on a number of key chapters are well advanced, with just few problems left to be solved; they can be closed if one or two determined moves are made. Today we are ready to accelerate the accession negotiations in qualitative terms and to secure the closing of individual chapters on terms compatible with Poland's interests. We have won the European Union's favourable position in respect of many important areas, for instance on the environment. Yet further progress depends on the adoption by the Polish side of unequivocal political decisions. The government, being fully aware that only in this way can we expedite the negotiations and stay with the 'leading runners', or candidates likely to become members in 2004 - in the year indicated by the Göteborg European Council and recently reaffirmed in Brussels - has resolved to take such decisions.

The negotiations are to proceed faster, more efficiently, and they are to be co-ordinated more effectively. This effort is to be supported by a new organisation of the process, by a new structure under which all integration matters will converge in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From this structure a secretariat for European matters will evolve in the future, to handle all issues related to our membership in the European Union. My deputy Minister Danuta Hübner, who is a Secretary of State overseeing the accession negotiations process at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is also the Secretary of the Committee for European Integration and Head of the Office of the Committee. She understands thoroughly the entire body of integration issues and she is responsible for proper co-ordination of government activities. The Chief Negotiator for Poland Minister Jan Trzuszczynski operates from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs structure. His activities are fully consulted with the minister of foreign affairs who, on the forum of the Council of Ministers, is responsible for the status and progress of the negotiations and who, being the head of the Polish delegation to the Intergovernmental Accession Conference, is the European Union's negotiating partner. This structure was designed following a careful analysis of arrangements practised by the Member States and the remaining candidates. I am convinced time will prove its effectiveness.

Honourable Deputies,

I wish to proceed now to informing the Sejm about the status of negotiations in the different fields. I apologise in advance that I shall be using a somewhat hermetic language typical of the technicalities which determine the substance of the negotiations.

In the accession negotiations with the Union, which have been underway since March 1998, Poland has opened 29 negotiating fields. Provisionally, following yesterday's successful negotiating session, we have completed negotiations in nineteen fields. As I have pointed out, if Poland is to obtain full membership of the Union in 2004 the final closing of the ten still-open fields must come no later than in the next year. This is the government's aim. This should also be the aim of all those who want Poland to participate in the

European integration process which guarantees security, peace, freedom, prosperity, and economic and social development of the European Union Member States.

Of the ten pending negotiation chapters, the three I have already referred to: Agriculture; Regional Policy and the Co-ordination of Structural Instruments; and Budget and Finance are the most difficult and most complex. The government is acting on the assumption that Poland will commence negotiations on these issues in the first half of 2002. As this will require exceptional energy on the part of the government, negotiations in the other seven fields should be wrapped up as soon as possible.

I propose to start with the most emotionally-charged issues. The first one is the **free movement of persons**. The European Union's common position on this issue was presented at the 1 June 2001 negotiating session. The Union proposed the closing of this chapter subject to the Republic of Poland's agreement to a 2 years-plus 3-plus 2 transition period formula which restricts the movement of workers and, in the cases of Austria and Germany, the freedom of provision of certain services. In the first two years of the transition period relevant national regulations may be applied, from all-out liberalisation to total closing of the labour market. If no objections are raised by a Member State, the Community requirements will be automatically implemented on the elapse of the initial two-year period.

Poland has taken a highly critical view of the position taken by the European Union. This position is poorly supported by economic arguments. It is an example of allowing fears and apprehensions get better of facts. Our country has produced for years reliable forecasts showing there is no threat whatsoever of an excessive inflow of workforce from the new Member States. Moreover, due to various social considerations - to mention only the steady ageing of their societies - the present European Union Member States actually need an inflow of workers to their labour markets. For this reason, the Union's position is obviously unwarranted.

Yet we must recognise this position for what it is: an inflexible offer which we are not in a position to change. A huge political capital has been involved in it. Under the circumstances, as far as our further conduct is concerned we have two options. We can withhold our acceptance and prolong the negotiations - without any guarantee of success but with a sporting chance that by doing so we'll contribute to having Poland eliminated from the group of candidates for the first round of EU enlargement. The government has opted for another variant, one which involves intensive efforts aimed at securing at least partial opening of the labour markets and a search for additional arrangements that will enable various occupational groups to gain access to Union labour markets. To this end our ministers for European matters have been conducting an intensive diplomatic campaign, visiting the capitals of Member States and soliciting most advantageous possible terms from the different States.

We are ready to agree to the Union's conditions, subject to important reservations. Poland expects that the pace of liberalisation of access to the individual Member States' labour markets will be determined. To date, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK have done this. We have also secured, through recently conducted talks, the readiness for political commitments in this respect from representatives of the Spanish and French governments. Another issue to be yet clarified is the selection of criteria for purposes of a review of the present members' labour markets scheduled to be conducted two years after the accession. With this information in hand, a balanced position can be taken. On our part, we express our belief that on the elapse of these two years no extension of the transition period will be necessary.

Free movement of capital. Free movement of capital, including the right of unrestrained acquisition of real property by European Union individuals and legal persons in any Member State of the Union is one of the fundamental freedoms of the Single Market. The EU Candidate States must adopt European regulations also in this regard. Yet for economic and social reasons, as well as due to political considerations, some of the candidates have requested a transition period during which constraints hitherto applicable to the acquisition of real property by aliens could be applied also after accession. Poland initially requested an eighteen-year transition period in respect of agricultural and forest real property and 'secondary residences' and a five-year period in respect of investment-type real properties. The other candidates requested considerably shorter transition periods. In its modified negotiating position the European Union offered a seven-year transition period for agricultural and forest real property and a five-year period for 'secondary residences'. However,

these periods would not apply to farmers from Member States wishing to settle permanently on the territory of a new Union member. Hungary and the Czech Republic accepted these terms. It should be borne in mind in this context that the acquisition of real property is one of the most politically sensitive negotiating issues the resolution of which will reflect on the whole negotiation process. On the other hand, given substantial public interest, arrangements agreed in respect of this issue will influence strongly the outcome of an accession referendum.

Under the circumstances the government has resolved to promote a compromise solution which provides for: establishing a twelve-year transition period for agricultural and forest land properties and a seven-year period for 'secondary residences'; making farmers from Member States free to acquire agricultural land subject to the same constraints as apply at present and will apply in the future to Polish citizens provided that prior to the acquisition the farmer concerned has held and personally worked the land under lease for three years of the date of Poland's accession to the European Union, a measure designed to discourage the circumvention of restrictions for speculation purposes; waiving a transition period in respect of real property for investment purposes, as not being in Poland's interests. This solution will make it possible to prevent undesirable trends that could develop on the Polish real property market immediately upon Poland's accession in response to real property price and personal income differences in Poland and West European countries. It will also enable to end the negotiating stalemate on this very important matter. As an important element of the government's strategy in this area, an Act will be passed to regulate trade in farming land in a manner non-discriminating against the European Union citizens. This legislation will put in order the land market and it will prevent such phenomena as speculating in land, undesirable changes in the character of whole regions, or inability to rationalise the agrarian structure in Poland. The Council of Ministers discussed the main points of this law at its most recent meeting. Now intensive work on this piece of legislation is in progress.

Honourable Deputies,

I wish to proceed now to informing the Sejm about agreements arrived at during yesterday's negotiating meeting at the level of deputy heads of delegations. These agreements have resulted in important advancement of the negotiations, namely to the closing of negotiations on the Company Law chapter and to the opening - and closing at the same time - of the Free Movement of Goods chapter. We have obtained a transition period till the end of 2008 for the re-registration of drugs, i.e. for the adjustment of the file the producers of pharmaceuticals prepare for purposes of putting drugs on the market. This period is of exceptional significance from the social and economic point of view. It will prevent a situation in which most cheap Pharmaceuticals would have to be withdrawn from the market upon Poland's accession to the European Union. Such a situation would pose a threat to public health because, as our findings show, a majority of drugs lack test results conforming to Union standards. Obviously, underlying the request for a transition period till the end of 2008 were both reasons of the State and concern for immediate interests of the patients. We persuaded our partners to accept these arguments and during the Wednesday meeting the Free Movement of Goods negotiating field was opened and closed. For the first time in the history of these negotiations the both parties agreed to revisit an already closed negotiating issue. This evidences both the effectiveness of the government's efforts and the open-minded approach of our partners.

At yesterday's meeting we also closed the Company Law chapter. After two years of negotiations we succeeded in arriving at an agreement with the Union with regard to extended patent protection for pharmaceuticals. Poland agreed to introduce an additional protection certificate for those medicinal products and pesticides first admitted for trading after 1 January 2000 which on the date of Poland's accession to the European Union enjoy protection under a valid patent. The introduction of the additional protection certificate will reflect in the future on the Polish pharmaceutical industry's production capabilities and it could have a bearing on realised profit volumes. Yet it should also be recognised as a potential threat, basically concerning a period after 2013. We believe that it is much better to allow our pharmaceutical industry a necessary respite during several next years and not to risk drug price rises within several post-accession years. The decisions taken yesterday are good news for Poland, for the patients, and for the pharmaceutical industry.

Honourable Deputies,

Let me address now issues on which, in our opinion, considerable headway has been made in negotiations with the Union.

Taxation. In this field Poland is very close to reaching final agreements with the European Union. In all probability we shall obtain consent to a Poland-proposed one-year technical transition period in which to administer excise on ecological fuel at reduced rates, and to a two-year transition period for the share of excise in the retail price of cigarettes, even though in respect of this tax we are reckoning with the necessity of responding to new arrangements currently discussed in the European Union. In line with a decision of the Council of Ministers, Poland will request a transition period till the end of 2007 during which we shall be free to apply VAT at a 0% rate on books and specialist periodicals. By putting forward this request the government wants to prevent adverse social consequences of a decline in readership in Poland. Yet this is one of the difficult negotiating matters, because in the European Union the application of 0% VAT rate is avoided on principle.

Justice and Home Affairs. I wish to state that the government has notified the Union side of its readiness to close this chapter in view of the progress Poland has made in recent years. The latest position of the Union does not include a recommendation on the provisional closing of negotiations. However, this chapter was discussed at yesterday's negotiating meeting in Brussels at which Poland submitted a number of explanations and emphasised its willingness to work intensively towards the adoption of final arrangements. Finalising the negotiations this year, although possible, is difficult due to procedural and political-psychological reasons. Some Member States have called for expediting certain activities, in particular in respect of visa policies. Our partners still give low ratings to the progress of Poland's legislative and institution-building efforts. They have limited confidence in Poland's implementing capability, in particular on the eastern border as a future external border of the European Union. The 11 September events have given new significance to arrangements to be covered in this chapter. As regards further progress of the negotiations, in the nearest future the government will finalise two kinds of activity. On the one hand, the European Union will receive answers to questions put to Poland in the Union's latest common position.

On the other hand, information activities designed to add to our partners' understanding of the integration preparations put in train by Poland in the field of justice and home affairs will be enhanced.

Transport policy. I wish to inform you that the government has been working on revising the negotiating position and that this revision will be addressed today by the negotiating team. It provides, firstly, for the modification of proposals regarding the implementation of the 'load directive'. The modification will consist in Poland's expressing its readiness to admit to certain sections of transit roads, partly and conditionally, as of the accession, international road transport-servicing vehicles with a 11.5 tonne per axle load. The remaining part of the international and trunk road network would be made accessible by Poland according to the progress of upgrading work. Further talks of the both sides' experts are required for the respective road network to be determined in detail and for a declaration on the financing of road network modernisation in Poland to be adopted.

Secondly, the government will consider the modification of rail transport proposals to take into account the new Union legislation. In the new position the previous conclusion regarding a transition period till the end of 2005 for allowing international railway groups access to the Polish rail network will be maintained.

Thirdly, the government will consider revising the air transport provisions in a way linking the change of Poland's present position as submitted for the accession negotiations to the date of signature and ratification of a 'multilateral agreement in the European Common Aviation Area'. It is to be expected that in the transport policy field the European Union will request a transition period for the access to 'small coasting trade', i.e. to the provision of transport services within the Member States; this request will be assessed by us when received.

Fisheries. Let me inform you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that in October Poland presented its modified

negotiating position which had been agreed with the fisheries community. The chief obstacle to the closure of the Fisheries chapter is represented by the pending matter of European Union Member States vessels' access to Polish fisheries in the Baltic in the over-12-miles-off-the-coast zone in respect of which Poland has requested a five-year transition period during which to limit the access of larger Union vessels. In addition, the modified Polish position calls for Union legislation to be extended to include Baltic herring and sprat in the market intervention mechanism. In this matter the European Union declared itself ready to accept the Polish position. Moreover, Poland declares that as of Poland's accession to the European Union fisheries agreements entered into by Poland with third States and within the framework of fisheries conventions would be serviced by the Community.

Poland's position has been made more specific by maintaining that catch quotas allowed Poland under bilateral and multilateral agreements during the recent ten years which constitute a 'reference period' should not be changed.

In view of the Community side's objection to granting Poland a transition period in respect of access to fisheries, the government intends to engage in vigorous talks with representatives of those Union Member States which are against Poland's request and to continue the dialogue with the fisheries community.

Competition Policy. In the Competition Policy negotiating field which covers, among other things, State aid issues, the European Union has prepared a new negotiating position. It contains no recommendation that this chapter be provisionally closed.

[...]

Representatives of the government Minister Danuta Hübner and Minister Jan Trzuszczński stood ready to brief the Sejm's European Commission on this subject even before the meeting of the Committee for European Integration and Council of Ministers. Understandably - because a resulting debate would have concerned matters that even the Council of Ministers had not yet discussed at that time - they requested that such a briefing be closed to the public. Unfortunately their request was not granted, which made the submission of information impossible.

Likewise, following the adoption of decisions by the government Chief Negotiator Minister Jan Trzuszczński and Minister Jaroslaw Pietras were prepared to present the same in full to the Sejm's European Commission. However, they were given no opportunity for doing this. The position of deputies who challenged the mandate of these government representatives was unacceptable. To consent to such a procedure of joint work and to such a treatment of government representatives would have amounted to acquiescing in the disparagement of the Chief Negotiator who represents Poland before the Fifteen Member States and before the European Commission.

At a press conference held after the 15 November meeting of the government the public was informed of major decisions agreed by the Council of Ministers. Due to an obvious slip up - to which I admit - of a technical-organisational nature, notably due to the absence of sufficiently detailed written information, and with conference questions and answers focused on crucial elements of the proposed amendments to negotiating positions, the released announcement proved incomplete. With regard to the purchase of land by aliens it did state that the transition period had been shortened from eighteen to twelve years and a suspension of the freedom of trading in land for investment purposes had been waived in full. However, no mention was made of the new position on 'secondary residences' and on the purchase of land by farmers who hold on lease and personally tend the land properties concerned. This omission triggered a wave of criticism and allegations that the government's position was being kept secret from the public.

Putting aside the argument indisputable in my opinion - that such charges are illogical because they ignore the fact that changes of considerably greater import were disclosed, the critics attribute to the government intentions which are strictly at odds with its actual position. Yet, as this incident did take place, I wish to assure the Honourable Members and all citizens of this country, on behalf of the government, that providing full information on positions adopted by Poland in the accession negotiations is our absolute priority. Only

on receiving full information will the Poles be able to make a truly unemotional choice when voting in the European referendum.

Conclusions have been drawn from the erstwhile process of providing information on European issues. To avoid further misunderstandings, written information will be furnished to the Parliament and the public. On the other hand, I appeal for appreciating the urgency of situation. It is imperative that we act fast, or we'll find ourselves discussing the European Union in terms of lost opportunities. This kind of action requires good working communication not only with the Polish society, but with our European Union partners. Talks conducted on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Association Council on 20 November are a case in point. That was a natural occasion for briefing informally the Belgian Presidency and the European Commission on decisions taken by the government. In this context allegations that it was through deliberate designing that the details of the Polish position were made known first in Brussels and only later in Poland are totally groundless.

Honourable Deputies,

The operating mechanism of the European Union is very specific. Whether we like it or find fault with it, it nevertheless functions according to a certain pre-set rhythm. Moreover, it has very significant consequences for the ongoing accession negotiations. With the Presidency held by rota for six-month periods, it is towards the end of the term that the workload and efforts reach their peak. Much like in this country, in the Union the process of arriving at a common position is not free from problems and does not occur immediately. Even when acting in best will, our partners cannot be expected to take position on Polish proposals overnight.

The Leszek Miller government was sworn in two months before the end of the Belgian Presidency. Poland needed to act fast to make certain it was included in the first group of States joining an enlarged European Union. Hadn't we supplied necessary data on time, we would have lost irretrievably a powerful ally that the country now holding the Presidency is. This ally would have been unable to hammer out arrangements necessary for working out solutions on outstanding issues. Moreover, intensive diplomatic activity is essential to preparing the ground for arrangements beneficial to Poland. This activity also takes time, which is yet another reason why decisions as to directions needed to be taken very fast.

Honourable Deputies,

A great national debate on our European Union membership is underway in Poland. I believe we badly needed a debate like this. Involved in the present nationwide discussion are both proponents and opponents of our accession to the Union. Yet it would be wrong to treat all voices in this debate as equal as to validity of the substantive arguments offered.

The opponents of Poland's accession to the European Union should truthfully tell the citizens of this country what real alternative they wish to propose for Poland. Poland outside a Union to which our immediate and more distant neighbours will have acceded will be a country doomed to marginality. Not only shall we thus forfeit the access to advantages, including financial benefits, that go with membership, but we shall be double losers *vis-à-vis* those who will have come within this system. Growing development disparities, the unavoidable loss of a strong political position in the region, negligible chances of competing successfully for foreign investment, no influence on the future of the European Union - all these things spell a bleak future for Poland and the Polish society.

Let's keep the map of Europe in mind! Do we want to be the only country, except for the special cases that Norway and Switzerland are, left outside an integrated Europe in the company of no one but our eastern neighbours? Much as we appreciate the need for and the beneficial nature of actively developing economic co-operation with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and without meaning offence to our neighbours, surely we have no doubt that opportunities for the modernisation our economy and for faster growth must arise from our co-operation with highly developed Western States. As for occasionally advanced concepts of Poland joining the NAFTA, which is a form of economic integration of the USA, Canada and Mexico, they cannot be treated seriously.

Honourable Deputies,

Only European Union membership, secured soon, in 2004 according to the offer made by the Union itself, gives us a chance of propitious and harmonious development of this country. Only as a member shall we be able to participate, together with all European nations, in the making of decisions that concern the entire Europe and to offer our citizens a stronger sense of internal and external security. This is a vital consideration, especially now that the situation demands that we maintain closer co-operation with the international community. In the present historical and geopolitical situation this opportunity will come only with European Union membership.

I believe that those who object today to Poland's accession to the European Union could unwittingly do an irreparable harm to this society and this state. Arguments that Poland might as well accede to the European Union immediately after the first round of enlargement show an inconceivable error of judgment, they are nothing but a pipe dream. We'll be dealing then with a different European Union. Not only shall we have passed up the undisputable benefits of membership, but we'll be up against the new members jealously guarding their newly won prerogatives. The enlargement of the European Union is too complicated a process to be consummated at a time of our choosing. In 2004 decisions will be taken for many years to come. We must not forget this.

All those who at this time think responsibly of the future of Poland see the accession of our country to the European Union as the priority of the domestic and foreign policy, as our civilisational, cultural and economic opportunity. Many institutions, numerous authorities and Churches are now joining the debate on a uniting Europe. The Catholic Church has watched and supported Poland's drive for EU membership from the start, recognising it as a challenge and historical opportunity for this continent and as a platform of solidary co-operation of nations. In 1999 His Holiness Pope John Paul II said during his historic visit in this parliament: 'Poland has every right to participate in the general process of progress and development in the world, in particular in Europe. The integration of Poland with the European Union has had the support of the Holy See from the beginning. The Polish nation's historical experience and its spiritual and cultural wealth can effectively contribute to the general welfare of the family of mankind, in particular to the strengthening of peace and security in Europe.' Members of the Polish Catholic Church hierarchy have spoken in the same vein. The Polish Primate Cardinal Józef Glemp said during his most recent visit to Brussels when he met with the European Commissioner for Enlargement Günter Verheugen that the process of integration with Europe was a historical necessity. The Polish Bishops' recent position was equally unambiguous.

I want to express at this juncture my respect for all who speak for the historic process of writing Poland into a united Europe. I thank the people of prestige involved in promoting Poland's membership in the Union. I ask for their continued support for this important project.

Honourable Deputies,

The great national debate on Poland's integration with the European Union must evolve into a debate on the Union itself: on its future, its political and institutional aspect, its role in the world. Our voice must not be missing from this debate. Even today we do not confine ourselves to pondering a desirable shape of Polish EU membership, but we reflect on a shape of the Union itself. We shall participate in the 'Convention' that will prepare another Intergovernmental Conference on the future of the European Union. Poland's voice in this debate must be audible. We cannot afford to see a principle 'about us without us', which we know only took well from our history, put into practice yet again. Only within the Union have we a chance of being a genuine participant and creator of the future of this continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History is being made before our eyes and with our participation. The European Union may strike us at times as an over-formalised structure, yet it is largely owing to the EU that peace prevails in Europe. It is owing to the EU that successive mentality barriers which used to hinder co-operation from flourishing are

going down. We must understand this and take advantage of this situation for our common good.

Traditional policy-making methods may not be allowed to stand in the way of the unique opportunity which is opening before this country. I want to appeal to all Poles for active involvement in the process of including Poland on a lasting basis in the tried and proven European structures and mechanisms.

I apply to the political parties, in particular to ones supportive of the integration, to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves. Weighed against our future in the European Union, everything else is secondary. I appeal to the sceptics, whose apprehensions I do not share but, in many cases, I do not disregard either, asking one fundamental thing of them: that they conduct the debate on an on-merits basis. Insinuations and insults are no substitutes for arguments.

In conclusion, let me thank all Honourable Deputies and all fellow-Poles who actively involve in this unprecedented, in terms of challenges and opportunities alike, integration process. Thank you for your contribution.

Today, on the eve of another momentous turn in the history of our nation, we ought to put aside our various differences and misunderstandings as secondary. We shall succeed in the negotiations if everyone contributes to this process rather than dissociate from it. Now that the future of our nation is at stake, the time has come to stop thinking in terms of narrow vested interests. Thank you for your attention.

Translated by Elzbieta Golebiowska.