

THE POLES' PERCEPTION OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION BEFORE THE ACCESSION REFERENDUM

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Abstract. The announcements of Poland leaving the European Union structures were met with disapproval by the majority of the society. Why is the possible “Polexit” perceived negatively by nearly 90% of the Poles? Previously unpublished results of a public opinion survey carried out one month before the referendum, in which the Polish people supported accession to the European Union, are presented in the paper. The research focused on studying the reasons for positive and negative views regarding the possibility of including Poland in the European Union structures. The project’s objective was to obtain the data on the respondents’ attitude to the European integration in order to reveal the causes of their disapproval or enthusiasm. The results obtained in 2003 reflect the respondents’ expectations and fears regarding the upcoming change, at the same time revealing the level of their knowledge on the course and nature of integration processes. They are also a source of information about the social perception of opportunities and threats associated with accession, making it possible to compare them with the results of opinion surveys about the European Union carried out 15 years after the presented research project. Comparison with opinion polls on the European Union carried out fifteen years after the described research study shows that in 2018 positive feelings in Poland towards integration are equally well established.

Keywords: Poland, European Union, European Integration, Polexit, Accession Referendum

JEL Classification: P16, Z13

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Citation: Krawczyk, D. (2020). The Poles’ Perception of the European Integration before the Accession Referendum. *Virtual Economics*, 3(1), 74-94. [https://doi.org/10.34021/ve.2020.03.01\(4\)](https://doi.org/10.34021/ve.2020.03.01(4))

Received: October 30, 2019. Revised: December 15, 2019. Accepted: December 27, 2019.

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1. Introduction

The paper covers the analysis of previously unpublished results of a public opinion survey carried out one month before the nationwide referendum, in which the Poles were to decide on their country's accession to the European Union. Analysing the process of individual countries' accession "to the European Communities and then to the European Union" it was not everywhere that the decision was made during referendum. First of all, there were no accession referenda in six founding Member States of the European Communities, i.e. in France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (Grabowska, 2003, p. 96). However, the law in Poland required this procedure, as in the case of Ireland, Denmark, Austria, Sweden, Finland, and also in Great Britain, where it was the first referendum in history.

Direct quotations from respondents' statements that reflect the sentiment related to the possibility of Poland's accession to the European Union are included in the paper. They are a record of hopes and fears, as well as a projection of opportunities and threats caused by integration perceived by the average residents.

2. Literature Review

Before Poland's incorporation into the EU structures, the researchers focused on the globalization process related to integration (Budnikowski, 2001). After accession, among others, the economic aspect was analysed (Zielinska-Głębocka, 2018) with a particular emphasis on structural funds (Swistak, 2016). Attention was paid to the issue of Euroregions in organizational, financial and functional terms, as well as their impact on development in connection with regional policy (Greta, 2013). The phenomenon of reforming the EU structures was also subject to scientific reflection (Witkowska et al., 2017). Moreover, crises within the European Union were analysed (Stolarczyk, 2016). The findings proved that scientific community analysed European integration from different points of views: renewable electricity integration (Bernath et al., 2019); integration in the European electricity market (Saez et al., 2019); economic integration (Boglioni, 2019; Davydchik et al., 2018; Cutrini, 2019); institutional integration (Campos et al., 2019); innovation and sustainable development (Dalevska et al., 2019; Kharazishvili et al., 2019; Kuzior & Zozul'ak, 2019; Kwilinski et al., 2019; Mikhnevych et al., 2020); economic transformation (Głowski & Kvilinskyi, 2017); scientific integration (Lyashenko & Pidorycheva, 2019); Europeanization of physical activity (Mnich, 2019); and social integration (Schnittker, 2019).

3. Description of the Study

The research project was aimed to learn the residents' opinion regarding the accession of Poland to the European Union, and – what is most important – justification of the opinions expressed. The survey was carried out one month before the nationwide referendum on granting consent to ratifying an international agreement, which was held on the 7th and 8th June 2003. The poll was carried out at the "Laziska" Power Plant, a large industrial plant in the Silesian voivodship, where the employees were given the opportunity to share their feelings about including their

country in the EU structures. With the approval of director Klemens Ścierański¹, the author of this paper prepared a survey addressed to the company's personnel. The conditions of real voting by ensuring the two-day functioning of the commission accepting the questionnaires from employees², completed on a voluntary basis, in a way guaranteeing the universality of all employees' participation in the study, with no possibility of assigning responses to individual persons participating in the survey, were recreated in the project.

The point for completing the questionnaire forms operated in "Laziska" Power Plant³ from the 7th to the 8th May 2003. The forms included the question about the respondent's attitude to the European integration and preferences regarding participation in the Polish referendum scheduled for the 7th and the 8th June. Written responses given, the questionnaires were placed by the employees in ballot boxes.

The employees were informed about the opportunity to participate in the survey by means of internal communication media⁴. Consequently, 590 people, i.e. 51.9% of the employees who were present in the power plant during the survey, participated in the project. The majority of respondents supported the accession of Poland to the European Union. 83.4% of respondents expressed their approval for accession. Only 14.4% of respondents⁵ had a negative opinion on inclusion of the country to the EU structures. At the same time, 84.9% of employees declared their will to participate in a national referendum.

One month after the end of the survey among the employees of the power plant, there was held a nationwide referendum, during which the turnout amounted to almost 59%. 77% of voters supported the European integration, while 23% of people participating in the referendum voted against⁶.

4. The Sources of Approval for the European Integration

¹ Klemens Ścierański, born on the 8th November 1939 in Ledziny, a Polish politician and manager, was the Director of "Laziska" Power Plant during 29 years. He was, among others, the Minister of Industry and Trade, the Second Term Member of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland and the Fifth Term Senator of the Senate of the Republic of Poland. Died on the 1st of November 2018.

² 1423 persons were employed in the "Laziska" Power Plant at the time of the survey. 75% of the staff were men. The average length of service was 22 years, and the average age of the employees was 43 years.

³ The "Laziska" Power Plant has existed since 1917. In the 1990s it was thoroughly modernized. During realization of the research project it was one of the most modern Polish power plants (installed capacity of 1155 MW) supplying more than 4% of electricity produced in the whole country. It was a part of the Poludniowy Koncern Energetyczny S.A. The "Laziska" Power Plant was the first power plant in Poland that simultaneously implemented the quality (ISO 9001), environment (ISO 14001) and work safety (PN-EN 18000) integrated management system.

⁴ The information was published in the „Laziska" Power Plant monthly, broadcast by the company cable radio and placed on the notice boards.

⁵ The rest of respondents submitted questionnaires that did not meet the formal requirements, that is e.g. without marking the preferred answer.

⁶ The data from the official website of the State Election Commission at <http://referendum2003.pkw.gov.pl> [accessed 14th December 2017].

The main objective of the project was to find out the reasons shaping the residents' opinions about the European integration. That is why there were two open questions in the questionnaire form. 58.6% of participants of the research project answered the first of them: "Why do you want Poland to be a member of the European Union?"

Supporters of integration gave the individual reasons for a positive decision (Figure 1). A belief that the accession will expand job opportunities providing financial satisfaction (11.8% of answers); besides, a belief in more or less conceivable "better future" for children of people participating in the survey (11.6%) dominated among the reported motivations. Hopes for generally favourable changes in the country were at the similar level (11.2%). Positive image aspects related to the formal affiliation of Poland to the European structures (10.4%) as well as economic and social development of the country (10.1%) were the next responses in terms of their number. The respondents' opinions also showed a significant scale of disapproval in relation to the national authorities' functioning (8.9%), which, in combination with hope for limiting the corruption (5.5%), revealed a considerable disappointment over the internal situation in Poland. A marginal share of responses regarding the introduction of the monetary union (0.5%) or the possibility of obtaining funds from the European Union to finance development projects (1.2%) is typical. This may be a sign of low effectiveness of information activities carried out at that time to present the consequences of integration. In comparison with the most frequently quoted reasons for positive opinions such as a relatively small share of answers related to improving the quality of social benefits (0.8%), freedom of travel associated with the abolition of border controls (4.9%) or a forecast of increase in the wealth of a EU member state's society (6.9%) can be astonishing.

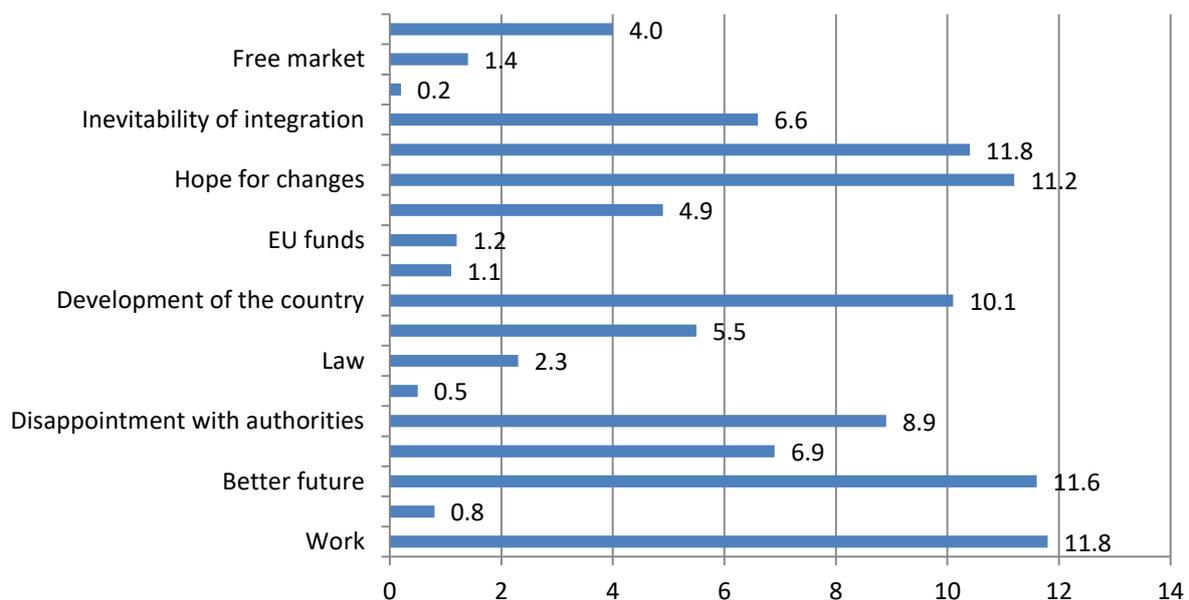


Figure 1. Reasons for the Respondents' Positive Opinions on Integration with the European Union.

Source: The author's own research.

4.1 Hopes for the Labour Market

Nearly 12% (11.8%) of respondents approving the accession of Poland to the European Union counted on improvement of working conditions both in Poland and other Member States. The vision of making it easier to get employed abroad was especially attractive. In this context it is worth recalling that as a result of integration with the European Union, starting from 1 May, 2004, the Polish citizens could freely become legally employed in Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden and newly admitted Member States (with the exception of Malta) (Ossowski, 2014, p. 83). The answers that documented emotions of respondents who emphasized, among others, their hope to get a job abroad deserve researcher's attention. According to them integration is "an opportunity to work abroad in the EU countries", "a chance to improve wages, working conditions and greater presence in other countries", "a greater opportunity to work abroad", "an opportunity to work abroad, there will be more workplaces for young people", "work in the European Union, better wages", "the borders will be open and there will be a possibility to work". Here we have also answers emphasizing greater opportunities for attractive employment⁷: "expanding the labour market and improving the quality of work", "opening the markets, work for us and for future generations, free movement of people, better political prospects, chance for us in the field of equal treatment", "better prospect of finding a job, higher salary". In fact, the later research of the scientists dealing with the funds transfer to Poland concluded that after integration "workers' remittances came mainly from the EU countries, mainly from Ireland and Great Britain. The earnings in those countries increased in 2004-2007" (Puzio-Wacławik, 2010, pp. 185).

Specific hopes, such as "I hope that a situation on the labour market will improve and that it will be possible to get a favourable credit", "a possibility to be employed abroad means elimination of unemployment", "more workplaces, better life conditions. It is an open window to the world for us", - were also associated with the opportunity to work abroad.

A belief in improvement of working conditions in Poland after the country's inclusion in the EU structures can also be found among the responses, exemplified by the statements like "connecting Europe – equal work and pay conditions", "I hope that working conditions will improve", "I think that it will improve the standard of the Poles' life and reduce unemployment", "equal (EU) work and pay conditions", "I hope that then it will be easier to find a job, not only abroad, but also in Poland". People also sincerely hoped that salaries will increase in Poland: "maybe salaries and comfort of life will increase", "I am interested in salary calculated in EUR after Poland's accession to the European Union", "so that it is better and the job is better paid". The belief in the improved situation on the labour market was emphasized: "employment for all the people and adequate pay", "to ensure job, to improve existence and situation", "for improvement of working conditions", "employment of young people, reduction of unemployment", "maybe there will be fewer unemployed people", "increase in the number of

⁷ Integration was also associated with expectations of people from the energy sector to get a job abroad: "maybe the obligation to verify the qualifications of those responsible for energy devices, installations and networks will be abolished".

jobs”, “creating new jobs”. Positive changes in perceiving the employment by the employees were also expected: “maybe there will be more workplaces and we will change our attitude to work”. However, wishful thinking, such as “I want Poland to be a member of the European Union to live more comfortably and to ensure work for everyone”, prevailed. The prospect of internal stabilization was also seen through the increase in the number of job-offers generated by the EU integration: “joining the European Union rises the hope of unemployed people to get a job, to live with dignity and to earn their bread. Maybe at last it will be better to live in this country”.

4.2 Precise Expectations in Relation to Accession

A conviction about an increase of accessibility and quality of services in Poland, associated with accession, appeared among the respondents’ detailed answers describing the sources of positive perception of the European integration. Less than 1% of respondents counted specifically on “improvement of health care”, “improvement of life due to state-of-the-art medicine” and “improvement of social care for ordinary people”. A vision of monetary union was another argument for integration. However, only 0.5% of people polled articulated the possibility of joining the euro zone as a reason for approval. It is worth noting that in the end Poland did not adopt the common currency, although the forecasts assumed that “the effect of trade expansion may occur after announcement of the decision to join the euro zone and undertaking the commitment to stabilize the exchange rate. Moreover, joining the euro zone should contribute to further increase of Polish trade, in particular export to other euro zone countries” (Cieślak et al., 2009, p. 85). Respondents hoped simply for e.g. „salary in euro” or believed in long-term benefits of adopting euro: “for the benefit of generations, because there will be a common currency”.

A little bit more than 2% of respondents counted mainly on the improvement of Polish legal system which, according to them, would be forced by the accession to the European Union. In their opinion “most of cases will be settled clearly and transparently, connections and deals will be stopped and then maybe finally it will be normal in this country”, “the law will be understandable”, “I think that the law will change, that it will be equal for everyone”, “maybe the law, which nowadays frequently changes, will be finally fixed”. It was emphasized that the “European Union legal standards are better thought out than the Polish ones, and accession of Poland to the European Union will definitely systematize our economic life and open our country to the world”. “Organizing the state issues after introduction of the EU law” was also supposed to be a positive aspect of integration.

Slightly more than 1% of respondents paid attention to technological advance provided by the EU integration. They emphasized, among others, an “access to newer technologies that will improve everyday life”, “opening the market for the EU products and technology” or increase of “availability of new technologies”.

Implementing the principles of free market economy, such as “there will be private health insurance, it will be more difficult, but more beautiful”, “new opportunities for collaboration with foreign companies”, “elimination of customs duties”, “a chance for our country to be

competitive with the rest of European countries”, “opening of borders and a broad market”, was an important aspect in favour of integration for less than 1.5% of respondents.

Some respondents also focused on the absorption of the EU funds. A small number of this type of responses shows low effectiveness of campaigns encouraging to vote in the referendum, which were carried out at that time. Only slightly more than 1% of respondents pointed to the fact of an “access to the EU funds”, a “possibility of using the EU funds, greater opportunities for faster development, and a regional situation of Poland will require it”, “Poland will receive the EU money for development”, “possibility of using the EU funds, rather than isolating Poland in Europe”.

4.3 Awareness Regarding the Future Benefits

The will to secure better living conditions for future generations was one of the most common reasons for expressing approval for the European integration. Nearly 12% of respondents had such a motivation, which was the second largest category after the responses highlighting the importance of opening up the labour market. Both these groups are closely related to each other. First of all, the attention was paid to equal educational opportunities for children and youth as well as to the opportunity to provide them with employment within the Member States. A typical argumentation was a reference to getting a job: “our young people will have greater opportunities to find a job in the EU countries” or “work and education for children”, although more general phrases such as: “I hope that my children will have a better future”, “hope to improve the existence of future generations” or “I am for the Poland’s entry to the European Union, because I hope for better tomorrow for young generation”, “I hope that entry to the European Union will ensure better future for our children” were equally often used.

Therefore, referring to the possibility of: “education and work abroad”, “taking up legal work in the EU countries by young people”, “better start for young people” dominated among the responses.

The following was emphasized: “...children to have greater prospects of learning and getting a profession...”, “...my children to live better, to have a job...”, “...my children to have better future, good job and good existence” or “...greater opportunities to be educated and to learn the world”.

It was emphasized that integration is a unique chance for the “development of young people”, “better future for children”, and a “better start in adult life for young generation”.

A disappointment over the internal situation of Poland, manifested in expressions such as “because as for now I do not see the future in this country, but I hope that one day my children will have a better life”, “maybe something will change for better and there will be work for young people”, “so that it is better, I hope that conditions of life will improve, maybe not my life’s conditions, but my children’s ones” or “maybe finally our children will have a better life”, was also more or less deliberately emphasized in the context of ensuring the European standard of

living to the young generation. People also believed that integration will contribute to changing the situation in the country with time: “living conditions in Poland and future of the next generation will improve”.

4.3.1 Prosperity of the Society

Nearly 7% of respondents expected the increase of society prosperity when giving the reasons for their approval of the European integration. A hope to implement in Poland the living conditions that are characteristic of the Western European countries was reflected in the responses such as “because in all Member States the rate of life and wealth of the average citizen is higher than in Poland”, “adapting of earnings to the European level in the future”, “due to accession the European Union, Poland will join the highly developed countries, what will enable to reach the standard of life similar to the standard in those countries” or “so that life is prosperous and fair”.

A dream about an increase in the ownership was reflected in the following statements: “a great prosperity awaits us”, “so that prosperity of the country and society increases”, “improvement of material situation” or “improvement of the standard of living”. The prosperity was also supposed to be a consequence of Poland’s operation within the EU structures: “I hope for stabilization and country development, and thus for increase of the standard of living and increase of aid to the poorest”. The mood of people in this group is documented by the following phrase used by one of the respondents: “better living conditions and an open door to Europe”.

4.3.2 Economy and Development of the Country

Another group of responses provoked a reflection on the greater opportunities for the country’s development within the EU structures. Over 10% of respondents referred to the country’s comprehensive progress, economic recovery and development, which were thought to be the effect of the European integration. In this context, the following economic and political arguments were given: “Poland cannot be away from Europe, because it would be economically disadvantageous”, “the European Union gives us and Poland better prospects for the future, in terms of economy and development it creates new opportunities”, “in the current political situation in Europe it is the only way, economic issues are also important – it would be more difficult to act alone”.

Integration was seen as a way to improving the “economic position in the world”, as well as “improving the economic situation”, “improving the economic situation and reducing the unemployment”, “improving the economy, living and political conditions” and “not falling behind other countries”.

The EU progress was contrasted with the vision of a single state: “so that Poland is not a parochial country and that it further develops among the leaders”.

Comparisons to other Member States, such as: „this is a great opportunity for Poland, in which I see a better future for the next generations and the largest development of our country, like it was, for example, in Greece”, were also made.

4.4 Disappointment over the National Authorities

Negative assessment of the functioning of the legislative, executive and judiciary structures in Poland was an important reason for the respondents to opt for the consent for accession. Almost 9% of respondents clearly emphasized the need to implement control over institutions managing the country. They saw the EU monitoring and supervision as the most important opportunity associated with integration. The need for increased control was reflected in such statements as: “Poland should be in the European Union to have proper control over the parliament”, “maybe finally somebody will force us to order and to obey the law, to open up to the world, etc.”, “greater control over state finances will reduce unnecessary waste of money, it is better to stay together, because we cannot govern ourselves, but rather need to be directed” or “maybe with time the situation in our country will become normal and an ordinary citizen will be treated with due respect”.

At the same time, there was disapproval of people involved in governance who were accused of incompetence, ineffectiveness and nepotism. The nature of criticism is reflected in such statements as, for example: “maybe there will be less thievery and fraud among so-called elites”, “I hope that the mentality of Polish political class will change”, “maybe they will curb this bold rudeness and thievery”, “to end this Warsaw trash” or “it will raise our country and reduce corruption at the top of power”.

Generally, “with the current government in Poland – and not just the last one – we do not have any chances for development, refusing to join is a hazard to marginalize the Poland’s role in the world and increase the poverty of the Poles”. What is more, referring to the experience of previous generations it was emphasized that: “The Poles cannot manage themselves, I am really sorry, but we need someone’s supervision – that is what the history of Poland shows” or “The Poles cannot effectively exercise power – they must be supervised so that corruption cannot develop”.

Various symptoms of the country’s social life were evaluated negatively: “it is the only chance in the current economic chaos”, “I hope that degenerations in the field of politics and economy will be at least partly stopped”, “without the European Union Poland will not cope with agriculture, industry, safety, etc.”, “so that Polish economy is more controlled” or “the political situation will improve, as it could not be worse”.

Due to integration “maybe the situation will improve after 13 years of promises that have not been kept by the politicians”, “Polish politicians will take for themselves, in perspective – it will be better”, “maybe finally the situation in our beloved homeland will be normal”.

A belief in the effectiveness of the EU verification solutions was also expressed: “so that our government is under supervision of the EU specialists,” “so that our government is under strict control,” “we will be closer to the world and we cannot deal with managing, maybe something will go forward under the EU supervision.”

A belief that joining the EU structures is “the last resort for Poland,” because without accession “we cannot get out of this poverty by ourselves,” reflects the mood of people from that group.

4.4.1 Reducing Corruption

Mentioning the reduction of corruption in the country as the main reason for the European integration corresponded to the negative evaluation of the internal situation in Poland. Creating a barrier to using public functions in order to gain illegal benefits was the main argument for 5.5% of those supporting the accession. Accessing the European Union meant, among others, “reducing corruption, better opportunities for all the people, not only for protégés,” “reducing corruption and improving the functioning of executive bodies,” “elimination of corruption in public offices” or “less corruption and internal order.” For the respondents from that group, a belief in “reducing corruption among state officials” or “limiting the thievery, corruption and privacy” resulted from the belief that “the EU regulations limit corruption.”

4.5 The European Identity and the Image Aspects

Over 10% of respondents expressed their belief in the Poles’ European identity, declared their will to take decisions jointly about the future of the European community, as well as emphasized their fear of marginalizing the role of Poland in the future fully united Europe. The following statements confirm such opinions of the people supporting the integration: “I want to participate in co-decisions about the future of Poland and Europe”, “it is necessary to create a common Europe, we cannot stand aside”, “it is better together, just like in a family”, “because Poland is in the middle of Europe”.

There are statements that also express the sense of significance, and even the pride of possible joining the EU structures by Poland. This can be noticed in the following sentences: “maybe we will finally become the citizens of Europe”, “because it is a historical chance to exist in Europe” or “it is the unique and only chance for our country’s development, remaining outside the European Union would be an economic catastrophe and isolation of our country from the surrounding neighbours – members of the European Union,” “we are already in Europe,” “I am a European”, “Poland is a European country,” “Poland is already in Europe,” “because we are in Europe,” “I want to be a fully-fledged European” or “Poland is as European a country as, for example, Germany.”

Threats caused by the lack of consent for integration were also mentioned. It was said that “Europe is one and should not be divided into better and worse”, “further separation from the European countries will only deepen the distance,” “not to be left behind and not be the third

world,” “so that Poland would not lag behind other European countries” or “I do not want us to be the second-class country.”

The fear of marginalizing the country and blocking its citizens the access to the EU privileges was reflected in such statements as: “I want to be a real European, and not the citizen of the second category,” “this is the only reasonable way not to be marginalized,” “not becoming a member of the European Union would be a huge and irreparable loss – also for me,” “at present, when more and more countries are becoming the members of the European Union, a country that will be beyond the Union will have more and more difficult conditions for further development.”

“Better future for Poland” was mentioned among the opportunities, because “in the European Union there are good examples to follow, in the economy and democracy.” “Co-management of Europe,” which “will open us the gate to better tomorrow,” and, in consequence, will ensure that “Europe will be united,” seemed to be a new quality. That is why integration “is necessary and is associated with a lot of good for Poland.”

Less enthusiastic respondents pointed out that „we are in Europe and we should enter its economic structures” or “it cannot be predicted which benefits will be gained by Poland, but it will certainly not hurt to be in the forefront of better countries”.

4.5.1 The Abolition of Border Controls

Free traveling to member countries was the accession’s biggest benefit for nearly 5% of respondents. A vision of visa-free travelling and abolition of control at the internal borders of the EU countries, which signed the Schengen Agreement on the 14th June 1985, frequently called by the respondents the “abolition of borders”, were especially important for them. The statements’ analysis demonstrated that integration “will be a civilization lift for Poland, and that formalities related to crossing the borders of the EU countries will be lifted”.

The respondents wanted that “opening the borders”, “removal of borders”, “extending the borders”, “elimination of borders”, “easy traveling around Europe” or “traveling without borders” come true. “Facilitations in international travels”, “no queues at border crossings” and “normal treatment of the Poles at the airports, and not as if they were the citizens of the third world” were mentioned as those of primary importance.

4.6 A Hope for Positive Changes

Over 11% of respondents who wanted integration of Poland with the European Union voiced a widely understood belief in improvement of the living conditions as a justification for their approval. However, the statements approving the accession did not include specific social, political or economic reasons. Respondents motivated their opinions by the statements of the following types: “I hope for improvement in many areas of life”, “improvement”, “it should be better”, “I hope that something will improve”, “more opportunities”, “a chance for better tomorrow”, “maybe it will be better?” or “maybe we will live a little bit better”.

The respondents wrote: “I see the future in the European Union”, “entering the European Union means new perspectives”, “opening to the world”, “better and more certain future”. At the same time the awareness that advantageous changes need time, because “probably we will have better life in the future” or “after a few or several years it should be better”, was articulated.

4.7 A Sense of Integration’s Inevitability

A bit over 6.5% of respondents emphasized that Europe-wide integration processes are inevitable, and, if stopped, they can harm both Poland and the Poles. The respondents from that group were usually convinced in the need to access the European Union, resulting from the need to resist civilisation regress that would be a consequence of staying beyond the EU structures. They assumed that as a country “we have nothing to lose”, and moreover, “it is the only chance for Poland”, “we have no other option”, “it is the only option for our country”, as well as they showed a “lack of alternative acceptable solution”.

They accented “the need for unification”, because “there is no alternative, otherwise we may be isolated”, and they determined integration as “the move of last chance”. They emphasized that if “there is the European Union, Poland should also be within this Union”, and regarding the country’s development “it should be determined where our place is”. So, there was a conclusion that “not to enter means to block development of the economy, which will cause an increase in the costs of living” and that “our country cannot function outside the European community, it is important for economic development”, because “if not in the European Union, then where?”.

Some even put forward a thesis that Poland “will enter no matter if we, ordinary people, want it or not, as the government has the final word in that matter”.

4.8 A Conviction about the Need for Integration as a Favourable Balance

The broadly understood favourable balance between possible profits and losses related to accession was the source of a positive opinion on the European integration in the case of 4% of respondents. This opinion was reflected not only in such positive statements as: “entering the European Union is more advantageous than leaving the country in isolation and a lack of prospects for convergence of economic levels”, but also in neutral statements such as: “Poland should have more benefits than losses resulting from accession to the European Union” and disapproval was justified as: “a classical situation when you have to choose between what is wrong and what is less wrong, at lack of reasonable alternative”.

5. The Sources of Disapproval of the European Integration

The questionnaire form included an open question “Why are you against Poland’s entering the European Union?”, answers to which were given by 9.4% of participants of the research project (Figure 2).

The possibility of worsening the situation for the Poles was mentioned by 21.4% of respondents, which was the dominant justification of critical opinions. It correlated with the answers revealing a lack of belief in improvement of living conditions (12.5%). Negative verification of integration conditions was the reason for opposing integration by 19.6% of respondents. Unfavourable balance between accession benefits and predicted losses and threats were the reasons for 12.5% of respondents to express their opposition. 10.7% of people participating in the research claimed that the country is insufficiently prepared. The next group of people referred to the threat of losing independence and to Poland's being abused by the European Union (8.9%), threat of being dependant on the EU structures (5.3%), as well as negative image-related aspects (3.5%). The rest of people answering the open question did not substantiate their opposition to integration.

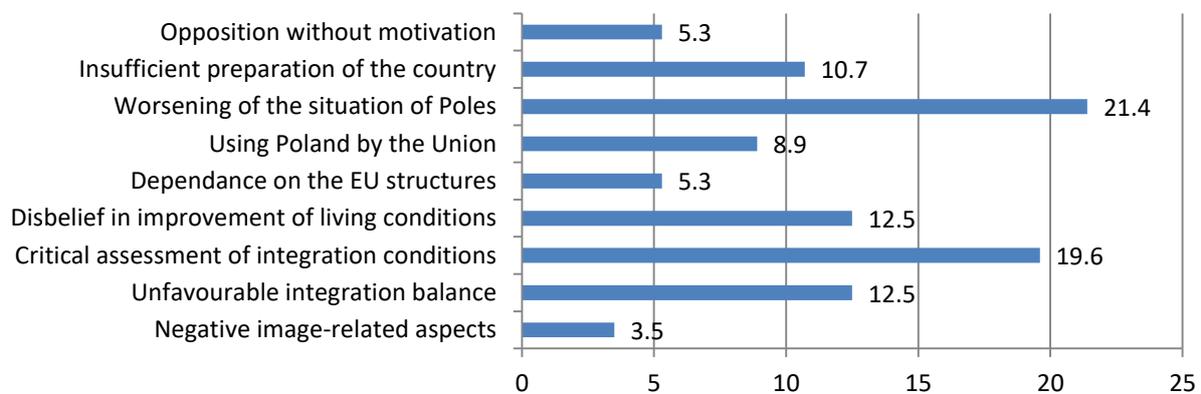


Figure 2. The Reasons for the Critical Opinions on Poland's accession to the European Union Expressed by the Respondents.

Source: the author's own research.

5.1 The Fear of Worsening the Poles' Situation

21% of respondents based their disapproval of accession to the European Union on the conviction that the European integration will be associated with lowering the living standards of the residents. Referring to the social costs of the process, the respondents formulated the statement: "our standard of living, which is not the best one, will worsen and we will be a so-called 'fifth wheel of the wagon' in the European Union, i.e. we will be a servant if we enter the Union under conditions that were negotiated by our government". There were also the following statements in that group of answers: "there may be problems with employment", "the vague future, high prices, job insecurity", "an increase of unemployment, decrease in the standard of living, a sale of assets and land", "our standard of living, which is not the best one, will worsen, we will be the servants in the European Union".

The respondents expressed their opposition to accession saying that "only the prices in the shops and the payments, except the salaries, will be those of the EU". They were afraid of "increasing taxes and prices" and "an increase of unemployment, worsening social conditions – too long-time to wait for improvement". They also saw the reality of the Poles as the residents

of the united Europe through “firing workers, low salaries, black labour, no social rights”. They noticed a possibility of increasing social inequalities: “I do not like that I will earn too little, it is unfair that people performing physical work earn so little”. A lack of agreement on accession was also motivated by the forecasts that “the conditions related to salaries and hospital treatment as well as other social conditions may worsen” and a possibility of “the increasing gap between the poverty and wealth, similarly to the case of the South America”.

5.2 Critical Evaluation of Accession Conditions

For nearly 20% of respondents the awareness that “a model of European integration has to be measured by the criteria of international organization of interstate (intergovernmental) type. International agreements concluded between the Member States are the base for the European Union operation” (Barcz et al., 2012, p. 27) in combination with critical opinions about the competences of the Polish central authorities caused the lack of belief in effectiveness of accession negotiations. According to the respondents, the government agreed on unfavourable conditions to access the European Union. It was reflected in such statements as: “the negotiated conditions are bad”, “the truth is not being told to the Poles. They are not informed about the details regarding the situation after entering the Union”, “the bad conditions of Poland’s accessing the European Union”, “an uncertain situation after entering”, “not at all cost” or “I am against entering the Union under conditions negotiated by our government”. It was even emphasized that “I am not against entering the Union, but on the terms other than those currently negotiated”. The accession would be possible, but “on equal terms, so not now”, remembering that “it is Poland that the European Union needs, and not vice versa”.

5.3 The Country’s Insufficient Preparation

Nearly 11% of respondents opposing accession referred to the problem of the country’s insufficient preparation to be included in the EU structures. Along with statements of a general nature, the economic, functional and communication aspects were emphasized. According to the respondents, “we as a country are not prepared for this” due to “the economy being unprepared to the EU requirements”, and what is more – in the context of concluded accession agreements – “we are not properly prepared to enter the Union”. As it has turned out recently, there may be problems with translating the documents into Polish. Our interpretation is different. Are we sure what we have signed?”. It was also pointed out that “we cannot afford to pay contributions”, and there was a regret due to deficiency of the country’s information policy, because there was a “lack of sufficient information for middle class” related to accession.

5.4 Abusing Poland by the Union

For nearly 9% of people opposing Poland’s accession to the European Union a vision of Poland being abused by the EU structures and other Member States was the basic reason of negative perception of integration. The mood of those people is reflected in the following statements: “I do not want my country to lose its sovereignty and pay extra for it”, “Poland will be a Cinderella. It will be abused by the previous EU members” or “I am against, because the European Union is

searching for the market for its goods and does not care about our domestic manufacturers". It was pointed out that "the first period will be a period of being plundered by rich countries", and it was also stated that "being a cash cow is not nice!!!".

5.5 Unfavourable Integration Balance

Respondents who disapproved the European integration also pointed out an unfavourable ratio of possible benefits to possible losses. For 12.5% of respondents Poland's accession to the EU structures would result in a civilisation regress. Such emotions are reflected in the following statements: "Poland will lose more than gain", "Poland will lose financially after joining", "because of worsening the financial situation of Poland" or "I do not want the rest of the country to be sold, as it has been done so far".

5.5.1 Being Dependant on the EU Structures

Excessive dependence of Poland on the EU structures and mechanisms was a part of unfavourable attitude to the European integration of 5% of respondents. "High economic dependence – higher than in other economies" was emphasized, as well as there was a justification that "I am against, because the Poles, and especially people in power can be astonished by various decisions of the Union".

5.5.2 A Disbelief at Improving the Living Conditions

A disbelief at the positive effects of accession was the next factor to decide to oppose the integration. According to the people belonging to this group, potential benefits at most will balance the losses, but even if a global balance will be beneficial for Poland, it will not be perceived as such by ordinary residents. 12.5% of respondents claimed, for example, that "there will be no improvement for the poor and unemployed", "I do not see any perspectives in relation to this fact", "it will give nothing, because all the time Poland is in the Union but we are not aware of it", "the situation will not improve", "I do not know if living conditions of people will improve" or "I do not believe in fundamental changes that they offer". Finally, the accession will mean that "only the elite will benefit from accessing the Union".

5.5.3 Negative Image-Related Aspects

Negative image-related aspects were the cause to oppose for nearly 3.5% of respondents, who gave a specific reason for their critical reaction on the European integration. Their statements were as follows: "there will be no German spitting in our face" (Stalmach, 1908)⁸ and "our

⁸ A participant of the research project cited "Rota", Polish patriotic song dated 1908, including the sentence: "Nie będzie niemiec pluł nam w twarz, i dzieci nam germanił" ("There will be no German spitting in our face and germanising our children") - spelling in accordance with the first edition of the poem dedicated to the Silesian people, which "was written and addressed by the famous poet especially for >>Gwiadka Cieszyńska<< as she wanted to increase the national spirit in the Poles from Silesia, who are currently going through hard times".

fathers fought for free Poland”, referring to the possibility of losing the independence. Other participants of the research project (5.3%) answered the open question, but they were not able to justify their opinions, e.g. “it is difficult to say and describe”.

6. Social Consequences of Perceiving the European Integration Positively

Showing the reasons for approval and sources of concern on Poland’s accession to the European Union, this research can still be used to analyze the reasons for the Poles’ extremely positive attitude towards integration processes. Social feelings described in this research turned out to be extremely durable.

The report by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) on the country’s foreign policy published in 2018 reveals that the relationships with the European Union were the most visible source of disputes with participation of Poland on the international scene. Non-compliance with the EU law, the failure during voting for the head of the European Council or the direction of political actions aiming at removing the country from the EU structures were indicated among the factors that had impact on lowering their quality. At the same time, “in the social opinion, improvement of collaboration within the European Union should be the priority of the Polish foreign policy at present” (Roguska, 2018, p. 8). Answering the question “what should be the main objectives and directions of Poland’s foreign policy?” as many as 66% of respondents stated that normalization of relationships with the European Union is the challenge. According to the authors of CBOS statement, “this postulate is not surprising if we take into account almost widespread public support for the membership of Poland in the European Union. Approval of belonging of our country to the European Union has been very high for years. During the survey that was carried out in April, 88% of respondents expressed their support for Poland’s membership in the European Union, while only 8% of respondents were against” (Roguska, 2018, p. 10).

Positive opinions about the presence of Poland in the EU structures, which have been consistently declared for fifteen years, were reflected in the reluctance towards actions aiming at so-called “PolExit”. The possibility of removing the country from the European Union was met with strong disapproval of most of the Poles, which was confirmed by the studies in 2018 when “during a potential referendum on further presence of Poland in the European Union nearly 88% of respondents would definitely or rather vote for remaining of our country in the organization structures. Only 9% declare that they would like Poland to leave the EU” (2018, Report: Attitude of the Poles towards the European Union and “PolExit”). The attitude expressing approval for the European Union was maintained, despite dissemination of the anti-EU content by some mass media. This shows that in 2018 a well-established belief of the Poles that the benefits of European integration prevail over its costs did not change significantly.

7. Conclusions

The research project recreating conditions of the two-day accession referendum, which was held in June 2003, was carried out in May 2003. All employees of the power plant in Laziska Gorne,

which is one of the largest power plants in Poland, could participate in it. During a questionnaire survey, which was carried out in the electoral commission room opened for 48 hours, the employees completed the questionnaires including the questions about their attitude to integration as well as their declaration of participation in the referendum. The answers regarding the reasons for approval (expressed by 83.4% of respondents) or the reasons for opposition (14.4%) to the European integration are of the greatest analytical value. The analysis of respondents' opinions reveals that most of expectations were associated with a possibility of legal employment within the European Union, a hope for broadly understood positive changes and pride in the possibility of co-deciding about the future of the European community. The main concerns referred to the vision of worsening the life situation and consequences of accession on conditions unfavourable for the country.

15 years after the accession referendum in Poland the views of people collected before the referendum was held have not only a historical value, but also present the material for analysis of possibilities of the "Polexit", i.e. to move the country out of the EU structures following the example of Great Britain.

The research project, which was carried out one month before the nationwide accession referendum, revealed the Poles' hopes and fears associated with the country's inclusion to the EU structures. The issues related to the extending availability of job offers in the EU Member States and improving the situation on the Polish labour market were the sources for the highest expectations. Integration was perceived as an investment aiming at ensuring better living conditions and education for the young generation as well as at realizing their professional aspirations. A vision of joining the European Union was associated with the opportunity to develop the country and to solve the internal problems related to, among others, corruption, ineffective authorities or poverty. It was possible to feel trust in realizing dreams about the improved living conditions and a civilisation leap, at least in a perspective of the next generations. When evaluating the effects of the EU social integration strategy, which were achieved in Poland as well, it should be taken into account that "ineffectiveness of the strategy is to a high extent a consequence of the method implemented, which, in turn, results from the lack of legal competences of the Union to take actions in the field reserved for the competences of the Member States" (Żukowski, 2010, p. 6.), but despite 15 years that passed the support of the European integration did not decrease.

Analysing the Poles' opinions expressed one month before the referendum in June 2003, it can be assumed that realization of a hope for extending the availability of legal employment in the European Union, which was most commonly articulated, was then one of the reasons of social dissatisfaction that led to the decision of Great Britain to leave the EU structures, made during referendum in June 2016.

A vision of the decreasing standard of living associated, among others, with the connection of a poor country, being under political transformation, to the prosperous countries community with state-of-the-art economic, political and social solutions, was one of the most frequently articulated threats. Thus, there was a fear of being a disabled integration participant, a "servant

of Europe” abused by stronger partners who reached a higher level of civilization development. Opinions that the country is not prepared to function within the European Union were undermined by, among others, the quality of Polish presidency in the EU Council from the 1st July 2011 to the 31st December 2011, as, according to the researchers, “Polish presidency will be remembered as effective and competent and it would be difficult to find any major mistakes” (Kubin, 2013, p. 62). Besides referring to the country being unprepared to the membership, a lack of belief in the improving economic situation of the society and critical evaluation of opportunities offered by the European Union, as well as the concern about losing the right to self-determination could be found in the respondents’ statements. The practice has shown that “despite expectations, the idea of nation state associated with the integration processes did not fail. The promised overcoming of nationalism and nation state” (Malendowski, 2010, p. 11) also did not happen and, what is more, after 15 years the Polish government was at the stage of a serious conflict with the European Union. The case concerned respecting the rule of law in the country, and on the 20th December 2017⁹ the European Commission “analysed the Laws on the Supreme Court and on the National Council of the Judiciary. During the meeting, the EU Commissioners decided to activate article 7.1 of the Treaty on European Union towards Poland. It says that at a justified request from one-third of the Member States, the European Parliament or European Commission, the EU Council can say that there is a clear risk of serious violation of the EU values by the member country” (Sobczak, 2017).

Meanwhile, after 15 years from the described research was realized and the nationwide referendum in Poland was held, there was still high support for the European integration. The polls indicated that 88% of the Poles support integration, while there is only 8% of opponents, and that respondents “clearly express their support for the membership of our country in the European Union, and more than two-fifths would like to deepen the European integration. The fear of creating Europe of two speeds and marginalizing Poland in the European Union is clearly visible. These fears may be strengthened by evaluating the ruling party’s policy” (Public Opinion Research Centre, 2017, pp. 18). So, the Poles continued to support their country’s participation in the EU structures, exceeding the positive result obtained during the referendum in 2003 by 11%.

Analysing the anti-European activities of the Polish government, Polish scientists published a report, in which they stated, among others, that “we both weaken the entire European Union and we move away from its core. We voluntarily move to the edges of the common home of the European values, becoming its troublesome member. It is contrary to the interests of Poland and to the will of most of our society” (Wilkin, 2018, p. 7). On the basis of this material a timeline of the road leading to accession can also be determined: on May 25, 1990, i.e. several months after starting the system transformation, Poland submitted an application to start the negotiations on the association agreement with the European Union; on December 16, 1991 this agreement, a so-called Poland-EU Association Agreement, was signed and it entered into force on February 1, 1994. On April 8, 1994, Poland submitted its application for membership in the European Union. On May 31, 1998, Poland started its negotiations for membership, and on

⁹ The actual state in December 2017, i.e. at the end of the paper preparation.

December 13, 2002 the negotiations were completed. On April 16, 2003, Poland signed the Treaty of Accession. On June 7 and 8, 2003 the described referendum was held, and on May 1, 2004, Poland joined the structures of the European Union.

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