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Values and Aspirations of the Polish Youth in the Contemporary Europe

Abstract: *Polish accession to the European Union has resulted, among other developments, in the phenomenon of economic migration. Having observed this expanding and noticeable process, the author attempts to demonstrate that the Polish youth of today is not the “economic potential” only, but it can also offer many positive values to the contemporary Europe. In the content of the article some of the values, which involve: educational aspirations, mobility and competitiveness and willingness to assimilate, are enumerated and briefly discussed. The author also reminds that the research conducted by Polish scholars and centres of public opinion already before Polish accession to the European Union had recognised other important qualities of Polish young people. Those included: the hierarchy of accepted values, the actual attitude toward work, professional and economic aspirations. The article further draws the attention to the phenomenon of the generation acceleration of the youth in Poland, which has been particularly affected by the political transformation, because this societal group seems to demonstrate the greatest economic emigration. Their disappointment with the lack of state involvement in the process of creating new jobs, has, first, resulted in seeking the source of professional success in the so-called relations and informal contacts, rather than in their skills, intelligence and education, and later in a increasing willingness to move abroad. However, the author points out that the economic movement of people at the same time representing the earlier mentioned values can constitute one of the important dynamics of the process of transformation of the post-industrial era into the information era within the European Union.*

Introduction

Polish accession to the European Union, as well as economic and political integration, were at the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries priorities of the Polish country. The whole society, and the youth in particular, was confronted

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with a difficult task of self-determination towards the regional, national and global world. The Polish youth who have been living in the country of intensive and constant socio-political transformations since 1989, have been influenced by the pressure of Europeanization and globalisation trend. At the beginning of the 21st Century, Poland had the biggest number of young people among the Central and Eastern European countries – 8,5 million in the nursery and school age and 5,4 million at the age 25-34. Altogether, there has been around 14 million Polish young people who are theoretically most dynamic and entrepreneurial with the biggest development potential.¹

The aim of the article is to demonstrate that the Polish youth represent the same values and life aspirations that can entitle them to be treated as a factor constituting an important dynamic of civilisation and global processes and the European integration in particular. Polish youth can contribute to the process of passing of the European societies from the post-industrial era to the information era. A particular emphasis is put on educational and professional aspirations (attitude towards work), willingness to mobility and competition in the European labour market. The issues of the chance resulting from Polish accession to the European Union which a part of Polish youth has, as well as the dangers of frustrated youth with the lack of possibilities of using their natural potential in Poland are presented. The situation of Polish youth has all the hallmarks of *accelerations generations*, a notion applied by Hannah Arendt. According to her, an essential factor determining a shape of contemporary western societies is *generation acceleration*: generations succeed one after another more and more quickly and people of slightly different ages can live in a totally different social and economical situation. A general acceleration of speed of social and political changes is a feature which differentiates 20th Century from all previous centuries – two world wars and transformations after 1989 led to numerous breaches and changes in a process of social transformation of Europe as a continent and as a culture. If there is a sense of talking about existence of generations, certainly, as their determinant one has to adopt deliberate participation in such transformations as wars, revolutions or regime collapses.²

¹ W.Cellary, *Szanse młodzieży wobec globalnego społeczeństwa informacyjnego i gospodarki opartej na wiedzy (The Chances for the Youth Facing Global Information Society and Knowledge-Oriented Economy)* in: *Polska w Unii Europejskiej wobec wyzwań globalnego społeczeństwa informacyjnego (Poland in the European Union Facing Challenges of Global Information Society)*, proceedings of the debate held at the Polish Academy of Science, 16.06.2004., Warszawa 2004, p.7.

² J.Sowa, P.Marecki, *Dezerterzy społeczeństwa konsumpcji (The Deserters of Society Consumption)* in: *Frustracja. Młodzi o Nowym Wspaniałym Świecie (Frustration. The Young about New Wonderful World)*, eds. J.Sowa, P.Marecki, Kraków 2003.

The results of the research on the youth carried out in Poland by various research centres and universities in 1995-2005 were the material basis for this article. The Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS³) should be listed as the most important and reliable. Information taken from the Central Statistical Office of Poland, Eurostat, Eurobarometer were also used.

Most frequently used notions in the article are: “young people” and “Polish youth” that should be understood as the people between the age of 15–30, being at time of preparing to undertake all. The youth is characterised by the following features: rise of intellectual and cognitive activity; aspiring to independence, *inter alia* through getting education and profession; established interests; developed hierarchy of values and completed process of self-identification. The notion of “values” stands for any material or nonmaterial thing, idea or institution, aspect of life they have respect for and ascribe it a significant role in life. The notion of “aspirations” can be defined as determination in achieving aims chosen by the individual and the desire for realisation of ambitious plans. In the article, it concerns mainly the educational and professional aims connected with knowing and developing skills and professions.

1. Generation acceleration

Considering a place of Polish young people in the totality of the European relations, the essential phenomenon which is the so-called *generation acceleration* cannot be omitted. It has clearly visible in Poland in the last years. Polish young people, who entered the European Union on 1.05.2004 at the age of 16-30 years, spent their entire childhood and early youth in simply different historical and political conditions. Some youth groups have benefited from the political transformation, other have suffered the negative consequences (unemployment) but still can benefit from the Polish integration with the European Union. People born in the 1970s and early 1980s are the last generation remembering the communist system in Poland and its everyday life. They constitute the group that benefited from the chance given by the regime change in Poland. Clever, educated and entrepreneurial people, owing to the boom in economy and education, got excellent education and work – both in Poland and abroad. The other youth group that in the first ten years of the 20th Century enters the adult world finds itself in a much worse situation since high unemployment rate made it impossible for them to stabilise financially. Yet, it is the group that, owing to the Polish accession to

³ Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej – the Public Opinion Research Centre.

the European Union, can benefit from the earning potentials in the European labour market most.

A phenomenon of desertion and indifference can be noticed among this group of young people. The socio-economical transformations which took effect in Poland in the last years caused hard generation crisis among this part of young people and the reasons for this situation can be sought in a quite specific tangle of historical events. The phenomena should include Polish Martial Law, the end of communist era, difficult years of regime transformation, and finally the turn of the century and Polish accession to the European Union. These phenomena constituted a big challenge for both the adult part of society and the most sensitive part – the youth.

The part of a young generation concerned, showed a slighter interest in an active participation in a social civil life. This part of Polish young people, frustrated by the lack of prospects in the country, withdraws to a privacy and gives up a desire to create the world actively. A vision of neo-liberal capitalism which dominates on Polish market does not suit them. They see negative consequences of the “mcdonaldisation” of the society and are aware of the fact that the commercialisation influences to a large extent on the customer behaviour. They are opposed to the money making pressure already in an early age to meet the conditions, patterns and stereotypes created by the free market. They do not accept the new economic order that in spite of the promises has not brought the greater freedom and has not served them well. On the contrary, acting according to the existing rules often requires making difficult decisions.

An attitude of a desertion is not only typical for the Polish manifestation of a negation of capitalism in its liberal kind. It gains more and more popularity among young people in the countries of advanced capitalism – Germany, England, France.⁴ The symptom of such activities can be the Antiglobalist Movement popular in these countries and which is getting more and more popular in Poland. It represents alternative programmes and solutions to healing global situation in many areas. It gathers human rights activists, ecologists, anarchist, church organisations, charities, feminists,

⁴ See: U.Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London 1992; A.Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, London 1991; J.Zinneker, *What Does the Future Hold? Youth and Socio-Cultural Change in the FRG* in: *Childhood, Youth and Social Change: a Perspective Comparative*, eds. L.Chisholm et al., Basingstoke 1990; C.Banach, *Refleksje o rozwoju i regresie społeczeństwa (Reflections on Development and Society Regression)* in: *Agresja i przemoc we współczesnym Świecie (Aggression and Violence in the Contemporary World)*, eds. J.Kuźma, Z.Szarota, vol. I, Kraków 1998, p.15-26; *Rok 2005. Młodzi Polacy jako obywatele (Young Poles as Citizens)*, Report, Gdańsk-Warszawa 2002; H.M.Griese, *Socjologiczne teorie młodzieży. Wprowadzenie (Sociological Theories of the Youth. Introduction)*, Kraków 1996.

leftist groups. They are convinced that the governments and countries have already lost the control over the globalisation processes and that is why they transfer their demand to a different plan.⁵ That is why young deserters explain: "...it is not a result of laziness or intentional choice, but a result of a consistent marginalisation which in the New Wonderful World experience everybody who does not accept enriching and fighting for a social status as an aim of human existence. Young fugitives withdraw from the public spheres of life which decay after being given as a prey to a free market, private business groups and careerists devoid of ideals who, in this way, can see a chance to take up influential positions. A healthy civil society requires the existence of citizens, but a free market does not create citizens but consumers. And we do not want to participate in it – we prefer a consistent desertion to being thoughtless cogs of a consumption society".⁶

The two equally probable predictions for the future of the discussed youth group can be drawn from the above-mentioned deliberations. It seems real that this part of Polish young people, deeply affected by negative effects of political transformation, could find their real place in the civil society which is being created now, especially on the local level (volunteer work). An equally real possibility exists for them to look for a place in the united Europe. This is a group especially predestined to migrate in search of work and it results in numerous trips of Polish students and graduates to find work in the countries of the Western Europe.

2. Recognised values

In political discussions concerning the results of Polish accession to the European Union, a problem of changes in the sphere of values was raised both by followers and opponents of the integration.⁷ There is no difference between the Poles who are in favour of and against the European Union as far

⁵ C.Mojsiewicz, *Świat, w którym żyjemy (The World We Live In)*, Poznań 2003, p.75.

⁶ J.Sowa, P.Marecki, op.cit, p.45.

⁷ See: *Pierwszy rok członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej w ocenie społecznej (The First Year of Polish Membership in the European Union)*, ed. E.Skotnicka-Iliasiewicz, Warszawa 2005; J.Ściegienny, *Opinia publiczna. Polacy wobec integracji europejskiej (Public Opinion. Poles and the European Integration)* in: *Obywatele Europy. Integracja europejska w polskim życiu publicznym (The Citizens of Europe. European Integration in Polish Public Life)*, eds. M.Fałkowski, J.Kucharczyk, Warszawa 2005; L.Kolarska-Bobińska, *Polacy wobec wielkiej zmiany. Integracja z Unią Europejską (Poles Facing the Great Change. Integration with the European Union)*, Warszawa 2001; *Polacy wśród Europejczyków. Wartości społeczeństwa polskiego na tle innych krajów europejskich (Poles among Europeans. Values of the Polish Society in Comparison with other European Countries)*, eds. A.Jasińska-Kania, M.Marody, Warszawa 2002.

as the values system that gives sense to their lives is concerned. Followers and opponents of Polish accession to the European Union have the similar system of values and priorities in life. However, a detailed analysis of the research carried out in Poland into the subject shows that there are some differences existing between values that they hold. In the survey conducted by CBOS, the respondents could choose not more than five out of eighteen values.⁸ The Poles supporting the integration with the European Union, just before acceding to that structure indicated on average slightly more the most important values in life than the opponents. Regarding various societal groups and their preferred values, the research prompts the following observations. The adult part of a society opting for the integration with the European Union more often appreciated such values as: family, love and achieving a professional success. Whereas, the group of adult opponents appreciated rather tranquillity, personal security and life according to the religious indications. Regardless of these differences, a hierarchy of values in both groups is approximate, while the differences are mainly derivative of influence of age and education.⁹ These differences are caused by the fact that support for integration was not and is not divided evenly. The research of the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) demonstrates that people better educated attach more importance to both family life and professional success. Whereas, for example, for older people more significance have religion, peaceful life without problems and more seldom – professional success.

2.1. Surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS)

In the years 1994-2003, according to CBOS, the values shown by Polish young people – the representative sample of students from all types of secondary schools – were generally invariable.¹⁰ On the top there were: successful family life, interesting job consistent with the interests, love and friendship. Besides, the more and more important aims in life became the following to achieve a “high professional status and to make a career”. During ten years, indications for this value increased nearly two times (from 19 to 34%). The next in the hierarchy of life values were: peaceful life without problems and conflicts, accumulating the wealth, achieving a high financial status. Moreover social life, full of entertainment is much higher appreciated by young people than being useful to others. For example in 2003 “life for

⁸ *Polska, Europa, Świat. Opinia publiczna w okresie integracji (Poland, Europe, World. Public Opinion in the Time of Integration)*, eds. K.Zagórski, M.Strzeszewski, Warszawa 2005.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p.228-229.

¹⁰ *Młodzież polska 2003. Raport CBOS (Young Poles 2003, Report CBOS)*, “Opinie i Diagnozy” no. 2/2004, p.10.

others” as the most important aim had more than half less indications (9%) than “entertaining life” (21%). On the other hand during ten years a percentage of the indications for a value of making decisions in an economic sphere and gaining political power did not change, therefore, young people rather did not link their career with these spheres. In each survey from the years 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2003, young people, who indicated the most important aspirations for themselves, the most frequently chose the same three aims: successful family life, interesting job consistent with the interests, love and friendship. Further down the hierarchy of values appeared essential changes and therefore a higher expectation of achieving a high professional status and making a career.¹¹

The hierarchy of values did not differ in 2003 from the one held by the adult part of society. It proves the existence of the generation continuity characteristic for the societies considering as important first the tradition, and then the modernity.

To confirm the above results, the research of CBOS of April 2004 conducted on the adult population of Polish society can be mentioned.¹² The following hierarchy of values was given for a question “What is the most important in life for you, what makes the sense of life?”: family – marriage, children, successful family life – 70%, his own and family’s health – 67%, love, friendship – 54%, work – having a job and a permanent employment – 43%, belief in God and living with faith – 40%, peaceful life without problems – 31%, personal security at home, in the street – 28%, achieving professional success, being good at its own profession – 23%, financial security, living without bigger financial problems – 22%, being useful to others – 17%, satisfaction with a job, a proper job in accordance with interests – 13% (making fortune – 9%, journeys, getting to know its own country, world – 9%, contact with art, literature – 8%, contact with nature – 6%, colourful and full of entertainment life, a busy social life – 3%, being in power – 1%).

To conclude, the youth surveyed declares the same values as the adult part of Polish society who favours Polish integration with European Union – family, love, interesting work, professional success. These indicators are analogous to both students of secondary schools – high schools, technical secondary schools as well as vocational secondary schools.

2.2. Particular surveys conducted at schools

Let us now present the second example. The analysis of the research conducted among the students of different schools in a few provinces in

¹¹ *Poland, Europe...*, op.cit., p.230.

¹² Report of CBOS, <http://www.cbos/SPISKOM.POL/2004/K.098.04.PDF>

a country, in a day before Polish accession to the European Union proves that a hierarchy of the most important life values of the students of the vocational schools (agricultural and non-agricultural) is not different from the one which is recognised by the whole society.¹³ The most essential value for 48% of the surveyed young people has been a family, happy family life and setting up home. The next in the hierarchy of this group of young people of the vocational schools are: having a job as a value for itself – understood as having a permanent employment (44%); education (27%), health (27%), good financial conditions (26%), love (12%), happiness (9%), realisation of plans and dreams (4%), friendship (3%), good relations with other people (3%), helping the others (3%), honesty (2%), success and professional achievements (1%), other people's respect (1%).

Moreover, and interestingly, researches demonstrate that there is a common conviction among young people (85 %) that parents expect them to be good people successful in life who give good reasons for being proud of them. There is also a common opinion that parents expect them to study well at school. Because of the fact, that a relatively big group of students (27%) thinks that parents expect them to become independent as quickly as possible, one should think that this group especially often plans to start working quickly after school or to connect work with further education, at schools offering evening or extra-mural studies. Among the Poles dominates a conviction that a condition of success and prosperity in life of their offspring is mainly a good preparation for taking up a job in the future (education, high qualifications, professional skills). More than one third of the Poles also appreciate a value of a reliable, fair job and one fifth makes their life success conditional on their profession which is performed and a type of work.¹⁴

2.3. Surveys conducted in the province of Upper Silesia

Focus on the traditional family values on the one hand, and fulfilment of career aspirations on the other seem to be characteristic for the Polish youth.

¹³ K.Wierzbička, *Aspiracje i cele życiowe młodzieży szkół średnich, szkół zawodowych w kontekście integracji z Unią Europejską (Aspirations and Life Aims of the Youth from Secondary and Vocational Schools in the context of Integration with the European Union)* in: *Migracje zarobkowe polskiej młodzieży. Badania i analizy (Youth Wage-Earning Migration. Research and Analysis)*, ed. E.Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, Warszawa 2004; Z.Drag, K.Gorlach, Z.Saręga, *Młode pokolenie wsi III Rzeczypospolitej. Aspiracje życiowe w przeddzień integracji z Unią Europejską (Young Generation The Young Rural Generation in the Polish People's Republic. Life Aspirations the Day Before Integration with the European Union)*, Warszawa 2003.

¹⁴ *Poland, Europe...*, op.cit., p.249.

It is shown in the research done in different regions of Polish Voivodeships: the Kuyavian-Pomeranian, the Silesian, the Świętokrzyskie-region, the Greater Poland and other.¹⁵

Finally it is instructive for the purpose of this study to recall the results of the survey conducted in the province of Upper Silesia. Interesting conclusions were drawn from the research on the values of the youth from the Upper Silesia – the region traditionally perceived as the mainstay of family and tradition. The researchers found it interesting whether the career and knowing new professional skills are also highly valued there. Research among young people of secondary schools in the Silesian province was conducted in 2002. A group had 285 respondents (175 girls and 110 boys) and was chosen at random. The aim of research was to determine value orientation. A list of sixteen different aims of life or aspirations was used. Young people from Upper Silesia are family oriented because this value is timeless and is not devaluated and gives man the sense of security and hope.¹⁶ Apart from this orientation, young people oriented to their own “selves”, friends and work – these are the four groups of life values in the preferences of the Silesian young people. One can say about a certain ambivalence of their needs and preferences: these teenagers are on the one hand ambitious, appreciating love and honesty and on the other hand, they are characterised by an apparent conformity and limitation of their functioning to the daily routine. Among this group any degree of commitment in the social matters is definitely low. However, lack of activity does not have to signify societal unwillingness or lack of interest in the history of the own country, as such but inability and feeling powerless and helpless and helplessness in introducing any changes. At the same time, the Silesian young people of secondary schools are interested in learning foreign languages, undertaking advanced studies, taking up an interesting job in accordance with their interests.

¹⁵ J.Olejniczak, *Aspiracje studentów uczelni bydgoskich w aspekcie wejścia Polski do Unii Europejskiej (Aspirations of College Students from Bydgoszcz from the Point of View of Poland Entering the European Union)*, “Świat Idei i Polityki” no. 4/2004; E.Gorczycka, *Młodzież akademicka wobec Unii Europejskiej (University Students and the European Union)*, Częstochowa 2004; B.W.Mach, *Młodzież polska a starania o członkostwo w Unii Europejskiej (Young Poles and Efforts towards Membership in the European Union)*, Warszawa 2002; R.Cichocki, *Wielkopoleanie wobec integracji Polski z Unią Europejską (Inhabitants Of the Region of Greater Poland and the Integration with the European Union)*, Poznań 2003.

¹⁶ A.Szczurek-Boruta, *Orientacja na wartości młodzieży żyjącej w wielokulturowym środowisku Górnego Śląska (Focus on Values of the Youth Living in the Multicultural Environment of the Upper Silesia)* in: *Transgraniczność w perspektywie socjologicznej (Transbordering in the Sociological Perspective)*, ed. M.Zielińska, Zielona Góra 2003, p.164-177.

The unique character of the Upper Silesia region is about valuing tradition and timeless, universal values and at the same time shunning pro-social values, reluctantly engaging in political activities.

3. Educational aspirations of Polish young people

After a political turning point in 1989 and especially in the last ten years, an awareness of being educated considerably increased in Polish society. Nearly all adult Poles (93%) were convinced about this before a date of Polish accession to the European Union's structures, regardless of age, sex, education, profession and other features of their life situation. Educational boom, which started in Poland after 1989, is an unprecedented phenomenon on a worldwide scale.¹⁷ An awareness of the fact that in relation to education, the Poles still do not catch up with the Western Europeans and also an opinion that integration with the European Union can equal these disproportions, certainly had an influence on educational aspirations of the Poles.¹⁸ It motivated a great number of them to raise their own education level and to educate their offspring.

¹⁷ See: J.Auleytner, *Szansy i zagrożenia młodego pokolenia w obliczu globalizacji i przystąpienia do Unii Europejskiej (Chances and Threats of Young Generation Facing Globalisation and Entering the European Union)* in: *Między transformacją a integracją. Polityka społeczna wobec problemów współczesności (Between Transformation and Integration. Social Politics and Contemporary)*, ed. P.Błędowski, Warszawa 2004, p.232-233; *Etos edukacji XXI wieku. Zbiór studiów (Education Ethics of the 21st Century. Collection of Studies)*, ed. I.Wojnar, Warszawa 2000; *Eurostat Yearbook 2002: The Statistical guide to Europe Date 1990-2000*, European Commission, Luxembourg 2002; *Skuteczne inwestowanie w edukację. Imperatyw dla Europy, (Investing Efficiently in Education. Imperatives for Europe)* European Commission, Warszawa 2003; W.Rabczuk, *Polityka edukacyjna Unii Europejskiej na tle przemian w szkolnictwie krajów członkowskich (Educational Politics of the European Union and the Changes in the Education System of Member Countries)*, Warszawa 1994.

¹⁸ See: *Strategia dla Polski po wejściu do Unii Europejskiej na lata 2004-2015 (Strategy of Poland after Entering the European Union 2004-2015)*, Warszawa 2002; E.Ciumielecka, A.Kraśniewski, J.Woźnicki, *Korzyści i koszty związane z przystąpieniem Polski do Unii Europejskiej w sferze szkolnictwa wyższego (Benefits and costs of Polish Integration in the European Union in the Field of Higher Education)*, Warszawa 2003; *Edukacja wobec integracji europejskiej (Education and European Integration)*, eds. J.Kojkoł, P.J.Przybysz, Gdynia 2004; R.Mosakowski, *Szkolnictwo wyższe w krajach Unii Europejskiej. Stan obecny i planowane reformy (Higher Education in European Union Countries. Present State and Planned Reforms)*, Gdańsk 2002; *New Impulses for European Youth. The White Paper of European Commission*, European Commission, Luxembourg 2001; *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries*, eds. J.Torney-Purta, R.Lehmann, H.Oswald, W.Schulz, Amsterdam 2000.

Among fifteen factors that can decide about success in life of the children, the parents mention education as the first one (in February 1997 – 76% of indications, in April 2004 – 71%).¹⁹ Educational aspirations of the Poles correlate precisely with their own education level – the higher education respondents had the more often they desired that their children would complete studies. However, a desire that the children would complete studies also intensified among people with vocational education or primary education and also with secondary – but to a lesser degree. It turns out that more than a half of students whose parents have primary or vocational education is going to obtain a diploma of the university during 10-15 years.²⁰ Thus, comparing educational aspirations of students with their parents' education proves great ambitions in this area. Moreover, an increasing educational ambitions of the Poles additionally stem from their dissatisfaction with their own educational achievements. The main reason for which the Poles desire to complete education is a high salary. The following reasons are: avoiding the unemployment and having an interesting profession. They are convinced that thanks to education, their life will be easier. The remaining reasons include: independence, self-reliance, intellectual development, possibilities of working for oneself or abroad, recognition and esteem of other people. The fewest people want to have an easy job and to participate in exercising power thanks to education.

Among the Poles dominates a conviction that a condition of success and prosperity in life of their offspring is mainly a good preparation for taking up a job in the future (education, high qualifications, professional skills). More than one third of the Poles also appreciate a value of a reliable, fair job and one fifth makes their life success conditional on their profession which is performed and a type of work.²¹

One of the measures of life aspirations and perceiving aims possible to achieve and indicating real prospects in case of a younger part of the society are their visions about its own life in 10-15 years. As CBOS announces on the basis of its own research – a level of aspirations of young people from 1989 in a sphere of education is characterised by high dynamics.²² Even in 1990 only one fourth of Polish young people was convinced that they would have a higher education. But in 2003 a majority of young people assumed it.

¹⁹ *Poland, Europe...*, op.cit., p.249.

²⁰ *Young Poles...*, op.cit., p.15-16.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p.250. It is written about a complicated situation of world labour market in the era of globalisation on a large scale in: J.Rifkin, *Koniec pracy. Schyłek siły roboczej na świecie i początek ery postrynkowej (The Decline of the Global Labour Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era)*, Wrocław 2001.

²² *Young Poles...*, op.cit., s.15.

Symptomatically, in this period, a number of surveyed people claiming that vocational education is enough for them and desiring to complete their education at primary school decreased definitely. Nearly all students of grammar schools (95%), most of students of technical schools (74%) and vocational secondary schools (72%) are convinced of completing a higher education. Aspirations of students of vocational schools are more modest but also there is a certain increase in aspirations.²³ Education (knowledge, learning, graduation) is treated the most frequently as an essential condition for accomplishing other life goals, but also treated as an autotelic value.

To sum up the above-mentioned research results, it should be stated that getting education became a priority task for all the Polish youth groups in the pre-accession period. Polish accession to the European Union opened up new prospects for Polish students. Along with the accession, Poland got the possibility of influencing the educational and academic politics of the European Union. One of the most important aims of the European Union was to create favourable conditions for the student and teacher mobility and to enable them to enter schools in the whole region of European Community. It should be stressed that the European institutions dealing with the education are making every effort to let young people know about the benefits of the integration.

4. Professional aspirations

In the analysis, one more fact should be taken into consideration, that is, that in case of professional aspirations, young people rarely define aspirations for achieving high professional status precisely. They do not treat a profession as a status in a social structure, but they understand it in a traditional way, associating it with obtaining higher education. For example more than 15% of students link their future with professions which were created after 1989, for example an owner of a company, businessman, broker, dealer, marketing or informatics specialist.²⁴

Having an own company or working at Polish private company is important for a lot of young people. From 1990 there was a systematic increase of rates in these sections. For the first time – in 2003 – the biggest group of young people (25%) forecast that they want to be self-employed. A rate of people willing to

²³ The biggest group (50%) thinks that in 10-15 years they will have secondary education. Dynamics of aspirations reveals, among others, a fact that a number of young people of the vocational schools who expect to obtain a diploma of the university increased nearly two times (from 9% in 1988 to 17% in 2003).

²⁴ *Young Poles...*, op.cit., p.16.

go abroad in search of work also increased in a visible way (from 9% in 1990 to 15% in 2003). In other research, more than a half of polled vocational school students expressed their interest in working in the European Union, accepting the idea of making efforts to achieve it. The factor inducing students to do so was mainly the conviction of low salaries in Poland and difficult situation in the labour market.²⁵ They were willing to take up – not necessarily in their field of profession – jobs in the EU – and rather of seasonal character. The students had high expectations as far as the earnings were concerned in the EU and they listed most frequently the following countries: Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, France, Spain, Ireland, Norway. Whereas, as many as 76% of students interested in taking up jobs in the EU stated that if they were offered a permanent job in Poland they would abandon the intention of working abroad. The decisions of taking up work by the students seem to be conditioned by the family financial situation and the need to earn by young people. The money earned in the European Union was spent mainly on day-to-day living expenses and helping the closest family.

Most young people declared that in the future they themselves or their family will occupy a medium position in a social hierarchy, similar to their parents' position. They regard definitely their parents' position as medium or high. More than one third of surveyed people is convinced that in the future they will have a high social status. As a main direction of advancement in a social hierarchy, the researchers considered a change which concerned going from a group of a medium status (respondent's parents) and to a group of a high status (a respondent in 10-15 years).²⁶

In the near future most Polish students will continue their education without linking it with a paid job (77%).²⁷ The students of the grammar schools mostly declare a continuation of education on a selected specialisation at the university, more than a half of students of technical colleges and vocational secondary schools also intends to start education at the university, whereas, students of vocational schools want to take up a job and nearly half of them will link it with education in a technical college. At the same time, young people began to realise that completing studies is not a guarantee of taking up a well-paid job and it does not ensure automatically an employment. For two fifth of students of technical colleges in December 2003 it was profitable to take up a paid job as soon as possible. Also in a group of students

²⁵ At the end of 2007, the situation improved because the unemployment rate dropped significantly and one of its reasons was mass migration of Polish youth to work in other countries of the European Union.

²⁶ *Young Poles...*, op.cit., p.19.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

of vocational schools exists a great conviction about profitability of taking up a well-paid job quickly. These declarations do not determine the fact what in reality the surveyed students will be doing in the following years. They are conscious of the difficulties existing on the labour market. The highest increase of fear against unemployment can be seen among students of technical colleges. In 2003, both they and students of vocational schools and vocational secondary schools were afraid mostly of unemployment. In a group of students of grammar schools a sense of fear also increased, but a possibility of finding a job they estimated relatively the best. A sense of insecurity affects many young people living not only in the villages and small cities, but also in the middle and big cities. This sense of uncertainty is based on the real facts, because a rate of unemployment has been growing systematically in Poland since 1998. It was 19,9% before the accession.²⁸

The statistic data about a big unemployment among women is reflected in the research of young people in 2003, in which up to 42% of girls were afraid of the fact that they will not find a job (among boys there were nearly about half less of these declarations – 26%).²⁹ Together with a sense of fear towards an unemployment also among young people increased readiness to take up any job and readiness to go abroad in search of work.³⁰

According to young people, a very important factor that has an influence on finding a job, is knowledge of foreign languages. A significance of this factor extremely increased in the last years. The other factors were: type of profession, intelligence and abilities. These factors yielded the so-called connections in the last years in a significant way (from 40% in the 1990s to 55% before the accession). Young people more often see them as a source of future professional success than at their behaviour, abilities and skills.³¹ There is also a high rate of disappointment among the youth because at the same time they expect the country to act in the area of maintaining and creating workplaces for citizens. It is commonly accepted that the country's duty is to provide everybody, who wants to work, with a job (84% of indications). At the same time, more than two third of students (68%) think that too many people expect social help from the country, and in reality, they do not always

²⁸ Data of *Central Statistical Office* accessible on the web page: <http://www.stat.gov.pl> dated 30.04.2005.

²⁹ *Young Poles...*, op.cit., p.28.

³⁰ Research was conducted in December 2003 when a date of Polish accession to the European Union was already known, which certainly had an influence on forming of the plans of young people.

³¹ *Research of CBOS ordered by the National Office...* in: *Young poles...*, op.cit., p.24.

need it, which means that each citizen is responsible individually for his own and his family lot.³²

5. Attitude towards work

Actual attitude towards work of the Polish young people can be investigated, taking into consideration their declarations from the years 2002-2003. The practical rates stay on a similar level. 70% of the surveyed young people from the last classes of the secondary schools talk about themselves that they worked regularly, occasionally or during holidays. It applies mainly to boys and students of technical colleges and vocational schools than girls and grammar, vocational and profiled schools. Young inhabitants of villages the most frequently earn extra money. On the other hand, the most seldom extra money is earned by young inhabitants of big cities and people whose families have a difficult financial situation. Young people have a positive attitude towards values taken from a paid job, which was the most frequently taken up occasionally and during holidays. They think that they have learnt many new things and they are satisfied with their salaries. However, some of them felt exploited and cheated at work. The last opinion is expressed at most times by students of vocational schools, which is a result of being worse treated by employers or they just exacted their rights as employees unskilfully or they also performed a paid job inadequate to their expectations. An initiative of the young Poles proves that a majority of young people after completing secondary schools starts their own economic activity (71%) and that setting up own business in the future is ruled out by only 9% of surveyed people. It reveals a rather moderate disposition to risk – the most frequently young people prefer business making a small profit, but with a small risk of losing money in case of failure. However, up to one fourth of people would take a risk at investing money. The data about what the young people would do with a great amount of money if they had such an amount at their disposal is interesting and shows a positive and real attitude towards money. The most willingly (37% of respondents) would put it on the interest saving account; 1-2% would spend it on their own or their family current needs; 16% would start up their own company; 12% would spend money on financing studies; 7% would set off to visit the world and only 3% would play on the stock market.³³

³² Ibidem.

³³ *Young Poles...*, op.cit., p.80.

Conclusion

To conclude the deliberations and analysis presented in the article, it should be stressed that Polish youth representing all types of secondary schools hold the universal values such as: family, love and friendship. Education, good job, professional success are a little less valued. However, these are dominating values linked with other factors such as material comfort, good relations with others, health. At the same time, Polish youth have high aspirations in the field of education: getting education and developing professional skills are highly valued, regardless the type of school. Therefore, they are aware of the difficulties existing in the Polish labour market. They would be willing to start their own business and have pragmatic attitude toward money. They clearly recognise the problems of Polish country on the question of keeping and creating of new workplaces and a significant number of them consider employment abroad in other countries of European Union as gainful. Therefore, on a large scale, they are getting the knowledge and skills commensurate with the challenges of the new situation of Poland after entering European Union. They learn foreign languages, acquire computer and Internet skills, get higher education. They work hard and have serious and responsible attitude toward work. They contribute all these values to the European economy and culture. A thesis may be proposed that having such virtues they make a significant contribution to civilisation and globalisation processes – to the European integration. Readiness for mobility and competitiveness of Polish youth proves that Polish youth can be the factor constituting an important dynamic of the process of evolution from post-industrial to information era. Noticing this fact, as well as recognising young Polish citizens as an important part of the European labour market should become clear for many European institutions that are responsible for educational policy.