Poland’s membership in the European Union and its implications to further Polish-Australian cooperation

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both a great pleasure and honour for me to be able to address you today on the subject of the possible consequences of our membership in the European Union to the Polish-Australian cooperation. Before I start with a brief analysis of what has been achieved so far on our road to the EU, where we stand at the moment, what are our expectations related to our status of an EU member state and how we want to contribute to the Union’s further development, allow me to make some introductory remarks.

We often say in Poland, ironically, “May you live long enough to see interesting times”. There can be no doubt that over the last two hundred years few Poles could complain about being bored. For many generations, the ability to exercise sovereign rights of a state and a nation, harmonious economic and social development, respect for democracy and rule of law, to name only a few things, existed only in the realm of dreams. Profound transformation of Central and Eastern Europe initiated in the year 1989 drew worldwide attention to our region, as it usually occurs with unstable and somewhat unpredictable phenomena. Again, Poland was perceived as an interesting country, because the enormity and complexity of challenges lying ahead of the Polish society was indeed of unprecedented scale. Sometimes I have an impression that we are not yet able to fully appreciate the scope of changes that have taken place for during the last fourteen years. However, one thing is worth emphasizing- thanks to the efforts made by the Polish society and favorable geopolitical situation we can be no longer perceived as an interesting country, in the sense that I have explained before.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The key priority of the Polish foreign policy has been to anchor Poland in the democratic structures of security, political and economic cooperation. Since the very beginning of the transformations the membership in NATO and in the EU have been the fundamental objectives of successive Polish governments, irrespective of their political affiliations. Thanks to the resolve of the political elite and strong support of the citizens, Poland became a NATO member-state in 1999. At the Copenhagen European Council in December last year, we managed to successfully conclude a painstaking process of accession negotiations with the European Union. On April 16th in Athens the Accession Treaty will be signed between the member states of the European Union and 10 aspirants, including Poland, thus paving the way for the Union of 25 instead of 15. Subsequently, all member states, both present and future, will have to ratify the Treaty, according to their internal procedures. For almost all aspirants this means also national referendum. The Polish referendum will be held in June. If everything goes well, and no other scenario can be seriously discussed, as of May 1st 2004, Poland and nine other countries will have become full-fledged member states of the European Union.
It would be a bit premature to outline in detail our priorities of the ever broader policy agenda within the enlarged Union. The European Convention, of which we are active participants, and of which the key goal is to prepare the ground for the next Intergovernmental Conference, is the place of heated debates concerning the new shape of the European Union. We consider it a very useful forum for asking difficult questions regarding the division of power between member states and the Community institutions, bringing the Union closer to its citizens, reducing the so-called democratic deficit, to name but a few issues.

At present the work is focused on drafting the EU Constitutional Treaty, which is expected to be ready for the European Council meeting in June. The Convention and the next Intergovernmental Conference will result in further integration of the EU.

The EU enlargement is also a good opportunity to start thinking about revising some internal policies, which undoubtedly could work more efficiently in the future. The famous Common Agricultural Policy is an outstanding example in this respect. Poland is fully aware of the criticism, both external and internal, of this area of EU activity. We share the view, voiced by many, that CAP needs to be reformed. Nevertheless, critical as we may be towards the whole idea of granting subsidies to farmers, we need to recognize two facts: first of all, that the European Union is not the only “villain” in the global economy and secondly, that the socio-economic position of all people employed in agriculture would deteriorate dramatically if we were to make any rapid changes. Therefore, we need to act cautiously. I strongly believe that there is a need for improvements, provided that the EU shows sufficient political vision and resolve in carrying out necessary reforms.

In addition to what has already been said about the enlargement of the EU, it is worth mentioning that this process is also likely to bring benefits not only to the current and future members, but also to third parties. Poland regards its future membership in the EU as a chance to boost bilateral trade relations with Australia. After the exchange of both official ministerial visits and working-level delegations, we have identified several prospective areas of co-operation. They include information technology, education, food processing, environmental protection and the textile industry. At present, graphite-based products, glassware, chemicals, furniture, clothing and car tires top the list of Polish exports to Australia. Many experts believe that a good market for Polish ships, sailing boats and golf carts exists Down Under. At the moment, Australian investments in Poland total 70 million US dollars. The principal investors are Amcor, Land Lease Central Europe and Matrix. In June 2002 Australian Export Finance and Insurance Corporation upgraded Poland’s export and investment-risk rating from group 3 to group 2, thus putting Poland in the same league as Japan and the Republic of Korea. This is good news. Hopefully, that decision will result in the increased interest in Poland from the part of the Australian business community and subsequently will bring about an increased flow of Australian investment capital into Poland.

Moreover, we would like to take advantage of being a part of the enlarged Union in our relations with Australia in regard to visa regime. We are glad that after enlargement of the EU Australians will be able to visit Poland without visas. Despite the fact that there is no reciprocity in this respect, we hope that our Australian partners will introduce several changes to the visa regime for Polish citizens coming to Australia.
The new Australian White Paper on Foreign Affairs and Trade “Advancing the National Interest” was received in Poland with great interest. One of the chapters is focused on the enlarged Europe. We are happy that Australia wishes to increase its political, economic and what is the most important people-to-people links with countries of our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to elaborate on two issues that are high on political agenda of the European Union and that will affect Polish-Australian relations future development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the economic reform of the EU, the so-called Lisbon Agenda.

Poland wants to be an increasingly active player in the field of the emerging European Common Foreign and Security Policy and European Security and Defense Policy. We are confident that they will add a new dimension to bilateral relations with Australia and we are going to do our best to maximize the potential provided by the EU-Australia cooperation framework. Obviously, we would be most interested in boosting our trade and economic cooperation, especially by attracting potential Australian investors to our country.

Although the development of the Eastern dimension of the EU, that is the EU relations with its Eastern neighbours, is likely to become an issue of primary concern for Poland in the CFSP context during the years to come, we are willing to contribute to all spheres of external activity of the EU. One of the most promising areas of further development of the CFSP is the policy towards Asia and the Pacific.

Poland realizes that Asia is one of the key areas of foreign policy for both Europe and Australia. No wonder, after all Asian states are significant partners in cooperation covering many fields. China and India are newcomers to the club of world powers, playing a bigger and bigger role in international relations. At the same time Asia is a continent of huge contrasts. On the one hand, there is an immense economic development potential and advanced democratization process under way. On the other hand, there are regions affected by conflicts, crises, and thus representing threats to peace and security, both in the local and in the global dimension. In addition to this, we follow with concern and anxiety the existence of Asian movements supporting the international terrorist activities. The European Union attaches high priority to political and economic relations with Asian states, especially with China, India, Japan, South Korea and the Association of South-East Asia Nations (ASEAN). The dialog in the framework of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which deals with security issues is also very important. Poland hopes to be incorporated into these and other for a of Euro-Asian cooperation and the active dialog in their framework. We fully acknowledge the fact that important economic and trade ties link Europe and Asia. But not only that. The threats and challenges of the contemporary world, such as the global struggle against the phenomenon of terrorism constitute an important element of the dialog.

We deeply hope that cooperation between Australia, Asia and Europe will be beneficial for all the parties involved in the process and will encompass an increasing number of issues, ranging from trade and economy, fight against international terrorism and organized crime to cultural cooperation.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The second important issue that I would like to touch upon in my address is our engagement in the process of economic reforms of the European Union. The conclusion of the accession negotiations has consigned the East-West divide in Europe to history books. But that does not mean we can rest on our laurels. After enlargement, the EU must be synonymous with increasing prosperity for all its citizens. Prosperity achieved through sustainable growth, social cohesion, and sound financial policies. One important instrument for achieving a prosperous Europe is the Lisbon Strategy, which aims at turning the EU into a modern knowledge-based economy. The target is to make the EU the world’s most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010, an economy that can achieve sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. In a European Union in which the economies of the member states are increasingly interdependent, the Lisbon Strategy is of immense importance—not just for the present member states, but for the aspirants, too. During this year’s Spring European Council, which is due in less than two weeks’ time, we would like to show our commitment to reaching the goals set in Lisbon nearly three years ago. We are of the opinion that this might be a recipe for giving the necessary boost to our economy. At the same time, we believe that achieving the goals of the Lisbon Strategy will inevitably open the EU economy even more. However, further and closer trade and economic co-operation between Australia and the EU require not only more openness of the latter, but also common EU-Australia position in the international fora, like WTO. We would like to work with the Australians on identifying interests and priorities, which are common to them and to the Europeans.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat my deep personal belief that the enlarged European Union and Australia should and can increase their economic cooperation for the benefit of their citizens. Poland as a new member of the EU will be ready to make its contribution to that effort.

Thank you for your attention.