

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ON THE EVE OF NATO MEMBERSHIP
- FALLING SUPPORT FOR JERZY BUZEK'S GOVERNMENT
- FARMERS' PROTESTS
- WEALTH AND POVERTY IN THE EYES OF POLES

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH CENTER - CBOS -

4a Żurawia
00-503 Warszawa
POLAND

Ph: (48 22) 629 35 69
(48 22) 628 37 04
(48 22) 693 58 94

Fax: (48 22) 629 40 89

E-mail: cbos@pol.pl

<http://www.cbos.pl>

© COPYRIGHT BY CBOS 1999

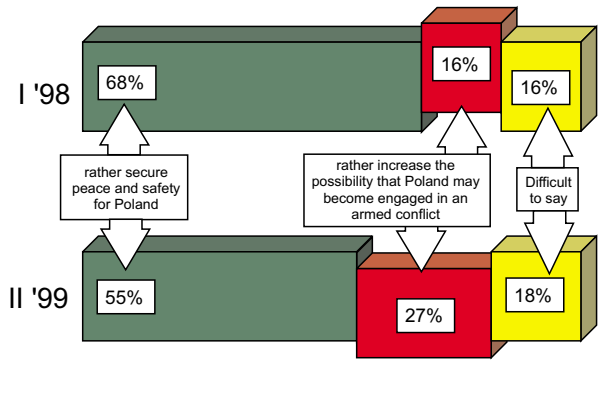
ALL SOURCES MUST BE CREDITED WHEN ANY PART OF THIS PUBLICATION IS REPRODUCED

ON THE EVE OF NATO MEMBERSHIP

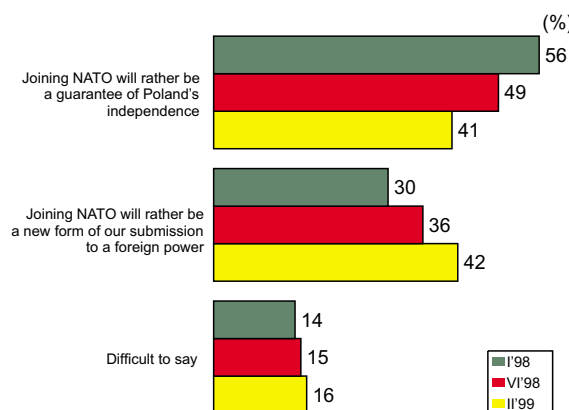
In just a few weeks' time Poland will become a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. For over half of respondents (51%) the information on our admission will be good news, almost two fifths (37%) are indifferent and only 6% will treat it as bad news. More than half of Poles (57%) believe that the international position of Poland will improve and her opinions will matter more on the international scene as a result of joining this organisation. Only 4% of respondents express the opposite opinion.

In spite of all the support, our approaching admission to NATO arouses growing concern and doubts in a number of respondents. Although over half of respondents still believe that joining NATO will secure peace and safety for Poland, the percentage of optimists is

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS CLOSER TO YOUR VIEW ON POLAND'S ENTRY INTO NATO?



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS CLOSER TO YOUR VIEW ON POLAND'S ENTRY INTO NATO?



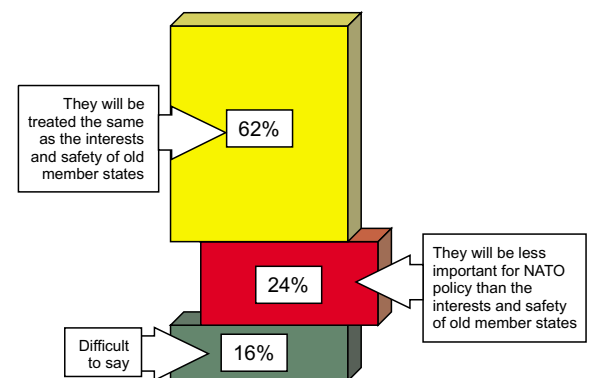
visibly lower than a year ago. At the same time growing fears that our country may be engaged in an armed conflict can be noticed. The fact that at the moment every fourth respondent is afraid that Poland may be engaged in some conflict is probably connected with the possibility of direct intervention of NATO forces in Kosovo, which has recently received considerable media coverage.

The scepticism that has appeared among Poles in the period immediately preceding our admission to NATO also manifests itself in opinions concerning the political sense of this act. At the moment the percentage of those who believe that Poland's entry into NATO is the best possible guarantee of our independence is the same as the percentage of those who regard it as a new form of our submission to a foreign power.

The situation of a not very big and still rather weak economically country joining a large international organisation brings about anxiety whether Poland will indeed have full membership rights or rather will be treated by stronger countries as a second-rate partner. A considerable majority of respondents do not share such fears and believe that the structure of NATO secures equal treatment of our interests and safety and the interests and safety of old NATO members.

Taking into account our past experience, these fears are not groundless. However, over half of respondents (54%) are not afraid that the situation which took place in 1939, when Poland was in fact left alone in spite of our formal treaties with Western allies, might happen again now.

DO YOU THINK THAT AFTER OUR ENTRY INTO NATO THE INTERESTS AND SAFETY OF POLAND WILL BE TREATED THE SAME AS THE INTEREST AND SAFETY OF OLD MEMBER STATES, OR THEY WILL BE CONSIDERED BY THIS ORGANISATION AS LESS IMPORTANT?

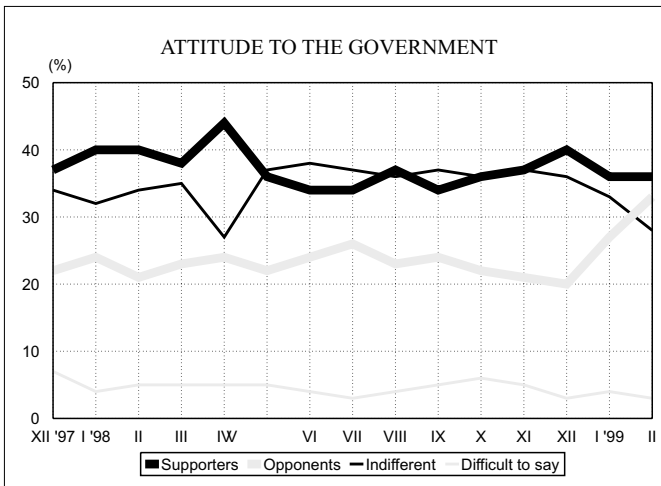


We also asked our respondents about their interpretation of Russia's suggestions concerning renegotiation of the treaty on the reduction of conventional weapons in Europe. One of Russia's demands concerns a reduction of the potential of weapons to be located in Poland. The opinion that Russia's intention is to reduce our military power so that in future it is easier for her to regain influence over Poland was chosen a little more frequently than the view that Russia is simply concerned about her safety in connection with the admission of our country to Western military structures (41% and 37%, respectively).

More information on this subject can be found in the CBOS report "On the eve of NATO membership", February '99.

FALLING SUPPORT FOR JERZY BUZEK'S GOVERNMENT

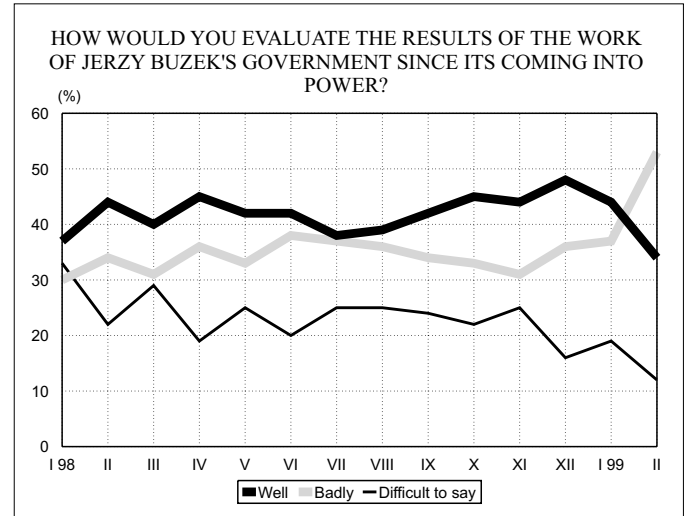
The beginning of this year proved very difficult for the government and the ruling coalition. The launch of the local administration reform and the beginning of the public health service restructuring met with the escalation of protests in different occupational groups. The protests of farmers who were blocking roads all over the country was especially dramatic. These events resulted in a decrease of support for the government. In comparison with January, the percentage of opponents of the government has grown, while the number of supporters has remained unchanged. The number of opponents is now the highest since the formation of the present government. In the past only the government of Waldemar Pawlak (February 1995) and Hanna Suchocka (the second quarter of 1993) had such a high percentage of opponents just before their collapse.



The events of the last weeks divided the public opinion. On the one hand, the feeling that the government had lost control over the situation and the critical opinions on the actions taken by the government heard from many sources resulted in an increase of the percentage of its opponents. On the other hand, organised actions against the government made the supporters of the government and reforms consolidate around the government. In other words, some respondents interpreted the criticism to the government's disadvantage, while others did not view it as a good reason to withdraw their trust.

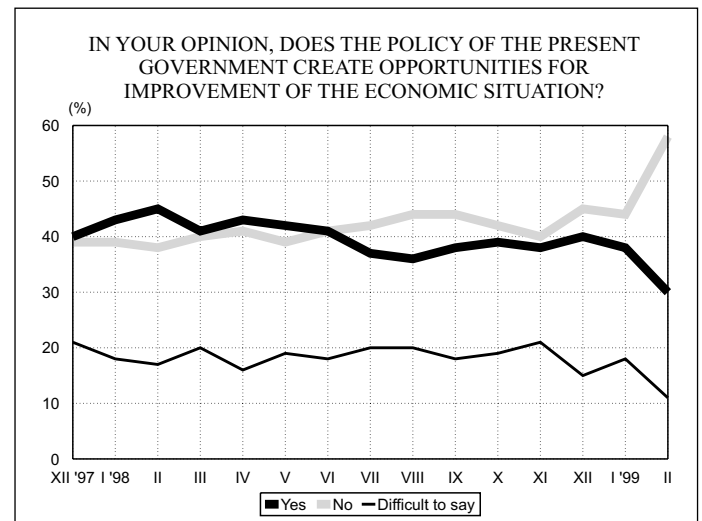
The scale of political support for the government changed only slightly, but the government's performance is now evaluated significantly lower. At the moment over half of respondents express a negative opinion on the overall performance of the government and only one in three believes

that the government works well. The present assessments are the worst since Jerzy Buzek's government came to power. The number of critical assessments increased the most among the electorate of the PSL, as well as inhabitants of rural areas and farmers.



Evaluations are worse in almost all areas of the government's activity that respondents were asked to evaluate. As compared with the October results, the opinions on the agrarian policy are the worst - as many as 74% of respondents evaluate the government's policy in this respect as unsatisfactory (increase by 22 percentage points). The evaluations of actions taken by the government in respect of the public health service are also lower - 59% of respondents evaluate them as unsatisfactory (increase by 18 percentage points). The way the government cares for people who need help the most is also evaluated negatively (61% of unsatisfactory evaluations, increase by 15 percentage points). The opinions on the way the government takes care of the citizens' safety are continually low (58%). On the other hand, foreign policy is evaluated well (72% of good and satisfactory evaluations, only 10% of unsatisfactory ones).

A difficult political situation in the country contributed to the increase of pessimism in the assessment of the economic policy of the government as well. The respondents' evaluations are the worst since the formation of this government in this respect as well.



In February the acceptance of the Prime Minister personally also decreased by 7 percentage points. For the first time since he has been appointed Prime Minister, the percentage of respondents dissatisfied with the fact that Jerzy Buzek is the head of the government was higher than the percentage of those

who declared their satisfaction (44% and 40%, respectively). We recorded a higher percentage of the dissatisfied only once before - in the case of Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak in February 1995 (48%).

The events that took place during the last weeks probably contributed to the fact that over three fourths of respondents (78%) accept the idea of the government reconstruction and replacement of some ministers. Only 7% of respondents opt for leaving the government in its present shape.

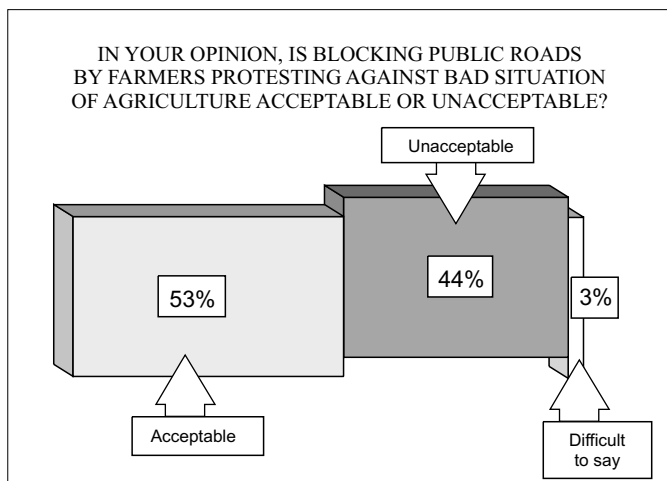
Reconstruction of the government is supported by a vast majority of respondents: both persons declaring left-wing political views (88%) and (although slightly less frequently) those with right-wing views (70%).

More information on this subject can be found in the CBOS report "Social opinions on the government at the beginning of February", February '99.

FARMERS' PROTESTS

The recent farmers' demonstrations met with much more understanding than similar protests which took place last year and were perceived by the public opinion as a justified protest (73% of indications). It was probably a result of bad situation in agriculture connected with the Russian crisis, as well as determination of protesters. The respondents' understanding of the desperation of farmers is so big that most of them are ready to accept the methods of protesting that are normally not tolerated and regarded as unacceptable, such as blocking public roads. Over half of respondents say that in the present situation, when farmers have no other possibilities of defending their interests, it is acceptable for them to block roads. As many as three quarters of respondents were against solving this conflict by force and using the police to remove blockades, even if other methods of removing them proved ineffective.

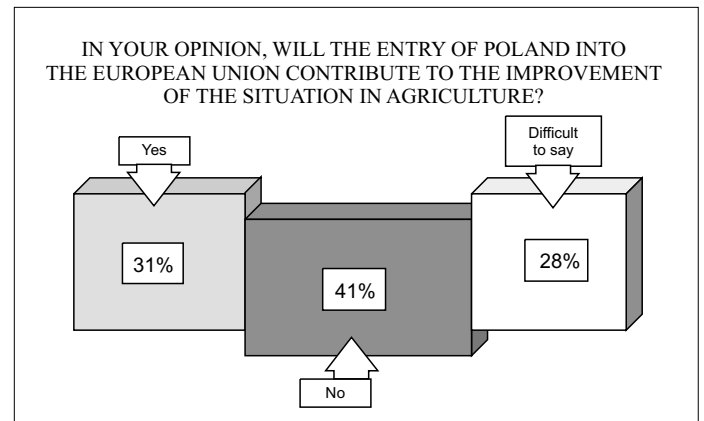
A vast majority of respondents (70%) are critical about the policy of Jerzy Buzek's government in respect of the rural areas and agriculture. At the same time almost half of respondents (47%) notice some weak points on the part of farmers as well. In the opinion of those respondents, they are not active enough and show not enough initiative.



The belief that the situation of agriculture is bad is almost universal. Almost everybody supports such solutions as an increase of funds allocated to agriculture from the state budget (86%), an intervention of the government in the form of buying up agricultural products (90%) and attaching more importance to the interest of domestic agricultural producers in the customs policy of our government (86%). At the same time many people are aware that the actions which are taken cannot only lead to a short-term improvement of the situation of

farmers, but they should rather be aimed at a more thorough restructuring of the whole sector. Over half of respondents (55%) believe that Polish farming is technologically underdeveloped and not efficient enough. A vast majority of respondents notice that the landed property in Poland is divided into too small pieces (78%) and accept the necessity of changes in this respect. At the same time, however, the postulate of a reduction of the number of persons working in agriculture is much less accepted, although it has more supporters than opponents (44% and 38%, respectively).

As far the projections of the situation of Polish farming after our access to the European Union are concerned, fears prevail over hopes.



More information on this subject can be found in the CBOS report "Opinions on Polish agriculture in view of the recent protests", February '99.

WEALTH AND POVERTY IN THE EYES OF POLES

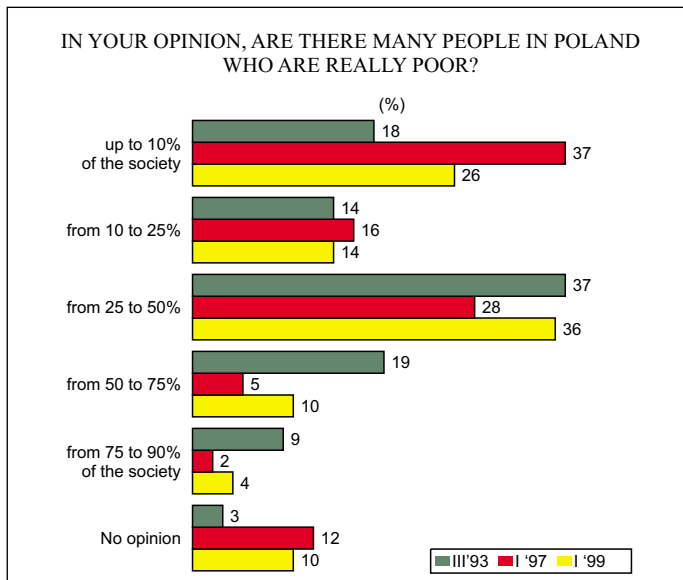
As opposed to the so-called real socialism, where (apart from the ruling class) differences in the wealth of individuals were levelled off by the authorities, market economy is associated with the existence of substantial differences in the income of individuals. Introduction of the principles of market economy, privatisation and restriction of the role of the state to redistribution of the national product are the reasons why the differences between the standards of living of different social groups are much bigger now than they have ever been before. Changes in the social awareness of Poles associated with it, such as especially our perception of the extremes on the income scale (i.e. both wealth and poverty) have been a subject of our research for a few years now.

In the opinion of our respondents, the percentage of rich Poles has grown during the last two years. At the moment one third of respondents believe that the rich constitute over 10% of our society. At the same time a little more than half (52%) think that this figure will grow in future. However, the sphere of wealth seems to be relatively limited. Poles are convinced that the percentage of wealthy people is growing, but at the same time they do not notice more wealthy persons around them than two years ago. Like in 1997, almost every third respondent (32%) declares that he/ she does not know a single rich person.

Following a considerable improvement of the image of wealthy people and a positive change in the attitude towards them in the years 1994-1997, the opinion has now stabilised. However, some faults in the social image of rich people must be noted. Although the number of respondents who believe it to be natural that some people become rich (while others do not) remains almost unchanged, less persons are convinced that it is

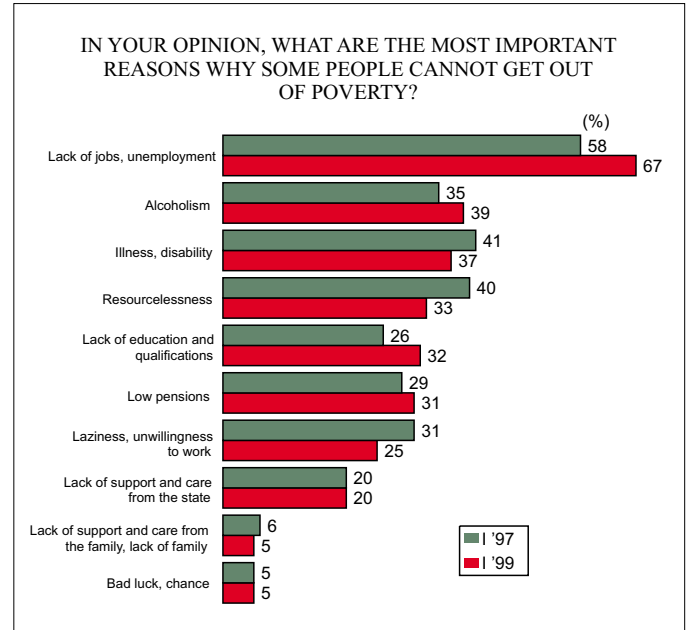
beneficial for the society. The number of those who believe that it is justified and fair that some people get richer has also decreased. Most respondents (62%) share the opinion that the rich do not deserve high social regard, because nowadays in Poland it is impossible to make a fortune by honest work. Only one third of respondents (35%) believe that well-off people should be held in high regard for their hard work and good ideas. The significance of some negative features of the image of rich people (such as ruthlessness towards others) has increased, while the significance of pro-social characteristics (such as charity work) has decreased. Social perception of factors that are crucial for making money has also changed - the importance of professional position, qualifications and education has grown. On the other hand, the significance of power and informal relationships has also increased. The possibility that someone will become rich is now associated with having power on the central and local level more frequently than in the past.

Asked about the level below which people live in poverty, respondents on average mentioned the monthly income of 325 zloty (around 85 dollars) per person in the family. One in five adult Poles estimates that the income of his/ her family is considerably lower than average, almost one in six (16%) evaluates the material situation of their household as bad. One in fourteen respondents (7%) says that he/ she and their family are so poor that their financial means are not sufficient to satisfy their basic needs.



In the respondents' opinion, poor people constitute around 32% of the Polish society. According to our observations, poverty as diagnosed by respondents has grown during the last two years by 7 percentage points. Also, more persons expect that the percentage of poor people will grow.

The perception of poverty and its causes has changed only slightly. During the last two years the number of respondents who believe that poor people are mainly found among the unemployed has increased a little. The opinion that the poor are ordinary people who work, but earn too little to provide sufficient financial means for themselves and their families has also become more frequent. Farmers are thought to be poor more frequently than in 1997.



One may say, then, that the respondents' diagnoses confirm the growing differentiation of income among Poles. It should be stressed at this point that in the respondents' opinion the percentage of Poles who are getting richer is not higher than 10%, while almost one third of our society is threatened by poverty. According to respondents, these differences will continue to grow.

More on this subject can be found in the CBOS reports: "Opinions on wealth and wealthy people", "Poor people in Poland", February 1999.

In addition to the bulletins referred to above, the following have been published recently (in Polish):

Savings and purchases
 Social moods in new voivodships
 Social image of President Aleksander Kwaśniewski
 Parents and peers in the opinions of the young generation of Poles
 Social moods in February
 Attitude to protests in the public health service
 Relations in the ruling coalition AWS-UW
 Trust in politicians

For more information on CBOS services and publications please contact:

CBOS POLAND
 4a, Żurawia, 00-503 Warsaw
 Phones: (48 22) 629 35 69, 628 37 04
 Fax: (48 22) 629 40 89

E-mail: sekretariat@cbos.pl

Http://www.cbos.pl

Yearly subscription rate for "Polish Public Opinion" is 80 USD

CBOS expertise in providing professional, accurate and timely research studies has made us the leading authority in political, social, international and consumer research concerning Poland.