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**Facing the New Challenge:  
Polish Villagers  
on European Integration\***

**POLISH VILLAGERS ON EUROPEAN UNION**

Since the dramatic change of the Polish political system in 1989, a discussion on integration with the Western European institutions has been developed. In December 1991, the Polish authorities signed an agreement on 'association' with the European Community. This agreement gives Poland an opportunity for accelerating economic growth, including within the sphere of agriculture. The attitudes and determination of the Poles in pursuing the goal of integration with Western Europe — in addition to many institutional activities — will select the way forward.

The attitudes of Polish society towards integration with the European Union are generally approving. However, approval of the full membership of Poland to the European Union is significantly lower among the rural population compared to the urban population. What are the reasons for this differing view? Does it result from lack of knowledge and 'fear of the unknown'? Or are there some objective reasons? Do villagers feel more jeopardized by the expected consequences of the integration process than their urban counterparts?

Let me start with the first issue. In October 1994, a CBOS survey (Poles on the European Union) found that although 80% of the whole

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\*The findings presented in this paper are part of a research project directed by Ryszard Borowicz of the Department of Sociology, Nicholas Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. The project was ordered and financed by FAPA Foundation. The survey was carried out in February 1995 on a representative sample of 310 adult villagers in three regions — Poznań, Olsztyn and Nowy Sącz.

sample declared that they had heard of the European Union, the proportion amongst villagers was only 60%.

The findings of our survey, conducted at the beginning of 1995, confirmed the CBOS data. Answers to the question: *Have you heard about the European Union?* were as follows: Yes: 61%; No: 13%; A little: 25.9%.

According to most of the survey reports, declared knowledge of the European Union is much larger than real information gained. In order to learn the level of real knowledge, we asked the respondents: 'What is the European Union?' We discovered three major categories of response as follows:

1. A political and economic organisation of Western European countries (7.4%).
2. An organisation of economic co-operation — without specific qualification (35.1%).
3. Difficult to say (41.9%).

The remaining 15.6% answered that they had not heard of the European Union. This survey confirms the hypothesis that real knowledge is much lower than declared knowledge.

Although the translation of declared knowledge into real knowledge is not perfect, the level of declared knowledge is a good starting point for analysis of the attitudes of villagers towards the integration issue. It supports the theory that knowledge of the social climate surrounding an issue has an impact on its outcome.

## EXPECTED CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION

In our survey, we intended to reveal the attitudes of villagers towards integration on both the macro and micro levels. The answers to the two questions below present the situation:

*Will the access of Poland to the European Union be:*

	<i>For Polish agriculture:</i>	<i>For you personally:</i>
profitable	32.4%	18.8%
neutral	5.5%	29.4%
unprofitable	30.4%	15.5%
don't know	31.7%	36.2%

The above data shows that about one third of respondents have no opinion on either issue. The remaining respondents have more pronounced opinions on the macro rather than the micro level. However, in both cases, the percentage of those who think that integration with the European Union

would be profitable is similar to the percentage of those who think the opposite.

The answers on the question regarding consequences of integration are interesting when taken in conjunction with the socio-economic status of the respondents. I will present here the analysis of answers given by the farmers, because common expectations were very well reflected in answers given by other social categories. Moreover, the farmers were a particularly important group from the point of view of this survey.

In theoretical discussions concerning the future development of Polish agriculture, two general models have recently been analysed. One of them — 'the family farm and market model' — argues for the radical restructuring of family farms and increase in productive capacity. The area of 25–30 hectares (or more) is said to be the optimal size of farms. The second model could be described as the 'ecological' farm model. It postulates a very gradual transformation of existing Polish agriculture with its very small farms into using ecological methods, with the development of small size equipment matching the size of the farms. The State would have an active agricultural policy.

If the first model was realised, hundreds of thousands of existing farms would become bankrupt and around two million former farmers would be looking for employment. Therefore, the size of the farms owned by the respondents would influence their evaluation of profits to be drawn from integration with the European Union.

Generally, we can say that the larger the farm, the more pessimistic the attitude of its owner towards integration with the European Union. This observation is contrary to the opinion that the larger the farm, the higher its chances for efficient competition with Western agriculture, and therefore the integration should be more profitable for it. The common opinion may be true but it is not perceived as such by the farmers. As we can see, the ecological model is more attractive to the Polish farmers during the process of transformation of agriculture. It seems more akin to the cultural traditions of villagers. It holds less fear and need for resistance.

### RESPONDENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF CHANGES TO POLISH AGRICULTURE BEFORE INTEGRATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

It is interesting to note which changes are, in the opinion of the respondents, necessary before integration. We should bear in mind that nearly half of the population of Poland live in rural areas and that agriculture still provides one quarter of all employment proving a vital source of income

for a great many Poles. These figures are very far from Western European standards.

Therefore, it is important not to underestimate the problems of villagers and the need to solve these problems without delay. The authors of the questionnaire presented six problems to respondents for them to choose two in order of importance. The problems, in order of decreasing priority, are:

1. Intensification of the Government policy protecting the Polish food market (responsible for the two most important problems — 43.3%, 18.3%).
2. Growth of food processing industry (23.3%, 28.5%).
3. Increase in the average area of individual farms (17.7%, 7.7%).
4. Growth of strong voluntary associations defending the interests of the farmers (11.3%, 27.2%).
5. Changes in the types of crops (2.7%, 10.6%).
6. Decrease of the number of people employed in agriculture (1.7%, 6.0%).

As we can see from the figures presented above, villagers are waiting for the State to offer protection for the Polish food market. Many respondents chose this answer, together with 'growth of strong voluntary associations' as the second important problem. This, however, does not translate into activity on the part of these respondents in associations. It reveals villagers to have passive characteristics. The growth of the food processing industry, the only economic factor that is comparable to the indicators discussed above in terms of positive answers, can also be seen as a reflection of the passive attitude of villagers, since investment is expected to come from abroad or from Government.

The actions to be taken by individual farmers and local communities, which would lead to the restructuring of agriculture, such as the increase of average farm area, the change in the kind of crops or decrease in employment, were rarely considered as important problems.

I would like to present now the relationship between the area of the farm and the opinions of its owner on the most important changes to be introduced. The owners of farms between six and ten hectares, have the lowest expectations of state protective policy. Instead, they stress the necessity of growth of voluntary associations. The owners of the smallest farms (two hectares or less) do not even mention the problem of farm area. For them, the growth in the food processing industry seems to be the most important. This industry could provide employment.

The conclusion is that the expectations of farmers significantly deviate from the assumptions of market economy. The state agricultural policy, if it wants to balance these two orientations during the transition period, should follow the route of moderate interventionism. This policy should be 'liberal' enough to stimulate the necessary structural changes and 'interventionist'

enough to provide temporary protection from outside competition. All actions of Government, such as social policy, environment policy, investments etc., should concentrate on this area.

### ATTITUDES TO 'OTHERS' IN THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL DIMENSION

As I have tried to show above, the attitudes of villagers towards European integration are cautious and ambivalent. The process of integration demands not only political, legal and economic adjustments, but also the overcoming of some cultural barriers.

According to the CBOS report of May 1994, Poles object very much to the possibility that foreigners buy land and houses without restrictions. This issue is particularly contentious in the countryside. Moreover, villagers are strongly attached to the traditional, conservative and Roman Catholic values. Therefore, it is interesting to discover their attitude towards 'strangers' are in both the declarative and the practical dimension.

In our survey, we asked the respondents to assume an attitude to two statements dealing with this problem. The first was: 'It is possible to reach co-operation between different nations, but it is not possible to reach a real trust.' The second was: 'People belonging to my nation should always prefer it to other nations'. The respondents are inclined to approve of both of these statements. This is evidence of closed minds. If we measure them on a scale from 1 — the most approving attitude, to 5 — the most disapproving, the average for the first statement is 1.7 and for the second 2.3. Both indicators are closer to the approving end of the scale, but in the second case the approval is lower.

Thus, on the level of declarations, we have to deal with the rather closed attitudes of villagers. In order to discover how these declarations reflect in more practical terms, we have asked for opinions on Western grocery products. The answers should be indicative since the majority of our respondents were producers of food. The participants were asked to give their opinions on Western groceries in two dimensions: quality and price. They considered:

1) Quality:

Better	Equal	Worse	Don't know
4.6%	21.5%	58%	14.1%

2) Price:

More expensive	Equally expensive	Cheaper	Don't know
55%	16.3%	7.5%	21.2%

As we can see from the above figures, Western groceries are not highly valued by villagers in either of the two dimensions. The figures presented are coherent opinions of the respondents on declarative and practical levels.

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The above presented findings confirm some of the already known facts. For example, attitudes towards the expected changes are more flexible if the participants are highly educated and come from a better socio-economic background. Our survey of the attitudes of villagers helps us, however, to look closer at this social category.

According to our findings, two stereotypes are characteristic to this collective. The first is approval for the integration of Poland to the Western European institutional structures. It seems to be based more on the willingness of this integration than on real understanding of the entire process of integration and its consequences. The second stereotype expresses a sense of threat to peoples own economic interests as well as the fear of the full opening of the country to Western goods and 'foreigners'. The existence of these two stereotypes should be taken into account by the State authorities when shaping Polish agricultural policy.

## REFERENCES

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