



## **POLES AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

### **Poles' attitudes toward Polish and European democratic institutions**

**Report on the outcome of a study conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs**

After Poland joins the European Union, Poles will have to find their bearings in an environment demarcated not only by Polish institutions but also European ones. The context and reference base for assessing the Polish institutional order is also changing. The goal of the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) study "Poles and the European Parliament", dedicated to Poles' assessment of domestic and international democratic institutions, was to find answers to the following questions:

- **How well Poles find their bearings in European democracy, what is their attitude to European democratic institutions?**
- **Is there a connection between assessment of the Polish institutional order and acceptance or rejection of European institutions?**
- **Will attitudes toward Polish and European democratic institutions impact the way people vote in the EU accession referendum?**
- **What is the level of knowledge of the European Parliament and trust therein among the Polish population, and what is its declared level of interest in next year's elections to the European Parliament?**

The project was financed by the European Parliament and "Integration Now" PHARE 2001 Project. The public opinion poll was carried out in the field between February 27<sup>th</sup> and March 4<sup>th</sup> by CBOS on a representative sample of 1620 adult Poles.

## ASSESSMENT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ORDER IN POLAND

The permanence of a democratic order is founded on the proper functioning of public institutions. However, as the time goes by, popular trust in the institutional order in post-communist Poland is waning instead of consolidating. Popular trust in the Sejm has dropped from some 50% to 12% and the percentage of respondents positively assessing the performance of the current government since the beginning of its term in office has dropped from 38% to 12%. Poles have made their mind up as to the motives behind political involvement – the percentage of respondents convinced that involvement in politics is dictated by a wish to have power and get rich has increased substantially. In 1993, 22% of respondents believed that one became a politician out of the desire to do something for the common good – presently only 6% believe that. The conviction that politicians, including those at state level, are corrupt is very strong. The politicization of public institutions, low level of their legitimization and conviction of the omnipresence of corruption carries with itself several negative consequences that reach far beyond the functioning of these organizations. It undermines the trust in the values of the democratic and free-market system. More than two thirds of Poles (67%) are not satisfied with the functioning of Polish democracy.

### Assessment of the Sejm's, government's and president's performance in the past year

Assessments*	Responses per study date													
	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	I	II	III	IV
	2002											2003		

Sejm														
Good	16	19	23	20	22	23	25	30	21	17	25	21	16	12
Poor	67	62	61	66	62	58	58	52	64	67	60	63	66	76

Government														
Good		33	31	27	27	26	31	34	35	24	32	26	24	12
Poor		45	46	51	56	53	48	47	47	56	47	54	61	71

President														
Good	75	72	75	75	73	76	77	78	78	78	81	79	77	69
Poor	18	18	17	17	18	15	15	15	14	15	10	15	17	20

\* The "hard to say" response was not considered

Source: CBOS

## ASSESSMENT OF EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Poles declare their trust in European and other international organizations. At the same time, respondents who declare their trust in some international institutions usually also trust other such institutions.

Trust in the European Union is declared by a somewhat lower number of respondents (56%) than trust in the UN (63%) and in NATO (62%). The declared mistrust of the EU (15%) is higher than in the case of the UN (by 8%) and NATO (by 6%).

<i>Do you trust these organizations?</i>				
	<b>United Nations (UN)</b>	<b>NATO</b>	<b>European Union</b>	<b>World Bank</b>
<b>Trusting</b>	63	62	56	39
<b>Indifferent</b>	14	14	15	19
<b>Not trusting</b>	7	9	15	9
<b>Unfamiliar</b>	3	2	1	13
<b>Undecided</b>	13	13	13	20

*Source: IPA*

The highest rate of mistrust in the EU is found among farmers and rural residents (24%). This social and professional group seems to be equally divided in its emotional attitude toward the EU between the prejudiced (24%), indifferent (26%), oblivious (24%) and trusting (25%).

Here is a portrait of a Pole who trusts the European Union: young male, urban dweller, interested in politics, planning to participate in the accession referendum and rather optimistic about the future (the percentage of respondents declaring trust in the EU is much higher among people stating that the situation in Poland will improve within a year).

The level of trust depends on the level of familiarity with EU institutions – people who declare knowledge of the European Parliament and European Commission trust the EU at a greater rate. However, obliviousness increases mistrust only to a small degree.

Trust in the EU is one of the main variables affecting support for integration. Among respondents declaring that they will vote in favor of Poland joining the EU, 80% declare their trust in the Union. The declared trust (not only in the EU but also in other international organizations) also promotes acceptance of stronger ties between Member States and consent for the evolution of the EU toward the community model.

Responses show that specific EU institutions are also perceived in a better light than Polish ones. More than one half of respondents (57%) that know something about the European Parliament assess its performance as good. A similar percentage with a certain sense of knowledge (56%) gives good marks to the European Commission. There are very few negative assessments of these two institutions.

<b>How do you generally assess the performance of the following institutions?</b> <i>(Responses from those who have heard of the respective institutions)</i>		
	<b>European Parliament</b>	<b>European Commission</b>
<b>Highly</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Poorly</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>

Source: IPA

## ASSESSMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF POLISH AND EUROPEAN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Poles are very critical of the performance of Polish institutions both in terms of their efficiency (only 7% consider them efficient) and morality (78% consider them corrupt, 89% believe that they take better care of civil servants than of regular citizens).

The performance of EU institutions is perceived much more positively in terms of both efficiency and morality. EU institutions are perceived as closer to citizens, more honest and better performing than Polish state institutions.

### Do you think that Polish state institutions / EU institutions...

	<b>POLISH STATE INSTITUTIONS</b>	<b>EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS</b>
<b>care primarily for average citizens</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>care primarily for government officials and civil servants</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>are efficient</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>are inefficient</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>are generally honest</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>are rather corrupt</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>usually take care of important matters</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>usually take care of unimportant matters</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>10</b>

Komentarz:

Source: IPA. The "hard to say" response was not considered.

However, Poles do not perceive domestic and EU institutions totally in terms of opposition. Poor marks given to Polish institutions do not necessarily translate into good marks for EU institutions. On the contrary: better marks given to one also mean better marks given to the

other, dissatisfaction with Polish institutions also means less acceptance for EU institutions. Good marks given to the European Parliament are linked with somewhat better opinions about the performance of Polish institutions and more criticism of the European Parliament also means a decisive criticism of domestic institutions. This indicates the presence of a generalized attitude toward the institutional order.

Positive opinions about the functioning of EU institutions are conducive to declarations in favor of taking part in the referendum and in support of integration. Among respondents with a positive opinion about the functioning of EU institutions (honest, efficient, caring for the average citizen), more than 80% plans to vote in the referendum, whereas among those who have a negative opinion of EU institutions, the proportion of those declaring their participation in the referendum is approximately 10% lower – some 70%.

### **WILL POLAND JOINING THE EU HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF POLISH PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS?**

However, in the view of the public opinion, integration of Poland with the European Union may be an incentive for halting the progress of the institutional crisis. A meaningful proportion of the Polish society hopes that Polish institutions will perform better after the country becomes an EU member. **Forty-eight percent of respondents believe that Poland's accession to the EU will have a positive influence on the performance of the Sejm and regional governments, 54%-55% see in it a chance for an improved performance of the central government, state administration and courts.** Respondents also take it as an argument in favor of their participation in the referendum – more than four fifths of respondents who expect that integration will contribute to the better performance of Polish institutions declare their wish to vote (85%-88%), some 80% of those will vote in favor of Poland joining the EU.

### **KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

However, the rate of knowledge about EU institutions is low. **Only 23% of respondents consider that they know quite a bit about the European Parliament and are satisfied with that amount of knowledge. More than one half (55%) consider not knowing much about that institution.** To an earlier question whether the European Union has a parliament, 63% of respondents answered yes. In their own opinion, Poles know the most about NATO (48% believe that they know a lot) and the UN (45% assess their knowledge of that institution as sufficient).

Among people who have heard and – in their own assessment – know quite a bit about the European Parliament, trust of this institution is somewhat higher (76%) than among those who know little or nothing at all about it (57%). A similar dependency is perceivable with respect to the knowledge of the European Commission. Therefore, it can be stated that a greater familiarity with EU institutions affects the level of the declared trust in the Union, whereas unfamiliarity translates into a greater distance and mistrust only slightly.

Poles' poor knowledge of the performance of the European Parliament is confirmed in responses to the question about the mode of electing European parliamentarians. A majority of respondents is not aware of the fact that their representatives to the European Parliament will be chosen in popular elections. Only one respondent in four (27%) knows that we will ourselves elect Polish deputies to the European Parliament.

<i>How do you think will be deputies to the European Parliament selected?</i>	
<b>By government appointment</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>By presidential appointment</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>By internal selection among deputies and senators</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>In popular elections</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>33</b>

Source: IPA

Also, for the first time, the Institute of Public Affairs asked Poles whether they would vote in elections to the European Parliament if such elections were held today. Forty-two percent stated that they would certainly vote. This must be treated with caution, rather as a declaration of interest in European affairs, considering that only 27% of respondents were aware of such elections and the fact that they are slated to take place in June 2004.

<i>Would you vote in elections to the European Parliament if they were held now, the coming Sunday?</i>	
<b>Certainly yes</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Probably yes</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Probably no</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Certainly no</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>11</b>

Source: IPA

**Do Poles ascribe importance to future Polish deputies to the European Parliament?** In the opinion of four fifths of respondents (84%), the fact of having our own representatives in the European Parliament will be very important to our country. Although that importance is assessed as least significant to the average citizen, nevertheless more than one half of respondents believes that the presence of Polish representatives in the European Parliament will also have an impact on their own lives.

<i>Do you believe that having Polish representatives in the European Parliament is important?</i>			
	<b>For the EU</b>	<b>For Poland</b>	<b>For people like you</b>
<b>Important</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Unimportant</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>

*Source: IPA*

Respondents have an idea of how many Polish deputies will sit in the European Parliament:

<i>How many deputies will represent Poland in the European Parliament? As many as in the case of:</i>	
<b>Large European countries (e.g. Germany, France)?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Medium-size European countries (e.g. Spain, Italy)?</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Small European countries (e.g. Portugal, Holland)?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Other countries on the eve of admission (e.g. Czech Republic, Hungary)?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>28</b>

*Source: IPA*

**An overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) would like to have an opportunity to find out more about the European Parliament**, with more than one third expressing such wish in very decisive terms. **Less than one fourth (23%) is not interested in these issues at all.**

## WHAT SHOULD BE POLAND'S ROLE IN EUROPE?

Although 63% of respondents tend to think that Polish deputies to the European Parliament will be important to the EU, Poles maintain a great deal of skepticism as concerns the role that our country can play in the Union. Sixty percent of respondents consider that Poland's role in the EU will be rather small. Only less than two fifths expect that Poland can play some more significant (at least medium) role in the EU.

<i>What importance will Poland have in the European Union?</i>	
<b>Little</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Medium</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Significant</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>2</b>

Source: IPA

However, more than one half of respondents expects that opportunities for Poland playing a more significant role in European politics after it joins the EU will rather grow than diminish. In spite of the fear that joining the EU means giving up some of national sovereignty, a majority of respondents is convinced that it is precisely the presence of our country in the structures of the European Union rather than staying out of it that may increase our importance on the international arena.

<i>Will Poland have a greater or smaller impact on issues important to Europe after it joins the European Union?</i>	
<b>Greater</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Smaller</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>21</b>

Source: IPA

*The Institute of Public Affairs will also soon publish a report on the perception and legitimization of the European Parliament in Poland, and a book dedicated to Poles' attitudes to Polish and EU democratic institutions.*