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I would like to start by saying that it has now been eleven years since Poland and seven other central and eastern European countries, along, as you know, with Cyprus and Malta, have joined the European Union in 2004. However, we had been waiting for this first of May 2004 for ten years, from the moment when we applied, which was on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1994, when our foreign minister went to the meeting of the Council in Athens, under the Greek presidency, and submitted our application for membership.

So, it has been for more than two decades that we had been involved in European affairs. First, we were not able to apply because we were on the other side of the river, while the European integration had emerged from the ashes of the Second World War. Then, we could immediately start to think about this potential that was there on the other bank of the river. So it has been a long time since the moment we started to think of and get ready to become a member. That was important because that had an impact on the way we handled the whole process of getting Poland into the European Union. What also mattered strongly was the fact that, in parallel to the process of preparation for accession (first association, then accession, as you remember) we were engaged in the whole transition from the previous, some people say communist, others say centrally-planned socialist, economy, to market economy and to democracy. At the same time we negotiated our accession to the OECD, for which I had the pleasure to be the chief negotiator, and we negotiated membership to the WTO, so we were engaged in many processes at the same time and one of those was preparing for the accession to the European Union. Accession to the European Union was a very special process, because it was very strongly interlinked with all the reform. We knew that whatever we were doing to become a member of the European Union, we would have to do in any case because these were reforms that were taking us towards market economy and also towards institutional change and fully-fledged democracy. So I would say that those processes were interlinked, interdependent, and that they were also strengthening each other.

The accession to the Union was also used the traditional European way as a blame game. When having to pass difficult reforms, we said that we had to do them because otherwise we would not be accepted by the European Union, so we had to do them before we joined the European Union. The accession was also some sort of light at the end of the tunnel and it was a very strong argument that was giving strength and direction to the reforms. I think the prospect of accession to the

European Union was also seen by those of us who were involved and who saw a lot of risks as well in this process as a guarantee for the irreversibility of the whole change in our countries. From this point of view as well, the prospect of the accession is what was extremely important.

But of course, when we were getting ready, we were not yet a fully-fledged market economy, not yet a stable fully-fledged democracy with all the institutions, all this was just taking shape. In the EU member States, at that same time, you had sometimes one hundred years or two hundred years of tradition, while we were just building all these elements, introducing all these changes. So, that also made the whole process more difficult and required, probably, institutional solutions that would maybe not be needed otherwise. Looking back at this period, I clearly see that the main element that was the basic precondition for a successful accession, for a successful preparation that would later on result in a successful membership, was absolutely the quality of public administration.

As you can imagine, in that part of Europe what we inherited from the past was not only an economy which was in relatively bad shape but also an administration which did not fit the new challenges. So we had at the same time to reorganise the way we functioned. A lot of institutional reforms were conducted back then but I think our administration generally suffered from a lack of quality and a lack of skills. To mention but one example, we did not have people in the administration who spoke foreign languages at that time. In this context, I was for a while, I think for three years, deputy minister for economy and then I could work on accession with three or four people.

We also had an administration that was extremely hierarchical in the way it functioned and in the way it was thinking. Decisions were made at the top and then implemented down the chain of command. I think we continue even now to suffer in our administration from this hierarchical tradition, which makes it very difficult to meet a lot of contemporary challenges in our part of Europe. At that time the minister was really in control of everything. I remember that, later on, when I was a Commissioner, a director was coming from a French ministry. He was coming with decisions, he was making decisions as he was talking to me. By contrast, in Poland, to have decisions, you had to refer to the minister or sometimes to the Prime minister. I think this type of thinking, this tradition stayed with us for quite long and, of course, produced a lot of mistrust: we did not trust each other because we could not decide on many things.

So there was a need, in the time that we were given and that we gave to ourselves, to work on this cultural change, on a change of mindset in the administration, which was extremely difficult. That is why when the National School of Public Administration, the Polish equivalent of ENA operating in cooperation with ENA, was established, that was a chance that maybe those with the archives would just bring also the knowledge of how to manage the life of a country and some changes in the approach to how you do this.

So, there were those weaknesses of administration. In addition, as you can imagine, we came out of a long period dominated by a very different system and the general thinking was that whatever was State-owned or State-related was bad. We were reducing the role of State overnight and the public as well as the political elite were expecting the weight of the administration to be reduced. They were wondering why we had all those hundreds of civil servants and there was this conviction that every State administration was simply too big. Therefore, the main point of every party in every electoral campaign was always to reduce the staff employed in the administration. This staff had also very low salaries, which was strengthening the received idea that there were too many civil servants in the administration who did nothing and earned too much. This was a general climate that was felt by the politicians so we also had to overcome this and address this challenge. This was important. Those of us who were in charge of preparing Poland we travelled a lot and my feeling and my observation was that good-quality administration was absolutely the most important precondition for a successful integration and was key for integration. If we did not fix problems in the administration, if we did not set things right, we were not going to be well prepared for the accession, and later on, to benefit from membership.

I would also mention that one of the biggest challenges was that, for the first time, actually, we were free and we were obliged, for the negotiations, to identify what was Polish national interest. Was national interest a simple sum of sectorial interests, was it enough to sum up what the fishermen wanted, what the farmers wanted, what the miners wanted, what the teachers wanted, and so on, in order to obtain it? Or was it something different? In complement to the discussions that we had on those issues and during the negotiations, Polish negotiations were the biggest challenge. So we had to learn how to identify the Polish national interest and how to combine the sectorial interests with the national interest. That was also quite a challenge in the whole reform of administration.

And then, of course, there was the need to create a special structure for the preparation, to first negotiate and then to head into the European Union. Over the years, I think the system in Poland has evolved like in many countries, but the Polish evolution of the system of running the European affairs is somewhat interesting because it evolved in the opposite direction from what took place in other countries. We started with these affairs being the responsibility of the Prime minister and then they were devolved to the foreign ministry while, typically, in the West, I think it was within the remit of the foreign ministry at the beginning and then it was understood that it was an internal issue and it was either centralised or moved to Prime minister's field of competence. We did it in a different way and we also had periods when we had a combination. For instance when I joined and when I was made responsible in 1995 for the reforms, I was supposed to propose the establishment of a new structure. At the beginning we had a small structure within the Prime minister's office, which consisted, I think, of sixty or seventy people. Then as

negotiations were approaching in 1995 we had to reform it and make it more serious. Back then I was a vice-minister for the economy and in charge there for European affairs and I was moved to the competence of the Prime minister and I was in charge there of preparing for these reforms. We were looking at the models available at that time and I remember my first trip to what was SGCE [*Secrétariat général du Comité interministériel*] at that time. We had to start. We had a good cooperation with France and, among other, also, a good cooperation at the academic level. We also have always had this obsession with France, starting with Napoleon, and we have often been disappointed with France because we expected too much. I went to SGCE and I spent days discussing and looking at the administrative structure in charge of European Affairs.

Then, we borrowed the French model. We created a two-tiered ministerial committee for European integration, and also an office. In 1995, we had two levels. There was a kind of conflict between the foreign minister's and the Prime minister's offices and we ended up by having the Prime minister chairing the committee. Then we had a State Secretary, which was me. I was the first State Secretary for this office of European integration, then completely separate from the foreign ministry, between 1995 and 1997. Then I left in 1998 and the position was taken over by my colleague, then I was in the UN and then I went back in 2002 and then I left in 2004 to become the first Polish Commissioner. At that time the idea was to have the European Affairs office under the Prime minister and to have it on the French model. We chose this model because of those relations that I told you about but also because we have a legal system also largely based on the French system, we also have our territorial system borrowed from the French model, so I think it was sort of justified that we were compelling ourselves to pick up this system for the preparation to join the European Union.

We did not have any requirement from the European Commission about the model, they only wanted to have an efficient coordination system in Poland. And that was the biggest challenge, to achieve coordination because, you can see it also in Europe today, we have a tradition of administration very much organised in silos. Breaking this, and having horizontal coordination and speaking with one voice, was quite a challenge. And I remember my conversations with directors from the ministries, when I was just State Secretary and was creating the structure in the ministries between 1995 and 1997, who were saying "Who are you to tell us what to do? We have our own ministers". Every cabinet meeting was starting with my reporting on the ministers and how they could not deliver and I can tell you I thought they all wanted to kill me, but, if I had not done that, we would not have succeeded. So overcoming the administration's tradition and administrative culture that did not fit current challenges was something that was extremely difficult but extremely important. I could really see with my own eyes how important administration was, how much depended on administration, how things could be blocked if we were not well-prepared and how important it was to have good people on board.

In Poland, we started to build the administration for European Affairs with people from the academia. The first office of the plenipotentiary was established in 1991. That was just a group of people from university and that was just how it all started. Then we built on it and we had more people from academia so in fact the coordination of European affairs was never in the hands of traditional Polish members or employees of a ministry but more of people who had more freedom of thinking, were more independent and knowledgeable. That was extremely useful in two respects: firstly, because we never assumed that some things could not be done, we were just thinking differently, and secondly because we had knowledge and skills, including language skills. But that was just the beginning and then we understood that we had to stabilise the administration and have really a reorganisation of the process of running the European policy on a probably different basis and that is why this evolution was so important.

During the first years of membership, in 2005-2006, we maintained the administrative system that we established for the negotiations. In the meantime we had to include also the foreign ministry into the process because, according to the Constitution, the negotiations had to be done by the foreign ministry. That is why I was a strange figure because I was at the same time working at the chancellery of the Prime Minister and subordinate to him and made State Secretary in the foreign ministry so that I could supervise not only the preparation for accession but also the negotiations that we had to work on. We were doing this kind of thing to have a good coordination and because the administration was not yet fully prepared to think in terms of horizontal common interests, horizontal cooperation and coordination.

Another big challenge was the cooperation between the administration and the Polish Parliament. When we were joining the European Union in 2004 we established for the first time a special law on the cooperation between the government and the Parliament which was I think modelled on the typical provisions that exist in the European Union: Prime ministers or ministers, before and after going to Brussels, go to national Parliament to inform and then to debrief parliamentarians. Also, we were the only country where there was opposition to the European accession. In the nine other countries that were negotiating together with us, there was nowhere a party that was against joining the European Union but we had in Poland two parties of this type. Because of this context, I could not be a permanent minister because as a minister I would have lost immediately the confidence of the Parliament, while as a State Secretary they could not reach me. As an illustration, there was this moment after the referendum in 2003 when the president proposed that we had a minister for European Affairs and I was nominated at the end of June 2003. As early as on the first of July there was a vote of confidence in the Polish Parliament because the opposition to the European accession used this to fight against the accession of Poland.

So politics have also reduced the efficiency of administration, I can ensure you that this can happen. Therefore, independence of politics and administration is absolutely

crucial. At that time this was not ensured: we had the law on civil service, we had also the effort, everything was in place but the system was not yet matured so we had also a lot of problems with this. In the Parliament we had to establish a strong link through reporting and information. In both chambers we have the committees for European Affairs that are also working and cooperating with the government. There is nothing special in the Polish solution even though we probably had a much weaker Parliament in terms of expertise. Today, we are still suffering from this compared many more mature Member States and democracies.

Another very big challenge that has been with us for the two decades of preparing to or being in the European Union was of course bringing people on board. In 1995, we established special advisory councils for integration. We invited celebrities from all segments of culture, which was extremely useful in promoting the accession and we also had a special council for young people and a special council for media, including local and regional ones. So we were having all sorts of fora where the administration was helping people to understand the challenges and tried to take them on board in this whole process.

We also had from the very beginning cooperation between the national administration and the permanent representation and the ambassador in Brussels, which is a normal thing. Here, we also had to learn. I would say one of the major weaknesses of Polish administration has been and continues to be the challenge of identifying the Polish interest on topics such as, for instance, energy or climate change and to have it passed on to the European level in such a way that we can be effective and efficient and make things happen. The challenge is not only a political one, it also depends on the efficiency of the administration, on its ability to think ahead and to have things prepared on time.

I would say that today I think we are a fully-fledged member. We are functioning rather smoothly. We have been already through our presidency three years ago. So as you can imagine we are not any more a sort of young administration that can use its newness as an excuse for not being perfect on many things. We continue to improve the administration. We are learning all the time and I think we are today a normal country but still with, I think, the French system dominating, even though when we joined the Union the whole office of European integration was formally moved to the foreign ministry. I think one can question this because we did it exactly when we joined the European Union and European Affairs just stopped being at all a foreign affairs issue and started to be an internal policy issue.

To conclude, what I wanted to leave with you is that in the European Union context, and I think also from the perspective of European institutions, the quality of administration is absolutely fundamental. National administrations are important as partners for European institutions. Also the implementation of law, which is crucial in a context in which we start to think more in terms of enforcement and implementation and less about legislating, is all or to a large extent in the hands of

administrations. I am not only referring to central administrations because regional and local administration is also very important in countries with strong regions and a certain amount of decentralisation. In Poland we had also prepared the regional level of administration to cope with policies such as regional policy, and we had excellent young people coming to work with the presidencies of the regions.