

*Jan Borkowski**

Role of the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee in Poland's Preparations for European Union Membership

The process of Polish preparations for European Union (EU) membership is occurring under conditions of political, social, and economic transformation, as well as within the framework of implementing the Europe Agreement, which provides for Polish association with the European Communities (EC) and their member states. The concurrent overlap of all these seemingly similar processes determines membership preparations, both in the positive and the negative sense.

System transformation has provided indispensable conditions to initiate the process of EU integration, while stimulating the same by influencing its direction, scope, and speed. The inability of separating EU integration distinctly from the transformation processes has resulted in a part of the Polish society believing that transformation difficulties have stemmed from the EU integration process. Polish politicians are frequently justifying the introduction of not very popular and difficult internal reforms with a need to adjust to EU membership requirements, even if such reforms only loosely relate to EU membership criteria. Moreover, the rationalising and forming of alternative solutions, as well as cost optimising in the area of EU integration are extremely difficult – if not impossible – given their linkage to transformation processes.

The Europe Agreement, which provides a legal and organisational framework for the implementation of fundamental integration tasks, shall be binding Poland gradually to the European Community in the political, economic, and legal dimensions. It is being implemented gradually, thus enabling both the construction of a proprietary institutional system, and the experience-building process. Apart from formal and legal adjustments stemming from the obligatory harmonisation

* Dr. **Jan Borkowski**: Warsaw University Centre for Europe; Member of the National Council for European Integration; in 1993-96 Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on the Europe Agreement and Co-chairman of the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee; in 1996-97 Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

of both the existent and future Polish legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire*, the association process shall basically allow for the forming of a proprietary economic and social model, as well as a proprietary path leading to membership.

Both parties (Poland and the Community) have perceived the Europe Agreement as assisting Polish preparations for European Union membership. The Agreement has made it possible to establish, and – subsequently – to amend any adjustment programmes and procedures serving the purpose of its implementation, and forming the organisational framework of preparations for Polish EU membership. Accession preparations, ever since the filing of the EU membership application in 1994, have been taking place chiefly as part of the association institutional framework, and have been chiefly based on association results.

Accession preparations, however, are also carrying the burden of negative phenomena related to the execution of the Europe Agreement. Negative comments concerning the execution of the Europe Agreement, especially in relation to the trade balance with the EU reflected in the negative balance with all EU countries, the value of said balance nearly doubling the export value, are – in some social and political centres in particular – seen as proof of EU integration in its former form and shape being disadvantageous for Polish economy. This has been reflected in the public opinion perception of costs and benefits of EU integration, which hints at an asymmetry in Polish-EU trade to the benefit of the latter, as resulting – among others – from the content and form of execution of the Europe Agreement.

Despite the accession negotiations having been in progress for more than two years now, both the content of the Europe Agreement and the form of its enforcement continue evoking controversies.¹ While postulates of renegotiating the Agreement are rather sporadic, and can be perceived as a form of political pressure on negotiating parties, any criticism of negative phenomena related to the association process ought to be reflected in works of the association organs.²

Association bodies established to the purpose of supervising the execution of the Agreement have so far been the most important institutionalised form of regular co-operation between Poland and the European Union. This has not, however, been properly reflected in Polish literature on the subject of Polish integration with the European Union, which may indeed mean that such bodies are recognised as formal structures only, with no actual impact on the course of Polish-European Union integration. Should the latter prove to be true, this

¹ See i.a. A.Czyżewski's comment in *Narodowe Forum Integracji Europejskiej (National European Integration Forum)*, Materials edited by A. Budzyński, Warsaw 1998, p.16-18.

² *Europe Agreement Establishing the Association by and between the Republic of Poland and the European Communities and their Member States*, Articles 102-110.

means that Poland is not using any of the existent instruments available to influence the European Union or her member states. This paper, describing the role of one of the three association bodies – the Joint Parliamentary Committee – serves the purpose of revising such assumptions.

1. Organisational Structure and Operational Procedures of the JPC

Since the early beginnings of operation, the Poland-European Communities Parliamentary Association Committee have adopted – despite legal doubts, but in conformity to the European Parliament (EP) practice – the following working name: Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

The legal basis for the appointment of an inter-parliamentary European Parliament delegation forming part of the JPC has been laid down in the European Parliament By-Laws. Inter-parliamentary delegations remain the chief form of shaping and developing external European Parliament relations, with their tasks including the following: securing dialogue with national parliaments and establishing contact networks with parliament members; exchange of information on current topics, and examining issues of special importance to mutual relations; keeping in contact with state authorities other than parliaments; influencing EU foreign policy; and co-operation in the area of resolving all and any problems arising between the Union and any given state.³

The European Parliament appointed the first Delegation for Contact with Poland with a membership of eleven on September 14th 1989. Shortly after the Europe Agreement⁴ had been signed, an EP delegation with 15 members and 14 deputy members was appointed in January 1992. In November 1993, this group assumed the function of a delegation to the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Members of the EP delegation to the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee are appointed for a period of two and a half years, from among political groups and non-party deputies, with relevant proportions observed. It would be noteworthy to emphasise the participation of numerous renowned and experienced politicians in subsequent JPC delegations, said politicians actively involved in contacts with and interested in Poland, and perceived as a Poland supporting-lobby in the European Parliament, after a fashion.⁵ Today,

³ F.Jacobs, R.Corbett, M.Shackleton, *The European Parliament*, Longman 1992.

⁴ The Europe Agreement was signed in Brussels on December 16th 1991.

⁵ In 1982, a “group of friends of Poland” (*Amici Poloniae*) was established at the European Parliament. Their purpose was to support the Polish society in political change attempts by providing material assistance estimated at ECU 140 million. *Amici Poloniae* have so far been the only lobbying community in European institutions to care for Polish interests. Members of the EP JPC Delegation have been co-operating with *Amici Poloniae*. See K.Popowicz, *Podstawy instytucjonalno-prawne Unii Europejskiej (Institutional and Legal Bases of the European Union)*, European Integration Committee, Warsaw 1998, p.81.

the EP delegation has 12 members and 12 deputy members. The delegation has one chairman and two deputy chairmen.

By-Laws of the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland constitute the formal basis for the appointment of a Polish Parliamentary delegation responsible for contacts with the European Parliament.

The first Parliamentary Group for Contacts with the European Parliament (with a membership of fifteen) was appointed by virtue of decisions passed by the Presidium of the Sejm and Presidium of the Senate of the Republic of Poland on January 4th 1990. The task of the said Parliamentary Group included the following: representing the Sejm and Senate during working contacts with the European Parliament; programming and initiating co-operation; and co-ordinating any action at the level of relevant groups and political clubs.⁶

Following the signing of the Europe Agreement, a permanent Delegation of the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland for Contacts with the European Parliament was established, with a membership of twelve. In November 1993, shortly before the Europe Agreement came into force, a 15-member Delegation of the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland to the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee was formed. Today, the Delegation has 12 members and 12 deputy members (9 deputies and 3 senators, respectively). The Delegation is appointed for the 4-year period of the parliamentary term of office from among parliamentary club representatives, in accordance with predefined proportions. The Delegation has one chairman and two deputy chairmen. In conformity to the practice adopted in 1993, the Delegation chairman is also the chairman of the European Integration Committee of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland (SKIE). Moreover, some Delegation members are European Integration Committee members as well. Under such conditions, both the SKIE experience and the results of their operation may be of importance to the efficiency of Delegation works.

By-laws approved in 1994 by Presidiums of the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland and of the European Parliament are the legal basis of works performed by the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee. The By-laws specify JPC competencies and operational procedures, as laid down in the Europe Agreement and parliamentary practice.

A Presidium consisting of two co-chairmen and four deputy chairmen from both delegations manages all JPC works. The JPC convokes at least twice annually: once in Poland, and once at the business location of the European Parliament. This is of crucial importance, not only for reasons of equal distribution

⁶ M.Kruk, *Parlament Europejski: traktaty i praktyka. Współpraca Sejmu i Senatu z Parlamentem Europejskim (European Parliament: the Treaties and the Practice. Co-operation of the Sejm and Senate with the European Parliament)* Wydawnictwo Sejmowe (Sejm Publishing House), Warsaw 1997.

of the organisational and financial load, but also of enabling close contact of EP deputies with Polish institutions and conditions. Moreover, such a format allows Polish parliament members to become acquainted with the course of work and operational conditions of the European Parliament.

Table 1. Schedule of Sessions of the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee and the Poland-EU Association Council, 1993-1999.

Year	Joint Parliamentary Committee	Association Council
1993	29.XI - 1.XII, Warsaw	-
1994	22-23.III, Brussels	7.III.
1995	30.I - 1.II, Warsaw 15.VI, Strasbourg (special session) 5-6.IX, Brussels	17.XII
1996	22-24.I, Warsaw 2-2.IX, Brussels	16.VII
1997	14-16.IV, Warsaw	30.IV
1998	20-21.I, Brussels 22-24.VI, Warsaw 25-26.XI, Brussels	10.XI
1999	29-31.III, Warsaw 22-23.XI, Brussels	7.XII

During the years 1993-1999, 12 ordinary sessions of the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee and one special session (1995) concerning agriculture-related problems took place (Table No. 1).

JPC sessions are conducted according to an agenda including a set of topics forming a number of meetings taking several hours each, as part of 2-3 day conferences. The duration of JPC sessions remains in direct and favourable contrast to Association Council debate hours, as these are usually limited to approximately one hour annually. Discussions are based on speeches delivered by representatives of Polish and European Union executive bodies (ministers and the ambassador as the Permanent Representative, and commissioners and ambassadors, respectively), as well as by reports and papers drafted by JPC members.

To date, JPC sessions also included meetings with Speakers of the Sejm and Senate, the Prime Minister, and the President of the Republic of Poland, and with the President of the European Parliament. Such meetings are both a source

of information, and proof of political importance of the JPC. It seems that the contact of EP deputies with representatives of major state institutions in Poland serves the purpose of promoting Poland among EU politicians, as does the cultural programme accompanying selected JPC sessions in Poland.

2. JPC Competencies, and Relations with the Association Council

According to by-laws, "*JPC scope of operations shall include the consideration of all and any aspects of relations between the Republic of Poland and the European Union, and the implementation of the Europe Agreement in particular.*" Thus, since the early days of its operations, the Joint Parliamentary Committee has assumed tasks covering not association-related problems only, but preparations for Polish EU membership as well.

As provided in the Europe Agreement, JPC is nothing but a forum for meetings and opinion exchange for members of both parliaments (Article 108). JPC has not authority to pass decisions binding to the parties or to executive bodies of any of the parties to the Agreement. In analogy to the role of the parliament within the state authority system and to the function of the European Parliament within the European Union organs' system, the Joint Parliamentary Committee is a representative body as well as a factor of political supervision over the process of Polish integration with the European Union, the latter enforced by executive authorities of both parties. As a forum for political dialogue, JPC has the opportunity of indirect influence on executive bodies by shaping the climate of co-operation between parties, by providing the public opinion with assessments of the executive authorities' performance, and by providing parliament members with an opportunity of using information and opinions from JPC sessions during sessions of respective seconding parliaments.

By-laws emphasise JPC competencies, limited to submitting recommendations to the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland, and to the European Parliament. During the six years of JPC operations, recommendations have been addressing equally the respective parliaments, the government of the Republic of Poland, the European Commission, and the European Union Council, via the Presidency. Making JPC opinions and recommendations publicly available via the media has regrettably been very limited in scope and importance alike.

The Europe Agreement defined the format of relations between the Joint Parliamentary Committee with the Association Council (AC) as the leading decision-maker among association bodies. In light of the numerous and crucial competencies assigned to the Association Council, the JPC may request that the Council provide them with relevant information as to the execution of the Europe Agreement, following which the Council shall submit the data demanded to the Joint Parliamentary Committee. Moreover, the JPC ought to be notified

of any Association Council decisions (Article 110). No such authority of the Joint Parliamentary Committee has been confirmed in the duties of the Association Council as laid down in its by-laws or the Europe Agreement. Neither the lack of tools to enforce such rather limited JPC rights in contact with the AC, however, nor the distinct lack of direct communication between the two bodies seem to be a crucial problem to parliament members, given the specialised (technical) nature of the vast majority of Association Council decisions. The session schedules of the Association Council and of the Joint Parliamentary Committee alike prove a complete lack of co-ordination of the work performed by these authorities; moreover, the regularity of parliamentary sittings versus the hard to justify irregularity of Association Council sessions is rather striking. Hence, it could well be concluded that the fundamental association bodies are mutually independent, which condition is indubitably detrimental to the process of impacting the association process, or of preparation for Polish membership in the European Union.

A crucial and actually applied competence of the Joint Parliamentary Committee is that of submitting recommendations to the Association Council (Article 110). Each of the 12 ordinary JPC meetings during the years 1993-1999 resulted in documents entitled *Declaration and Recommendations*, an interesting and synthetic picture of work performed by parliament members, and – concurrently – a paper submitted to the attention of institutions responsible for the integration process in Poland and in the European Union.

An analysis of *Declarations and Recommendations* enables a conclusion that these documents are an expression of compromise between the opinions and expectations of the Polish delegation, as well as of that of the European Parliament. This is fully understandable, given the multitude of information sources, experience, and expectations of the various societies, as well as the objective discrepancies between parties in the integration process. While consistent efforts made by the European Parliament to gain a stronger position against other EU organs are also reflected in JPC works, it would be impossible not to notice that JPC opinions and recommendations are highly conformant with EU Council and European Commission opinions. JPC opinions practically confirm the course and the expected direction of the integration process.

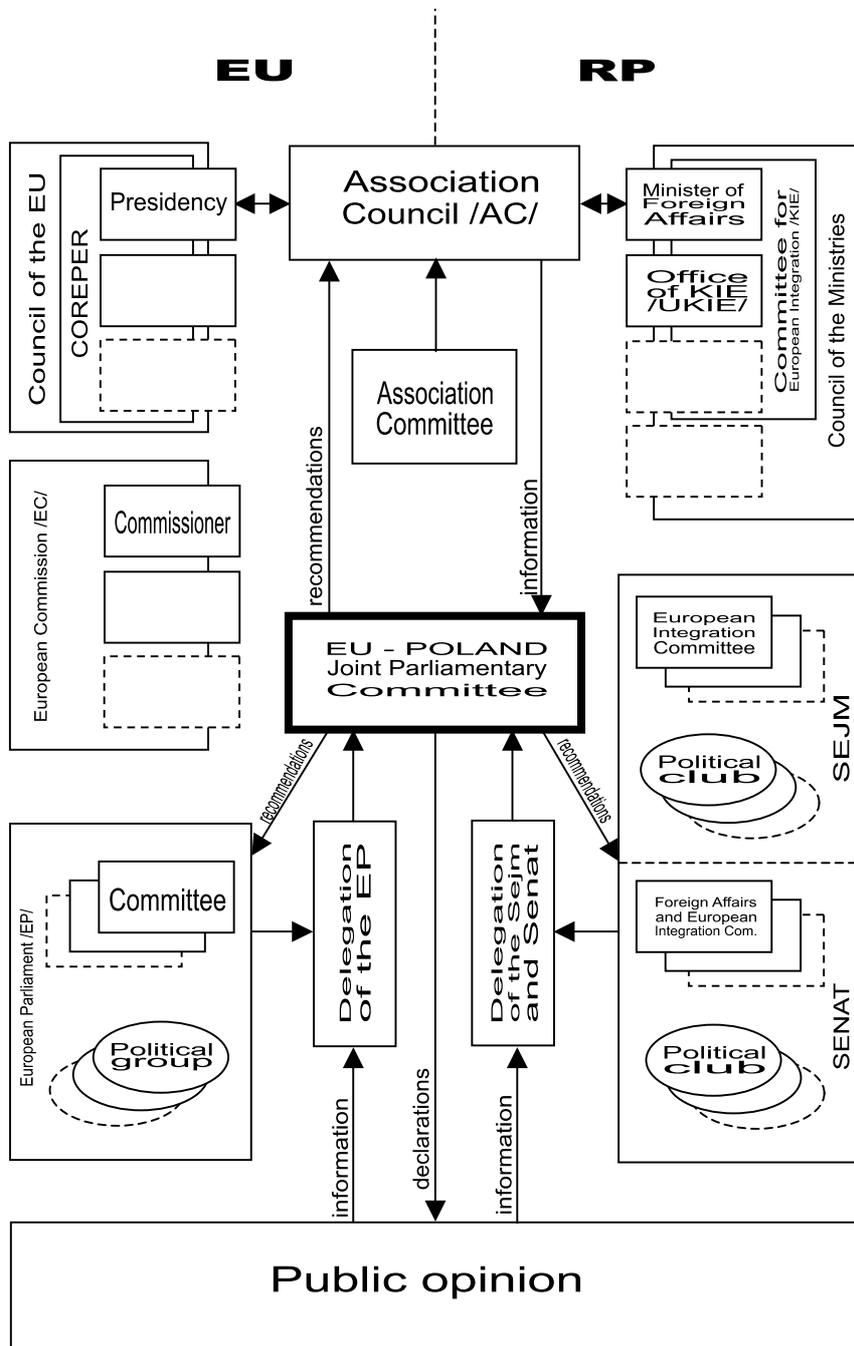


Figure No. 1. Position of the Joint Parliamentary Committee in Relation to Polish and European Union Institutions

3. Assessment of Preparations, and Perspectives of Polish Membership in the EU

The array topics of Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee debates stems from agreements by and between delegations, held on the Committee Presidium forum, with secretariates operating in both parliaments in attendance.

Throughout the analysed period, JPC sessions have had a remarkably extensive agenda, usually including the following:

- an assessment of all most recent events in Poland, in the EU, and in the world,
- international security problems,
- political and economic problems of European integration,
- EU development, and the status of Polish preparations for EU membership.

Reports and papers drafted by members of each delegation and the relevant discussions have all provided a basis for a unique catalogue of opinions concerning the various decisions and the current and expected occurrences, further reflected in the aforementioned *Declarations and Recommendations* adopted jointly by the entire Committee towards the closing of any session. Given the conditions, the fundamental role of the JPC remains that of monitoring the process of Polish integration with the EU. Hence, it has been a typical phenomenon for the debate topics to shift from basic political and economic problems to the dilemmas of enlargement and procedural issues (Table No. 2).

The basic task of the JPC, which is the assessment of the association process, had been the subject of debate among parliament members both in a general form – an overall evaluation of the Europe Agreement performance (sessions I/1993 and II/1994) – as well as with regard to the various areas regulated by the said Agreement. Albeit the association aspect has been present during a vast majority of sessions, the choice of topics itself suggests that since its early days, JPC sessions have been targeting an assessment of the status of preparations and perspectives of Polish membership in the European Union.

Special attention ought to be paid to the fact of the first JPC session having been convoked in November 1993, two months before the Europe Agreement came into force, as emphasised in the final declaration, with JPC “*expressing regret that the Association Agreement had not come into force yet*”, despite – as emphasised in the introduction – it having been “*ratified by all respective parliaments*”. This took place only nearly two years after the Agreement had been signed. Expressing its commitment to supporting Polish integration with the European Union, the Joint Committee thus displayed a readiness to take position above and beyond the interests of EU member states focused on the “*extension*” process, while emphasising that “*the extension and enlargement of European unification processes which ought to take place in harmony, should*

also be perceived as a serious contribution to peaceful co-operation on the European continent, and to peace world-wide.” Hence, at an very early stage of integration, and in line with Polish expectations, the JPC has been concentrating on membership perspectives, thus leaving problems stemming from the execution of the Europe Agreement on the sidelines.

Table 2. Array of Topics of Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee RP-EU Sessions, 1993-1999.

Topic	Year												1999	
	1993	1994	1995		1996	1997	1998							
	Session													
	I	II	III	spec	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	
Europe Agreement	x	x												
Security policy	x	x	x					x						
EU development	x				x					x		x		
PL-EU econ. contacts	x	x			x	x	x		x	x				
EU enlargement	x								x					
PHARE	x		x											
Env. Protection	x	x			x	x	x							
Memb. Perspectives		x	x				x	x	x				x	
Political sit. in Poland			x			x			x					
Political sit. in EU			x								x	x	x	
Agriculture			x	x							x			
Association Council					x		x	x			x			
IGC					x	x		x						
EU – 2 nd pillar					x									
EU – 3 rd pillar					x		x			x				
Public opinion						x						x		
Integration costs							x							
Integr. Strategy (NSI)								x		x				
Access. Partnership									x	x			x	
NPPC										x		x		
Social policy								x						
Memb. Negotiations									x	x	x	x	x	
EU institutions											x			
EU policy reforms												x	x	

Source: Compiled on basis of materials of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland.

During the second session in March 1994, welcoming the Europe Agreement coming into force⁷ with satisfaction, the Joint Parliamentary Committee concluded that this “*opens a new chapter in the history of mutual relations, leading directly to Poland gaining European Union membership*”.

Although Poland filed her EU membership application shortly after the Europe Agreement had come into force, that is immediately after JPC works began, this carried a rapid impact for the new understanding of the role of the said authority. According to J.Gawroński,⁸ “*given the formal filing of an application for Polish membership in the European Union, the Joint Parliamentary Committee shall be facing two fundamental tasks: to ensure democratic control over the association process, and to make association as effective as possible, if only by pressuring the European Union for the latter to put all her economic and budgetary opportunities to use for purposes of supporting economic reforms in Poland*”.⁹ A similar opinion was expressed by W.G.Van Velzen¹⁰ who declared that “*we (JPC) are the co-ordinating body inside the European Parliament responsible for lobbying for Poland, to help the Polish people become members of the European Union as soon as possible*”.¹¹

Of all the economic issues, trade remains one of the most serious problems in the area of Polish relations with the European Union. Poland’s negative trade balance with Community countries, growing since the nineties, has been recognised by the JPC (according to an assessment of the Polish party) as a symptom of factual asymmetry to the benefit of the Union, despite the formal asymmetry to the benefit of Poland as assumed in the Europe Agreement. In this context, the Joint Parliamentary Committee (session II/1994) expressed “*concern for reason of the possible protectionism tendencies within the European Union, and of a failure to adjust the Polish export structure to requirements of the European Union internal market*”. Moreover, it indicated a “*necessity of further trade liberalisation, and of eliminating non-tariff barriers*.” This was subsequently confirmed in a JPC recommendation (III/1995) to “*make every effort and take every step indispensable for the purpose of both parties avoiding the adoption of any legal, commercial or technical measures as could directly or indirectly result in a restriction in the flow of commodities and services between Poland and the European Union*.”

⁷ The Europe Agreement came into force on January 1st 1994.

⁸ Jaś Gawroński: Italian deputy to the European Parliament; first Co-chairman of the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee RP-UE on behalf of the European Parliament, 1993-1994.

⁹ J.Gawroński, *As Seen from the European Parliament*. “*European Union Magazine*”, 2/1994.

¹⁰ Wim G.Van Velzen: Dutch deputy to the European Parliament; Co-chairman of the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee RP-UE, 1994-1996.

¹¹ *Future Relations between Poland and European Union*, Proceedings of the Conference, Club de Bruxelles, Brussels 1995, p.26.

Given the fact of Poland implementing the *White Book* of the European Commission concerning integration with the internal market, the JPC (IV/1995) recommended executive bodies “to take steps to ensure elimination of any inequalities in the trade balance between Poland and the European Union (...)”. While noting “with regret” the numerous commercial disputes between Poland and the Union (i.a. certificates, and export quota for hides and scrap metal), the Joint Parliamentary Committee (VI/1996) emphasised the “importance of ensuring better access to the internal EU market for Polish commodities and services”, while highlighting the “need of Polish authorities to avoid any legal regulations recognised as a potential difficulty in economic operations or trade between Poland and the European Union”. In the course of the same session, parliament members recommended the “taking of any steps required to the purpose of removing all and any limitations in the trade balance between parties, such as quantity restrictions or tariff fees for goods imported from the EU to Poland”. Noting the constant negative trade balance and its growth, the JPC (VII/1997) repeated its recommendation of making efforts to ensure a balanced condition in trade, and (under the Polish party’s pressure) to “open the internal Union market wider for Polish agricultural products”. Proof of a search for measures of JPC influence (VIII/1998) can be found in the postulate of a “more intense dialogue in the search for mutually beneficial solutions as concerns matters of equalising the trade balance and of seeking further opportunities of developing sustainable economic relations”, as – according to a correct statement (XII/1999) – “any growth in the trade deficit results in problems in the area of restructuring the Polish economy”.

As proven by the above analysis, the debate held on the forum of the Joint Parliamentary Committee is chiefly of monitoring nature, whereas the indubitable lack of effective JPC influence on the practice of Poland-European Union trade relations may be explained with the complexity of problems related, accompanied by an absence of any effective action, either of the Association Council, or of executive bodies of Poland and the EU.

Debates concerning the problem of integration in the agricultural sector had been an equally strenuous challenge to parliament members. In encouragement of “cautious analyses of the opportunities of integrating Polish agriculture with that of the European Union, thus enabling the Polish government to draft adequate motions and action programmes” (III/1995), the Joint Parliamentary Committee decided to call an extraordinary session on June 15th 1995 in Strasbourg, to be attended by competent representatives of the Polish Government and the European Commission. The discussion was based on a Report¹² drafted

¹² *Working Paper on the Development on the Common Agricultural Policy from the Viewpoint of Future Polish Accession to the European Union*, drafted by H.Funk, General Secretariat of the Commission and Delegations, Strasbourg.

– among others – following a study tour in Poland by members of the Agricultural and Rural Development Commission of the European Parliament. In recognition of the fact that in Madrid (December 1995) the European Council failed to adopt the report concerning the integration of agricultural sectors of Central and East European states announced in Essen and drafted by the European Commission, JPC actions ought to be perceived as a courageous overcoming of concerns and myths related to the condition of Polish agriculture in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The Joint Parliamentary Committee itself (IV/1995) recognised that *“this special session provided an excellent basis for a better mutual understanding of issues related to the agricultural context of Polish accession to the European Union”*. It would also be worthwhile to emphasise the very fact of a special session outside of the course of ordinary meetings having been called, as applied for by the Polish delegation.

Agricultural issues returned to the JPC forum (VII/1997) to be expressed in the form of a recommendation to *“support efforts to establish pre-accession funds for purposes of restructuring and modernising Polish agriculture, as well as of developing rural areas and counteracting hidden unemployment”*, given the efforts made by the Polish government in the area. Extensive suggestions have been contained in JPC recommendations (VIII/1998) to *“ensure the inclusion of Poland and other candidate countries in the decision-making process, and to keep them fully informed of the Common Agricultural Policy reform, and of the transformation thereof into a coherent Agricultural Policy guaranteeing respect for the natural environment and the needs of rural area inhabitants, and conforming to the World Trade Organisation requirements”*.

In relation to works to reform the CAP as defined in the *Agenda 2000* document, the JPC (X/1998) held a debate, in conclusion of which it was declared that the matter of agriculture in the CAP reform is both *“important and difficult”*. When assessing the condition of the Polish agricultural sector, it was stated that *“not all farms classified as private provide goods production”*, whereas *“their situation ought to be considered within the framework of rural development policy, as laid down in the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy reform contained in Agenda 2000”*. All these statements seem to be crucial, given the need to dispose of stereotypes triggering fears concerning the Polish agricultural sector among EU member states. With relation to disputes between Poland and the European Union, the JPC (XII/1999) agreed that *“the process of integrating the Polish agricultural and food sector with conditions of the EU agricultural and food economy shall be hindered by the following:*

- *both parties retaining barriers in the food and agricultural produce trade between Poland and the European Union,*

- (...) *the European Union applying export subsidies in trade with Russia and the CIS, resulting in Poland losing her traditional agricultural export markets*".

Given the circumstances, the Joint Parliamentary Committee agreed to recommend a reduction in the subsidies of export to Russia and the CIS states from the EU and other countries – such as the United States – for purposes of establishing more equal competitive conditions.

In light of the approaching accession negotiations within the "agriculture" area, it ought to be counted on that the Joint Parliamentary Committee shall undertake a further process of clarifying the difficult problems in agriculture, which shall be of extreme value at the stage of accession treaty ratification.

An area of difficulties equal to those present in agriculture in the process of Polish integration with the EU is that of environmental protection, a subject of five JPC sessions. Very early in the process (III/1995) it was concluded that *"tremendous efforts shall be required in the environmental protection area to adjust the Polish legislation and practice to European Union standards"*. In the course of further debate (V/1996) a *"need to expand knowledge in the area"* was recognised, to be achieved *"by study tours and special sessions to be attended by members of the Commission for Environmental Protection, Health, and Consumer Rights of the European Parliament, and by the Environmental Protection Commission of the Sejm and Senate"*. On basis of a special session held as part of a regular session (VI/1996), the Joint Parliamentary Committee concluded that the *"natural environment in Poland has deteriorated considerably, following a lack of respect for said environment under communist time."* Special attention was subsequently paid to the "Green Lungs of Poland" ("Zielone Płuca Polski") programme, and to the "Green Lungs of Europe" project, in recognition of the justifiability of more extensive support to be provided to both. Executive bodies have been recommended to *"ensure that Poland shall be well-prepared to at least fulfil minimum European standards by enforcing a programme of adjusting legal regulations in the area of environmental protection, and by agreeing transition measures based on a strictly defined period of reaching European standards"*, and to *"causing a considerable increase in environment-supporting funds from budgetary and non-budgetary sources alike (the PHARE programme included), so as to enable Poland to implement transition solutions, and in particular to ensure that 10% of PHARE funds shall be used for environment protection projects"*. The above proves crucial JPC preferences for environmental protection issues, and its clear-cut conviction that Poland shall in the future require transition period for adjustments in the area of environmental protection.

Social problems had not found a special place in JPC works. In dealing with the topic, the Joint Parliamentary Committee (VII/1997) concluded that *"social policy problems in Poland shall require the drafting of a comprehensive model*

of new solutions, and especially in such key areas as social security, education, environmental protection, housing, and reduction of the poverty zone, all in conformity to the economic reform programme in progress today.” Moreover, the importance of *“taking realistic action to the purpose of reducing unemployment in Poland”* was emphasised, and *“especially among young people, as well as of alleviating structural unemployment in selected Polish regions, and hidden unemployment in rural areas”*.

4. Perspectives of Polish Membership in the EU

Within the Polish strategy of integration with the European Union, a special position is held by the definition of terms and conditions, by the schedule, and by a possibly rapid date of Poland joining the EU. This has been distinctly reflected in the works of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, who have:

- *“emphasised the necessity of a rapid agreement as to precisely defined criteria and a gradual integration timetable”* (I/1993),
- *“recognised the need to draft a schedule and a convergence programme leading to EU membership”* (II/1994),
- declared that *“negotiations ought to commence following the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, to the purpose of reaching relevant agreement prior to the end of the century”* (as above),
- recommends *“negotiations concerning Poland joining the European Union to commence as soon as reasonably possible, following the close of the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference”* (III/1995),
- in reference with great satisfaction to the announcement of Poland drafting her pre-accession strategy – declared that in consequence of the above, *“it shall be possible to commence membership-related negotiations as of the date of closing the subsequent Intergovernmental Conference, in consideration of an intent for Poland to join the Union as soon as shall reasonably prove possible”* (IV/1995),
- declared that *“the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee shall be pressing for negotiations concerning Polish membership in the EU to start as of the moment of closing the Intergovernmental Conference, and calling for relevant negotiations schedule to be drafted”* (as above),
- *“expressed hope that the initial negotiations stage shall concur with the commencement of negotiations with Cyprus and Malta”* (V/1996),
- *„accepted an opinion expressed by the European Parliament, that despite the concurrent start of membership-related negotiations with all candidate countries, the period of actual duration of such negotiations may vary”* (VI/1996),

- been pleased to note “*the Polish party accepting the date of December 31st 2002 as a date of EU membership readiness, while indicating the need of retaining the former dynamics of the enlargement process*” (X/1998),
- while claiming that “*the new financial perspective of the EU for the years 2000-2006 provides for working assumptions as to launching the process of accepting new members prior to the year 2002*”, emphasised that “*defining the date of Polish membership within the EU shall carry an element of mobilisation for the success of Polish system reforms*” (XI/1999),
- recommended the “*undertaking of action targeting a definition – in the course of the Union summit in Helsinki in December 1999 – of an accession process schedule, including the date of future Union enlargement*” (XI/1999),
- “*supported the European Commission recommendation of implementing – prior to the year 2002 – institutional changes enabling a decision to the effect of accepting first European Union accessions*” (XII/1999).

The above compilation proves beyond doubt that although on economic matters, the JPC remains in conformity to European Union expectations, on political matters it definitely supports Polish positions and expectations. JPC opinions concerning the accession timetable reflect its flexibility and efforts to shape the integration process in a political dimension.

Since its early days, the JPC has been speaking to the cause of Poland’s active participation in the European integration process, both through the development of a political dialogue and economic co-operation with the EU, and by including Poland (and other Associated states) in a framework proper for a debate as to the future shape of the European Union. A fundamental occasion was provided by the Intergovernmental Conference, which began in the spring of 1996. While initially recommending (III/1995) efforts and steps indispensable for adequate Polish participation in the IGC then under preparation, which had been fully in line with the expectations of the Polish government, very soon (IV/1995) did the Joint Parliamentary Committee “*express appreciation for the European Council commitment to fully inform Poland (and other future EU members) of Conference works*”. Concurrently, the JPC indicated a need to consider “*methods, thanks to which Poland could have her participation in reflections, and partake in the general debate concerning the future form of the European Union*”.

Recognising the absence of any formal foundations for third countries to participate in the EU Intergovernmental Conference, attempts of the Joint Parliamentary Committee to engage in a search for precedent solutions deserve close attention. While sharing the Polish viewpoint based on an assumption that EU reforms are hugely motivated by the future enlargement, and are to conform to future EU members’ expectations, the Joint Parliamentary Committee has

definitely been influenced by the Polish delegation when discussing the aforementioned matter several times, confirming *“the existence of a joint interest of both parties in sharing a debate concerning a future Europe, including the Mediterranean Conference, the Europe-Asia Conference, and the Central European Conference”* (IV/1995). Ultimately, the JPC *“noted the form of IGC participation reserved for the European Parliament and for Central and Eastern European countries”*, while recommending *“enabling Poland (and other associated states) to present own opinions concerning the future shape of the European Union”* (V/1996). In recognition of conflicting interests of Union member states as to her reforms, of a threat of offending some countries representing a different EU concept, and the lack of any guarantee that the Polish position shall in any way be used in practice, the encouragement to present detailed opinions eventually gained no support in Poland.

As similar objectives had been the guiding force for the Joint Committee in relation to the Intergovernmental Conference as concerns the European Union institutional reform, effects had to be similar as well, the more so that the JPC position (X/1998) had not been unambiguous. While appreciating *“the strategic importance of the EU institutional reform, it was concluded that given the role to be played by Poland in the enlarged Union, one should not exclude the option of Polish participation in a debate concerning the future form of European institutions”*. In expectation of the IGC to be convoked, the Commission (XI/1999) concluded that *“it would be desirable for states negotiating their EU membership to be able to participate in such a conference as observers”*. Ultimately, the Joint Parliamentary Committee (XII/1999), agreeing to the procedure adopted, *“recommended the Presidency and the European Commission to engage in regular consultations with candidate countries as to the reform of Community institutions”*.

The 1996 recommendation of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (V) is noteworthy: to *“implement the Polish postulate to hold an extraordinary summit of the European Union, jointly with associated countries from Central and Eastern Europe.”* This initiative has resulted in the so-called European Conference convoked in 1997, which had triggered tremendous hope. At the current stage of Polish accession to the European Union, many similar matters undertaken by the JPC in the past would have been anachronistic today.

Although Joint Parliamentary Committee competencies relate to the forming of the process of Polish integration with the European Union, the various JPC members can in practice be voicing differing – even negative – opinions as to the EU enlargement process. This is mainly the case of European Parliament deputies representing political groups sceptical as to the European integration process. This is why JPC *Declarations and Recommendations* contain but a few elements of the European Union enlargement vision, which deserve special

attention primarily in light of the role of the European Parliament in the enlargement process itself.

In the course of the inauguration meeting already, the JPC confirmed the *“intention to act to the purpose of preventing further divisions in Europe, stemming from differences in economic development”*, as *“such division would extend the existence of an artificial wall during the period of confrontation between the Warsaw Pact and NATO”*. This is why the JPC recognised that in attempts to implement European integration, Europe ought to be perceived as a political entirety, bound with shared values and with joint fate. Moreover, the Joint Parliamentary Committee declared (IV/1995) that accepting Central and East European countries to the Union shall result in political benefits throughout Europe, with the strengthening of all and any forms of regional co-operation these countries participate in (including CEFTA and the Council of Baltic Sea States) recognised as an integral part of the European Union enlargement process (VI/1996). A clear message is carried by a JPC opinion phrased during the period preceding the publication of the European Commission’s opinion concerning Polish EU membership application (VII/1997): *“accepting Poland as an EU member meets crucial interests of the Union, her members, and states preparing for membership. This is an indispensable step in the process of overcoming the post-war division of our continent, a contribution to enlarging the area of stability in Europe”*.

5. Parliamentary Co-operation Experience

Co-operation of the Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee with European Union institutions is a unique experience for Polish politicians, enabling a process of becoming acquainted – among others – with the operational procedures of the European Parliament and other EU organs; of absorbing the mechanisms of Union operations and the complexity of her policies; and of launching a process of learning as concerns the scale and nature of EU member states’ interests.

While not overestimating any of these functions, special attention ought to be paid to the remarkable role of the JPC in providing opportunities for co-operation between political parties and groups in Poland and in the European Union. This objective is supported by the actual structure of both delegations, with fundamental political proportions of the respective Polish and European Parliaments preserved. Differences in opinion as concerns the various matters discussed are present not only between delegations, but also within each delegation to the JPC. Hence, both differences and similarities in opinion emerge amongst the specific groups of politicians of both delegations. Given the circumstances, natural and informal coalitions are formed, consisting of deputies

representing similar interests and opinions, regardless of citizenship, with regard to issues displaying no fundamental discrepancy between Poland and the European Union. The necessity of presenting Polish interests efficiently on the JPC forum, however, also supports the process of communication among Polish politicians representing the governmental coalition and the opposition alike.

The need of co-operation among political parties was emphasised by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (IV/1995) in *“recognising that the social and political consequences of European Union accession shall be considerable enough to require a broad consensus by and between social factors and political parties, both within the Union and in associated countries, such consensus based on pre-defined national integration strategies, and on the Union enlargement strategy”*.

The perspective of Polish membership in the European Union enforces a necessity to realise – increasingly more clearly – that there is a need for Polish political parties to co-operate with political groups operating in the EU, and represented in the European Parliament. The evolution of the party system in Poland is not independent of the party system in other democratic states, while mutual assistance and co-operation opportunities on the international forum both lead to permanent bonds deserving a separate analysis. This has been confirmed in a recommendation of the JPC (VII/1997) to take any steps required to encourage closer contact between political groups in the European Parliament, and parliamentary clubs in the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland. In the course of its subsequent session, the JPC (VIII/1998) *“was pleased to note the contact of political groups in the European Parliament with Polish political parties, having taken on the form of off-site sessions of political group presidiums in Poland in the winter and spring of 1998, among others”*.

The Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee (similarly to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) is a “laboratory”, after a fashion, where information exchange takes place, and where supranational political bonds are established, the latter considered to be one of the many engines of European integration.

6. Final Comments

The above analysis, containing only selected – though crucial – problems constituting the subject matter of Poland-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee operations, provides no opportunity of defining the considerable role of the JPC in Polish preparations for EU membership. It does, however, allow us to conclude beyond doubt that the bulk of interest and ambitions of the JPC relates to pre-accession preparations, whereas issues concerning the execution of the European Agreement are nothing but an area of monitoring.

In conformity to the opinion of the EU Council as adopted by the European Council in Florence, “*Parliamentary Committees form an integral part of institutional association frameworks, whereas such sessions enable European Parliament members and deputies from associated states to exchange opinions concerning crucial aspects of bilateral relations, thus providing a contribution to mutual acquaintance and understanding.*”¹³ Public opinion polls in European Union countries and associated states indicate that the lack of knowledge about partners and of mutual understanding remain one of the main barriers in the EU enlargement process.

In recognition of the growing role of the European Parliament in the EU institutional system, experience gained by Polish deputies and senators within the framework of the JPC are becoming a crucial element of Polish institutional preparations for European Union membership.

¹³ See: *Report of the Council for General Issues of the European Union*, drafted for the European Council session in Florence, June 21st – 22nd 1996: *European Union Relations with Associated States of Central and Eastern Europe in the First Half of 1996*.