

The first decade in the European Union: Poland – strengths and weaknesses of the economy, effects of integration with the EU structures

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Abstract: The European Union is an example of deep and complex regional economic integration. The strong gravity of the EU resulted in its gradual enlargement. Poland joined the European Union in 2004 after a long and difficult accession process combined with transition of the Polish economy. The accession to the EU created significant advantages and true challenges for the Polish economy and the Polish society. The paper presents accession procedure to the EU from the Polish perspective and gives evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the Polish economy. It also discusses economic, social and political effects of integration with the European Union structures from the perspective of the first decade of membership in the EU structures.

Key-Words: Poland, European Union, regional economic integration, strengths, weaknesses, effects

1 Introduction

The European Union represents a really deep regional integration block embracing twenty eight economies in 2014. The origins of European integration should be looked for in the 1950s when six West European countries formed European Coal and Steel Community and a couple of years later created European Economic Community and European Atomic Energy Community. Since then both deepening of integration as well as successive enlargements have been under way. They resulted in the creation of the European Union in the beginning of 1990s, the adoption of euro as common currency for Economic and Monetary Union member states in late 1990s, implementation of many policies on European level (agricultural policy, policy of social, economic and territorial cohesion, competition policy, environmental protection policy, transportation policy among them) [1, 2, 3].

Poland began transition process in mid 1989. Political changes included building democratic society, promoting human rights and respect for national minorities. Economic reforms embraced creating market economy with functioning market of goods, service market, capital market and market of labour. Political and economic reforms introduced in Poland resulted in considerable changes in its foreign economic policy. Poland decided to tighten relations with the European Communities (ECs). In 1991 Poland signed Europe Agreement with the European Communities which served as a basis for its association with the ECs. In 1994 Poland decided to formally apply for full membership in the European Union and in 2004 it finally joined the EU. The paper aims at evaluating accession strengths and weaknesses of Poland. It also analyses economic, social and political effects of Poland's integration with the European Union from the perspective of the first decade of membership in the EU.

2 Poland as a candidate for the EU and a member state of the EU

2.1 Accession procedure to the European Union. The case of Poland

Poland's application to the European Union was presented by Minister for Foreign Affairs A.Olechowski on behalf of the Polish government on April 8th, 1994. It came as the second one after Hungarian (Hungary did so on April 1st, 1994). The European Commission revealed its avis on Poland in 1997. The avis was overall positive. The European Commission considered Poland as a democratic country, with stable institutions guaranteeing the rule of law, human rights respect and protection of minorities. With respect to economic aspects, however, some areas were criticised by the Commission, namely over employment in agriculture, neglected reform of coal-mining sector, environmental pollution and ineffective environmental protection policy, as well as not effective competition policy. Pre-accession negotiation, the so called screening began on March 31st, 1998 [4, pp.13-14]. This initial element of accession

procedure aimed at comparing the Polish legal regulations with the EU *acquis communautaire*. The last screening session took place on November 5th, 1999. Due to the fact that screening took so long, the EU and Poland decided to start proper accession negotiation talks before the final end of screening. Accession negotiations started on November 10th, 1998. In order to make the overall negotiation process easier and create a better climate for the talks, the two parties decided to begin with the easiest and least controversial areas like: Statistics, Small and Medium Enterprises, Science and Research, Telecommunication and Information Technologies, Education, Training and Youth. Accession negotiations took the form of Intergovernmental Accession Conferences, in which the representatives of both the European Commission, Poland and all 15 EU Member States (the level of ministry for foreign affairs) did participate. In all thirty one negotiation areas Poland had to prepare its position paper, the EU had to respond with common negotiating position. As a result of the talks in all the areas the project of the Accession Treaty was prepared. The final negotiation session took place in Copenhagen on December 13th, 2002. Poland had to negotiate three important, difficult and controversial areas, namely: Agriculture, Finance & Budget, and Competition Policy on this very last day. The Accession Treaty concerning the accession of Poland and nine other states to the EU was signed in Athens on April 16th, 2003. In June 2003 referendum was organised in Poland so that the Polish society could actively participate in making decision concerning the accession. The Polish government decided to organise the referendum as a two-day voting in order to promote it. 56% of Poles took part in it, 70% of them approved accession to the EU. The Accession Treaty was ratified by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski on July 23rd, 2003. Poland joined the EU on May 1st, 2004 together with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta and Cyprus [5, 6, 7].

2.2 Accession strengths and weaknesses of Poland

Poland was quite a controversial candidate for the European Union. A former socialist country, a young democracy with weak market economy was not a perfect applicant. The European Union had to be very cautious when accepting the application. Later it had to promote the necessary reforms and adjustments so as to prepare the Polish state, economy and society for a challenge of full membership in the EU structures. What features should be seen as accession strengths of Poland? What ought to be treated as Poland's accession weaknesses?

Let's start with the analysis of accession trumps of Poland. The list begins with demographic potential. Poland – with its 38 million potential consumers represents a huge internal market, the biggest one of all new EU member states. Then comes comparatively cheap labour force combined with pretty high qualifications (In 2013 minimum salary in Poland equalled EUR 395 and average salary amounted to EUR 800), rising educational aspirations and professional ambitions of Poles (with schooling ratio in tertiary education exceeding 50%). Favourable geographical, transport and communication location is another thing worth mentioning. West European politicians and economists stressed not once that having Poland in the European Union meant moving the border of political stability in Europe eastwards. Positive changes in GDP which have been observed since 1992 (even at the time of global crisis and instability, i.e. in 2009 and later) constitute the next positive feature of the Polish economy. Relative stability of democratic and legal system (no reservation of the EU concerning minorities' rights) should also be mentioned here together with advanced process of unifying Polish legal system with *acquis communautaire* even before the accession to the EU. The analysis of accession strengths of Poland must embrace social support for integration process with the EU. In referendum organised in 2003 70% of voters were for integration. After the accession social support became even higher. According to survey undertaken in April 2014 89% of Poles expressed their positive attitude towards the EU and pleasure with being in the EU structures. The list could be much longer with regions attractive for tourism, cultural heritage of Poland, low level of chemicals usage in Polish agricultural production [8, 9].

On the other hand, there were and still are many accession anachronisms (weaknesses) of the Polish economy. Wrong structure of employment seems to be one of crucial limitations of the Polish economy. Before the accession to the EU 26% of labour force in Poland was engaged in agriculture, while in EU-15 it was just 5%. In 2013 employment in agriculture in Poland still stood for 12.6%. Overemployment in agriculture was combined with underdevelopment in service sector (in Poland – 50% in 2003 and around 55% in 2013, while in EU-15 – 75% in 2003 and almost 80% in 2013). In the beginning of the 21st century wrong structure of property with overgrowth of public, state property was observed in Poland, though privatisation process was under way. This should be seen as an inheritance of communist past. Unfavourable structure of exports constitutes another weakness of the Polish economy. Poland exports mainly labour-intensive and raw-materials intensive goods. The next area of limitations is connected with technical and technological archaism and low level of innovativeness of the Polish economy. Gross expenditure on research and development (GERD) in Poland is around 0.7% GDP (while according to Lisbon Strategy, Renewed Lisbon Strategy as well as Europe 2020 Strategy it should reach 3% GDP). Low level of per capita GDP is another important accession weakness of Poland. Poland joined the EU as the poorest country in 2004 (per capita GDP in Poland accounted for

only 42% of EU-15 average). It became obvious that Poland would be net beneficiary of the EU budget (i.e. the country paying less money to the EU budget than receiving from it). One should note however that due to positive changes which have been observed in the Polish economy since 2004 (even at the time of global crisis and instability) in 2013 per capita GDP in Poland (according to purchasing parity power) represented 67% of EU-27 average. The next limitations of Poland as a candidate to the EU and a member of the EU include: one-way technical, technological and capital dependence of the Polish economy on highly developed economies, disparities in regional development (only a few regions are considered as very attractive by foreign investors: Masovia, Upper Silesia, Lower Silesia, Lower Poland, Pomerania and Greater Poland), transport infrastructure shortages, violation of EU competition law (too much state-aid for some sectors). One should also mention high taxes and not reformed fiscal system, environmental pollution and lack of effective policy of environmental protection, bureaucracy, ineffective courts and administration. In addition to that during the first years after the accession to the EU there were considerable problems with Eastern border (which was not tight enough) [10, 11].

3 Critical assessment of the effects of Poland's membership in the European Union

Membership in the European Union resulted in economic and political advantages. Economic effects of Poland's accession to the European Union included:

- elimination of tariffs, quantitative and qualitative restrictions in trade with respect to agriculture produce,
- elimination of qualitative restrictions in trade with respect to industrial goods (thanks to Europe Agreement signed in 1991 tariffs and quantitative restrictions had been lifted by the EU by the year 1999)
- free movement of services,
- free movement of people, i.e. possibility to live, study, work in any EU country and have the same rights as this country's citizens (interim periods were introduced by most EU-15 countries, the longest ones lasted seven years – Austria and Germany decided to use them),
- participation in Common Agricultural Policy (really important element of integration due to the significance of agricultural sector in employment in Poland),
- participation in EU Policy of Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, i.e. financial assistance in the form of structural funds and Cohesion Fund (another crucial area of economic advantages because of how poor Poland and the Polish regions were) [12].

In future the above list will also include participation in the third stage of Economic and Monetary Union and advantages stemming from this element of integration such as: lower transaction costs, elimination of exchange-rate changes risk, easy comparability of costs, prices and income [13, pp. 92-101]. According to the Accession treaty Poland is obliged to meet Maastricht convergence criteria and join euro zone as soon as possible.

Political effects of integration with the European Union are equally important. The list of political advantages includes:

- increased credibility of Poland in the eyes of trade partners and foreign investors,
- moving the border of political stability in Europe eastwards thanks to Poland's membership in the EU,
- possibility to work in EU institutions and therefore participate in creating the future of EU integration [14].

Thanks to integration with the structures of the European Union Poland belongs to a wide family of European countries, family once divided and in the first decade of the 21st century, due to Eastern enlargement of the EU, reunited.

Four selected areas of effects of Poland's membership in the EU have been studied and presented below, namely: net financial effect for Poland, implementation of EU Policy of Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion in Poland, development of Polish-EU trade relations, as well as evolution of migration tendencies of Poles.

All member states can be divided into two groups according to net financial effect of their membership in the EU: net contributors (i.e. states paying more to the EU budget than receiving from it) and net beneficiaries (i.e. states receiving more funds from the EU budget than contributing to it). Since the very first year in the EU structures Poland has been one of net beneficiaries. What's more, at present Poland is the biggest net beneficiary of the EU budget. No other member state received such financial assistance from the EU budget. Net financial effect of Poland's membership in the EU looks as follows:

- from 2004 to 2006 – EUR 6.3 billion, i.e. EUR 2.1 billion per year on average;
- from 2007 to 2013 – EUR 65.0 billion, i.e. EUR 9.28 billion per year on average;
- from 2014 to 2020 – EUR 75.8 billion, i.e. EUR 10.83 billion per year on average (prospects) [15, 16, pp. 57-75].

Poland is an important beneficiary of EU Policy of Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion. From 2004 to 2006 that EU policy was implemented in Poland through seven operational programmes. Five of them were sectoral operational programmes: SOP Improvement of the competitiveness of enterprises, SOP Human Resources Development, SOP Transport, SOP Restructuring and modernisation of the food sector and rural development. All sectoral programmes were mono-funded (single-funded) ones. Additionally Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP) was implemented; this programme was multi-funded. IROP was managed on national level, but implemented in a decentralised system on the level of voivodships. Technical assistance operational programme was supposed to create better conditions for the implementation of other programmes thanks to investment in the field of administration and necessary technical infrastructure. Additionally assistance from Cohesion Fund was used for the development of transport infrastructure and investment in the field of environmental protection. The total EU funds allocated for Poland for years 2004 to 2006 amounted to EUR 12.81 billion at current prices, including EUR 8.27 billion from the structural funds, EUR 4.18 billion from Cohesion Fund and the remaining EUR 355 million from Community Initiatives (INTERREG and EQUAL) [17, p.94]

Within the next multiannual financial framework of the EU, i.e. MFF 2007-2013 Poland was granted EUR 67.3 billion for the implementation of New Cohesion Policy. Table 6 presents operational programmes, the allocation of funds and respective EU funds for all the programmes. The majority of operational programmes were mono-funded ones. OP Infrastructure and Environment was the only exception here (both Cohesion Fund and European Regional Development Fund were used as financial sources). This time all Polish regions (voivodships) prepared their own regional programmes (Integrated Regional Operational Programme was no longer in operation). Regional operational programmes were created in strong correlation with the current situation in each and every voivodship. OP Infrastructure and Environment was the biggest one (EU assistance amounted to EUR 27.9 billion). One should stress the importance of OP Human Capital (aiming at promoting activity and employment and fighting unemployment), OP Innovative Economy (which aimed at promoting innovative development and modernisation of the economy) [18, pp.122-123]

According to data presented by Ministry of Infrastructure and Development since the start of the above listed programmes until 31st May, 2014 296800 applications (correct from the formal point of view) were submitted for the global amount of co-financing (both Community and national funds) of PLN 603.3 billion. During the same period 98721 contracts for co-financing were signed with beneficiaries, for the amount of PLN 394.9 billion, amount of co-funding on the part of the EU of PLN 274.3 billion, which constitutes 97 percent of allocation for the 2007-2013 period. The value of beneficiaries' expenditure recognised as eligible, resulting from submitted payment claims was PLN 277 billion, and in the part of EU co-financing – PLN 196.4 billion [19, p. 2]

The current stage of EU Cohesion Policy implementation is connected with the Strategy Europe 2020. It focuses on: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. Key priorities include: innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for small and medium-sized businesses, the shift to a low-carbon economy, Trans-European transport links, promoting training, education and life-long learning, social inclusion. In case of Poland and its participation in Cohesion Policy the prospects for the years 2014-2020 are really optimistic. Poland is to receive EUR82.5 billion of assistance from the EU funds designed for cohesion policy [19] The effectiveness of implementation of EU Policy of Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion will determine the position of the Polish economy in the European Union and in a globalised world economy.

The possibility to trade goods without any barriers (tariffs, quantitative restrictions and qualitative ones) resulted in considerable increase in Polish-EU trade. Table 1 presents value of trade turnover between Poland and the EU from 2004 to 2013. In 2004 Poland exported goods worth EUR 47.2 billion to the EU and imported products worth EUR 48.7 billion from the EU; deficit in Poland's trade with the EU amounting to EUR1.4 billion was observed. In 2005 Poland exported EUR 55.1 billion worth of goods to the EU and imported EUR 53.2 billion worth of goods from the EU. Trade surplus of EUR 1.9 billion was noted. An upward tendency was observed from 2005 to 2008 in case of both exports and imports. In 2008 Polish exports to the EU amounted to EUR 90.5 billion and its imports from the EU reached EUR 88.2 billion. Global crisis and instability resulted in considerable fall in Polish-EU trade turnover in 2009. The value of Polish goods exported to the EU fell to EUR 78 billion and the value of goods imported from the EU dropped to EUR 66.5 billion. Owing to a much stronger fall in imports one could observe huge surplus in Poland's trade with the EU amounting to EUR 11.8 billion. From 2010 to 2013 increase in both exports to the EU and imports from the EU was observed. Again exports dynamics was higher than imports one which means further rise in surplus in Polish trade with the EU (in 2013 it was as high as EUR 24.3 billion).

Poland's exports to the EU focused on five CN sections, namely: XVI - Machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical and electronic equipment, XVII – Transport equipment, XV – Base metals and articles thereof. IV – Prepared foodstuffs, V – Mineral products, VI – Products of the chemical industry, VII – Plastics and rubber and

articles thereof and XX – Miscellaneous manufactured articles (furniture, toys). In 2013 the above mentioned sections accounted for 80% of Polish exports to the EU market (the first three of them accounted for nearly 50% of Poland's exports to the EU). In Poland's imports from the EU five sections were crucial: XVI - Machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical and electronic equipment, XV – Base metals and articles thereof, XVII – Transport equipment, VI – Products of the chemical industry and VII – Plastics, rubber and articles thereof. They accounted for around 72% in the analysed period of time [21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28].

Table 1. Trade relations between Poland and the EU from 2004 to 2012 (million EUR)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Exports to EU	47231.7	55136.0	68079.0	80316.0	90457.0	78288.0	95286.0	106620.0	109080.0	114300.0
Imports from EU	48669.1	53200.0	63697.0	77240.0	88171.0	66531.0	79849.0	91043.0	88581.0	90000.0
Trade balance	-1437.4	1936.0	4382.0	3076.0	2286.0	11757.0	15437.0	15577.0	20499.0	24300.0

Source: Major Statistical Office data [21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, p. 5 and p.10].

According to the Accession Treaty a seven-year transitional period was introduced for the right of workers from Poland to freely move to EU-15 Member States to work. It aimed at allowing EU-15 Member States to gradually introduce free movement step-by-step during this period in order to avoid labour market disturbances by a sudden inflow of workers following Eastern enlargement. Nevertheless three EU-15 Member States opened their labour markets for the Polish citizens in 2004: the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ireland. In 2006 Greece, Spain, Portugal, Finland and Italy cancelled the restrictions for workers from Poland. In 2007 labour markets of the Netherlands and Luxembourg were opened. France did the same in 2008. Belgium and Denmark ended restrictions and opened their markets of labour in May 2009. Germany and Austria continued to apply restrictions on labour market access till the end of April 2011. Since May 2011 workers from Poland have had free access to the market of labour in other EU Member States [29].

Table 2. Emigration from Poland from 2004 to 2012 (number of emigrants, thousands)

Destination country	NSP 2002 (b)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	NSP 2011	2011	2012
Total	786	1000	1450	1950	2270	2210	2100	2000	2017	2060	2130
Europe	461	770	1200	1610	1925	1887	1765	1685	1693	1754	1816
EU-27 (d)	451	750	1170	1550	1860	1820	1690	1607	1622	1670	1720
Austria	11	15	25	34	39	40	36	29	24	25	28
Belgium	14	13	21	28	31	33	34	45	47	47	48
Cyprus	.	.	.	.	4	4	3	3	3	3	2
Denmark	.	.	.	.	17	19	20	19	18	21	23
Finland	0.3	0.4	0.7	3	4	4	3	3	2	2	2
France	21	30	44	49	55	56	60	60	62	62	63
Greece	10	13	17	20	20	20	16	16	17	15	14
Netherlands	10	23	43	55	98	108	98	92	92	95	97
Spain	14	26	37	44	80	83	84	48	45	40	37
Ireland	2	15	76	120	200	180	140	133	131	120	118
Germany	294	385	430	450	490	490	465	440	437	470	500
Portugal	0.3	0.5	0.6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Czech Republic	.	.	.	.	8	10	9	7	7	7	8
Sweden	6	11	17	25	27	29	31	33	34	36	38
United Kingdom	24	150	340	580	690	650	595	580	601	625	637
Italy	39	59	70	85	87	88	88	92	94	94	97
Non-EU countries	10	20	30	60	65	67	75	78	71	85	96
Norway	.	.	.	.	36	38	45	50	43	56	65

(d) up to 2006 – 25 countries

Source: [30]

Free movement of workers was considered an extremely important element of EU integration because of the situation on the Polish labour market at the time of accession. In 2004 unemployment rate in Poland exceeded 20%.

Table 2 presents emigration tendencies from 2004 to 2012 as well as data for the year 2002 for comparison. Total number of emigrants increased from 786 thousand in 2002 to 1 million in 2004, almost 1.5 million in 2005 and over 2 million from 2007 onwards. The number of emigrants from Poland was the highest in 2007 (just before the beginning of global financial crisis) when it amounted to 2.3 million. Later it was slightly reduced to around 2.0 million in 2010 but from 2011 to 2012 it grew to 2.1 million. The majority of Poles chose one of EU-27 countries as a destination one. In 2012 1.7 million emigrants from Poland stayed in one of EU countries. The United Kingdom was the number one destination for Polish emigration. It was chosen by almost 400 thousand Polish emigrants in 2004 and almost 640 thousand in 2012. Germany was the second choice. In 2012 0.5 million emigrants from Poland stayed in Germany (in 2004 – 385 thousand). Emigration from Poland to Ireland started just after Poland's accession to the EU. In 2002 just 2 thousand emigrants from Poland stayed in Ireland, in 2005 their number was close to 80 thousand, a year later it exceeded 120 thousand and in 2007 it reached 200 thousand. Later, because of the crisis and a difficult situation on the Irish market of labour, the number of Poles staying in Ireland started falling and in 2012 it amounted to 118 thousand. The Netherlands and Italy are also quite important destinations for emigration of the Poles: in 2012 almost 100 thousand Polish citizens stayed in each of those countries [30].

4 Conclusion

The first decade of Poland's membership in the European Union must be seen as a decade of success. Positive effects of integration can be found in socio-economic sphere, as well as with respect to political aspects. Free movement of goods, services, labour and capital created favourable conditions for the activity of Polish companies. Rising competitiveness of products "made in Poland" resulted in growing surplus in Poland's trade with other EU member states. Membership in the EU increased investment attractiveness of the Polish economy and gave stimulus for inflow of capital in the form of FDI into the Polish economy. As a net beneficiary of EU budget Poland was granted financial assistance of more than EUR 70 billion from 2004 to 2013. Structural funds, Cohesion Fund and money designed for agricultural sector helped modernise the Polish economy and reduce the gap in its socio-economic development. More than 1.7 million Polish citizens decided to emigrate to other EU member states taking advantage of free movement of labour. For sure this result of Poland's membership in the EU is quite controversial: on the one hand it reduced unemployment in Poland, on the other, however, it did create some social and demographic problems. Being part of the European Union seemed of particular importance especially at the time of global financial crisis 2008+ and successive economic instability in the world economy. It is even more important in 2014 with increasing political instability in Europe, not far from Poland's and EU's eastern border.

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