

Augustyna Burlita
Krzysztof Błoński
Department of Marketing
University of Szczecin
64, Mickiewicza Street, 71-101 Szczecin, Poland

BEHAVIOUR OF POLISH CONSUMERS IN BORDERLAND IN EUROPEAN MARKET CONDITIONS AND ITS DETERMINANTS

Abstract

From among many factors, which have influence on evaluation of Poland joining in the EU structures, also proximity of residence to border plays its role. For years a border has become for the population living there an important economic factor in field of cross-border movement, which lets buying and consuming the neighbours' good to much higher extent than in the other regions of state, but also development of business activities in sphere of small and medium business.

The paper is including evaluation of effect of the process of Poland integration with EU on these citizens of Poland, who live in borderland zone, carried out on basis of the selected poll results.

Key words: marketing, consumer behaviour.

Introduction

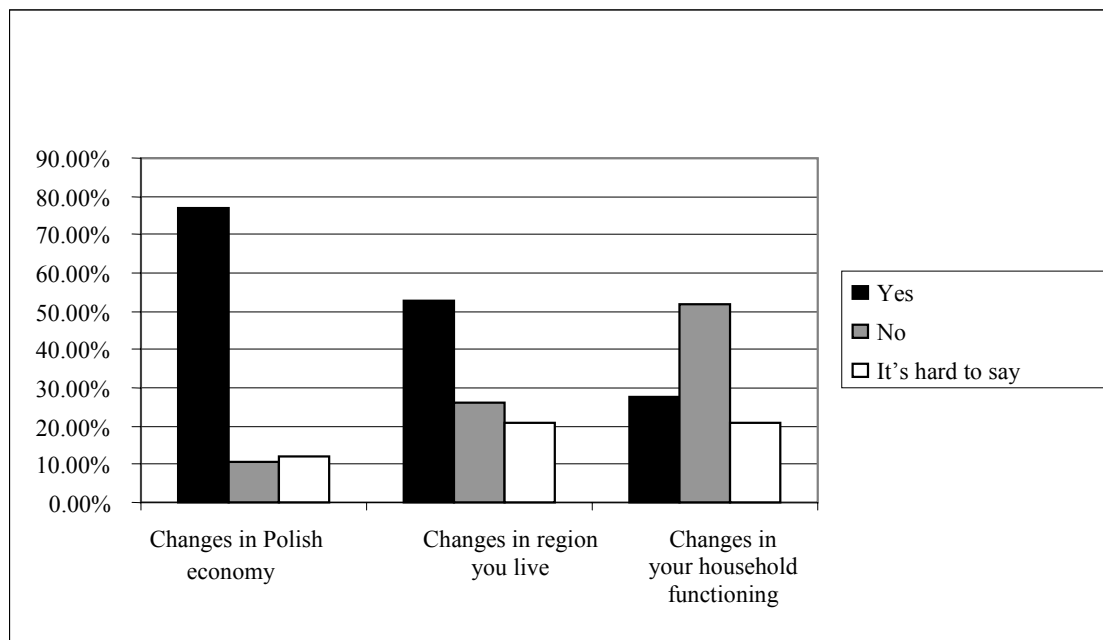
In Polish historical legal realities before 1989 a number of difficulties were have been faced in process of the cross-border cooperation establishment or, generally in establishment of cooperation between the regions of two different states, which a post-war period was extremely restricted for the political reasons. Not earlier, but after 1989 a process of normalisation and opening of Polish borders has taken place gradually, to be fully sealed at 1st May 2004, when Poland joined the Union structures. Among many factors, which influence evaluation of Poland joining the Union structures, also residence in proximity of border is a significant matter. For years already, the border has been an important economic factor for the population living there in terms of cross-border movement, which lets acquisition and consumption of their neighbours' goods to a bigger extent than in other regions of state, but also development of business activity in sphere of small and medium business. The process of culture diffusion deserves to be stressed, too; this is the borrowing of foreign values and translation of the same into a native ground. However, evaluation of full presence of Poland in the European space influence on Poles living in border zone also the factors related to a whole society, connected with economy functioning, have their effect.

Evaluation of transformations resulting from integration of Poland with EU by consumers of the borderland between Poland and Germany

On the first of May 2005, the first year of Poland's membership in European Union passed. Despite rather unfavourable external economic situation existing at the moment of

accession – such as small development dynamics of the “old” EU member states, or high prices of raw materials, Polish economy has handled joining in common market structures extremely well. The indices of economic growth and unemployment rate noted at the end of last year are the best ones since 1997. The accession was in favour of increase of economic growth pace in a passing year. In 2004, growing pace of GNP came to 5.4 per cent [2]. This is a reason, among others, that the results of opinion poll carried out at the beginning of 2005, show big social support (Pentor/UKIE: 63%; CBOS: 77%) for Poland’s membership in European Union. Also, majority of responding consumers, who live in border zone of the voivodships: Zachodniopomorskie, Lubuskie and Dolnośląskie¹ are aware of changes, which have taken place after Poland joined European Union. In their opinion, these transformations are evident especially in functioning of the national economy as a whole – 77% answers, to a slightly lower extent they are concerning the regions, where respondents live – 53% answers, and the smallest impact they have on their households – 27% answers (see fig. 1).

Figure 1. Opinions of consumers from the border zone on changes after Poland joined UE in % of total answers



Source: poll results.

At the same time, though among the respondents there are more supporters than opponents of these changes, explicit evaluation of them becomes difficult for consumers. The most of them – nearly 60% evaluate positively the effects of integration process considered in respect of economy, only every eleventh respondent is of opposite opinion. In point of view

¹ In literature on the subject, there is distinguished a number of terms to define area covered by interregional cooperation in Europe. The authors have carried out study in a frontier zone, which, according to administrative criteria is defined as a zone of two communes or of one powiat (administrative district) and a zone of one powiat on the other side of Polish border. It is assumed often to be a strip of land 20 – 30 km wide along the border. The poll has been carried out in Polish borderland zone. Broad description of terms in this range, see in Euroregiony w nowym podziale terytorialnym Polski, GUS, Statistical Office in Wrocław, Warsaw - Wrocław, 1999. Studies of behaviour of Polish consumers in border zone were carried out by the authors in period from March to April, 2005, on basis of formalised questionnaire, on random sample of 310 people over 18; 62% of respondents were the inhabitants of the frontier regions of Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship, 16% - inhabitants of frontier zone of Lubuskie Voivodship and 22% - inhabitants of the frontier areas of Dolnośląskie Voivodship.

of over 40% of respondents, the said changes have had a positive impact on functioning of the regions they live in, while 10% evaluate them negatively in this respect. The least favourable opinions on Poland accession to EU were expressed in respect of their impact on functioning of the respondents' households – nearly the same number of them perceive the changes positively, as negatively (18% and 19% of answers respectively; see Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluation of changes resulting from integration of Poland with EU by consumers of the western border zone (% of total answers)

Pos.	Evaluation of changes:	Positive	Rather Positive	Hard to say	Rather negative	Negative
1.	From the point of view of economy	17.1	41.9	32.3	7.1	1.6
2.	From the point of view of region you live in	12.6	28.7	48.7	7.1	2.9
3.	From the point of view of your household functioning	6.5	11.0	63.5	14.2	4.8

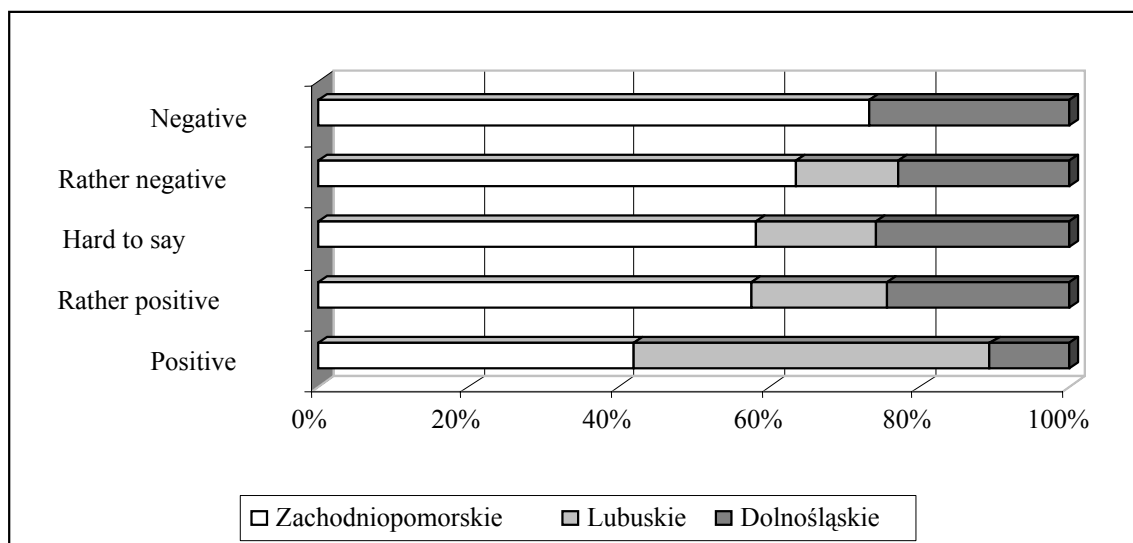
Source: poll results.

Considering the characteristics of responding consumers, it should be stated that education levels, place of residence and belonging to a social group have a significant effect on perception of the changes, which have taken place. Holders of secondary and higher education notice changes in economy much more often than persons of lower education. This fact confirms earlier tendencies from before the integration, when persons educated better more often than others perceived it as an opportunity for economy development. Similar opinion is revealed in a situation of impact determination on a region the respondents live. Here, also the people of better education predominate in positive opinions, though they still constitute a significant part of respondents, who express opposite opinion. Evaluation of integration effect on households is not determined by level of education to such significant degree, as in declarations concerning integration influence on state and region. Only every sixth person of basic vocational education and nearly every third person with secondary or higher education can notice it. When evaluating the impact on households, respondents in their majority are not able to take clear standpoint, since the answers 'it's hard to say' are dominant regardless of education level.

In case of evaluation of the identified impact of Union on economy and a region of residence, the situation is clear. Positive evaluation of this impact is expressed much more often by better educated people. Positive and rather positive opinion on impact on economy has been expressed by 65% of the holders of secondary, 58% of higher and 38% of basic vocational education. Educational campaigns undertaken by the state agencies and non-governmental organisations before the accession, as it can be seen, have had influence on expansion of the respondent's knowledge about the possibilities of European Union impact on economies of the accessing states. On the other hand, quite limited extent of consumers' opinion on the impact of Poland joining in the union structures on their households is not so much surprising, as the place of residence in borderland has been creating for them the opportunities to make use of e.g. sales or services proposal of the 'old Union' states much earlier than for the households from 'the depths of state'. Perceptible effect of accession on the households in this area will be noticed not earlier but after a lapse of some time. Confirmation of such a situation is a little influence of 'place of residence' on the views in presented scope. 87% of inhabitants of Lubuskie, 83% of inhabitants of Dolnośląskie and 72% of inhabitants of Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship can perceive the effect on economy. The situation

changes in opinion on noticed effect on the region, which is more visible for inhabitants of Dolnośląskie (66%) than for other Voivodships under research. Distinctive feature is the lowest percentage of answers on noticed impact and positive perception of it among inhabitants of borderlands of Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. Positive results of influence on economy and on the inhabited region are more frequently noticed by respondents from Dolnośląskie (48% and 50% of answers respectively) and Lubuskie (71%, 51%). Break-down of the opinions on Poland joining EU influence on households is shown by figure 2.

Figure 2. Evaluation of influence of Poland accession to EU on the households' situation in connection with the respondent's place of residence (% of answers).



Source: poll results

Regarding the social groups under research² it should be pointed out that the respondents are quite unanimous as to the noticed impact on economy, but they become different in their evaluation in case of influence on region, while the differences are bigger, when influence on their own households is determined.

Impact on a region is noticed to the highest extent by white-collar workers (61%), people of freelance occupation (50%) or self-employed (77%). Among them, positive evaluation of the occurred situation prevail more in the groups of self-employed and white-collar workers. On the other hand, this relationship is not felt by blue-collar workers as well as by the unemployed (40% each group).

In a case of evaluation of influence on household situation, only persons of freelance occupation can notice it (50%), while for the blue-collar workers (80%), pensioners (70%) unemployed (60%) it is imperceptible.

Freedom of capital, people and companies movement binding in Union has created new acting options and conditions for Polish households, in it, it has made it easier for them to make use of other EU states' proposal in field of, among others, culture, education, work, shopping, acquisition of funding or credits for specified activity or establishment of private and business contact with inhabitants. Consumers of western border zone make use of this proposal, especially because additional factor encouraging them to do it, is proximity of border and existing (often even before Poland accession to European Union) cooperation of bor-

² I.e. the blue-collar workers, white-collar workers or holders of managerial positions, people of freelance occupation, self-employed, pensioners, the unemployed, farmers and not working people.

derland regions of the European states. More than fifty per cent of respondents declare doing shopping in other union member states, while frequency of them after 1st May 2004 was increased by 12% of people. Nearly 43% go to other EU states for tourist purposes, and intention to do the same is declared by the next 15% of people. Moreover, integration of Poland with EU resulted in increase of frequency of tourist trips to union member states in relation to 18% of respondents. Process of integration increased also a number of contacts between inhabitants of borderland and other European member states of EU. In case of on average every third person, these contact are of private nature and in respect of every fourth person – of business nature connected with their job, school education or membership of various organisation. On average, every fifth respondent admitted that he/she has been looking for a job (permanent or seasonal, legal or ‘black’) in EU states, and the next dozen per cent intends to do the same. Relatively less frequently the inhabitants of border zone, covered by poll, make use or intent to make use of cultural union proposal, or of training and foreign languages courses (13 – 15% answers each). The least, i.e. only 6% made use (and the same percentage intends to make use) of opportunity to acquire subsidies for specified activity or to draw credits in other EU states (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of making use of other Union member states proposals by consumers from border zone (% of total answers)

Pos.	Proposal in field of:	Yes	No	No, but I am going to make use of it
1.	Culture	13.2	73.9	12.9
2.	Training or foreign language courses	15.2	70.6	14.2
3.	Work	20.6	66.2	13.2
4.	Establishment of closer contacts with citizens of other European countries:			
	a) private (on its own)	30.3	62.0	7.7
	b) business (school, various organisations)	24.2	68.7	7.1
5.	Shopping	54.0	37.9	8.1
6.	Tourist trips	42.6	42.6	14.8
7.	Opportunities of acquiring subsidies or credits	6,1	88,1	5,8

Source: poll results.

The services in field of culture were used only in small degree by white-collar workers (19%) and not working people (14%). Persons of freelance occupation, pensioners and unemployed were not using them at all. Despite the expanding opportunities in this field, it had no influence on satisfaction of needs in this group to a higher extent. Low level of making use of services connected with culture is a consequence of reduction of this kind of needs by households in the nineties and in this decade³.

³ Such situation is confirmed by results of poll examining the population living conditions, carried out by the Chief Statistical Office. Results of study show that in 2003, the households to satisfy the most urgent needs had to limit a number of higher level needs expenses once again, among which the cultural needs are rated.

The regional studies point out the same reasons. The households of Szczecińskie region explain their rare participation or lack of participation in culture mainly by shortage of time (66% of answers) and money (53%) (Poll carried out by: A. Burlita and J. Witek in period from February to March, 2004, on a group of 600 respondents from the area of Szczecin and its area. The purpose of study has been, among others, determination of participation frequency of Szczecin and Szczecin area citizens in selected forms of culture and the factors, which determine participation in culture).

Referring to training services or foreign language learning, making use of them was declared by the most open people, of broad horizons, well-developed needs for fulfilment and success. These are the people, who:

- have freelance occupation (28%),
- do not work, but who are still learning (29%).
- hold managerial positions (16%)
- white-collar workers (16%).

The will to make use of this kind of proposals in future is declared by all social groups covered by poll, except for pensioners and the unemployed.

Another sphere, which has become quite important for Polish consumers after 1989, is tourism. Social and economic freedom since 1989 and Poland accession in 2004 have had considerable effect on extension of opportunities to make use of international tourism. The poll shows that among the responding inhabitants of border zone, the people who are the most interested in making use of tourist services are the ones, who have freelance occupation (61%), self-employed (47%) and holders of managerial positions (45%). Lack of interest in tourist proposal offered by subjects from the other Union states is declared by blue-collar workers (54%) and pensioners (46%), what, to large extent, is connected with their income. The example is a group of white-collar workers, who with obtained income net up to 1500 Zł per person do not make use of proposal of the tourist agencies from the other Union states (44%). In a situation of income growth (i.e. exceeding 1500 PLN), the interest in tourist offer grows considerably. Three quarters of respondents in this group of such income, declare making use of tourist services.

The borderland zone creates better opportunities and stimulates to do shopping in the other EU states. Fifty per cent of respondents, who declare such behaviour, are the people of freelance occupation, self-employed and holders of managerial positions. Lack of interest in sales offer is shown by blue-collar workers (66%), as well as by pensioners, the unemployed and farmers. Only for 12% of respondents shopping frequency in the other countries has increased after Poland accession to EU. These are mainly the people, who live in the lands of Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. 62% of people, who declare increased frequency of doing shopping, come from this area.

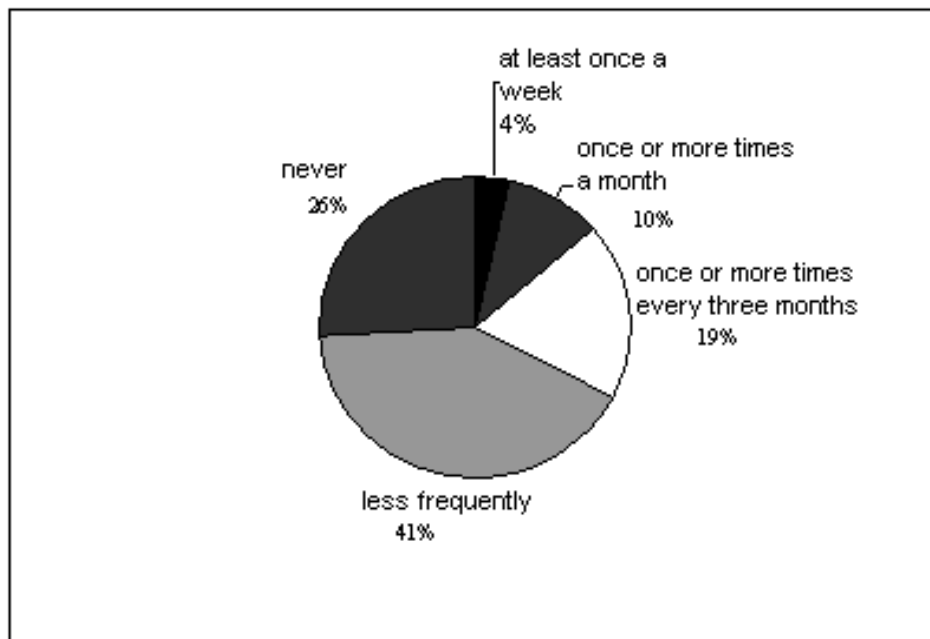
At the same time, integration of Poland with EU and the opportunities resulting from it increased frequency of the western Poland borderlands inhabitants' travels to the other union member states. On average, every seventh respondent goes to the other Union member states at least once a month, and every fifth one – at least once every three months. Only 26% of the people covered by poll has not taken such opportunity (see Fig. 3). In addition, these travels, if we consider their duration, usually last few hours (32.4% of answers) or one day (26.8% of answers). Thus, they are mainly the trips to Germany in purpose of, first of all, doing shopping as well as private or business contacts. In case of every fifth person, such a travel lasts two – three days, of every tenth person – one week, while only in case of every eleventh person – longer than one week. The most often one week and longer travels are connected with job or tourism.

According to results of study, nearly 80% of inhabitants of the borderlands, when staying in the other union states, irrespective of the main travel purpose, do shopping there (see Fig. 4). The most often it is purchase of clothes and shoes (41.3% of answers), food and beverages (37.7% of answers), cosmetics (33.2% of answers) and household detergents (20.6% of answers). Nearly 12% buy radio and TV equipment, 9% photographic equipment, 8% sports equipment and 7% of domestic appliances and household equipment. Other goods, including toys and medicines, are bought by only 3% of people.

Half of the respondents, who declare doing shopping, are mainly the people of freelance occupation, self-employed and holders of managerial positions. Lack of interest in sales

offer is shown by the blue-collar workers (66%), as well as by pensioners, unemployed and farmers. Only for 12% of the respondents, frequency of shopping in other countries has increased after Poland accession to EU. These are mainly the people, who live on territory of Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. 62% of people, who declare increased frequency of shopping, come from this area.

Figure 3. Frequency of travels of the western Poland borderland inhabitants to the other EU states in % of total answers



Source: poll results.

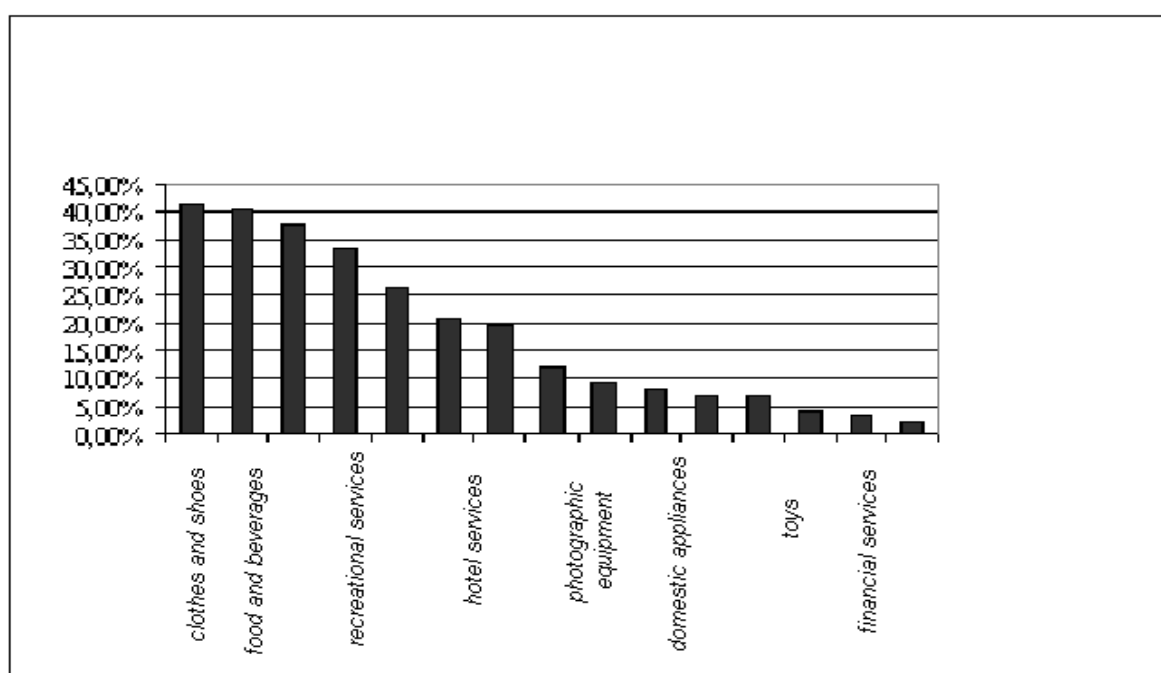
During such travels, more than 60% of respondents make use of services, too (see Fig. 4). At the same time, the services bought the most often are: gastronomic services (40.3% of answers), recreational (26.5% of answers) and hotel ones (19.4% of answers). Occasionally, (less than 2% of answers), the respondents have used financial, personal (e.g. beautician, hair-stylist) and other services.

In connection with process of integration and transformations arising from it, Polish consumers in prospect of the next few or a dozen of years can expect Poland joining the Euro zone. Among the inhabitants of western border zone this option has more or less the same number of supporters, as opponents and indecisive ones (see Fig. 5). The reasons are, among others, relations between standard of living of consumers in Poland and in the other Union states (in particular, as perceived by them subjectively), as well as anxiety about its worsening after introduction of Euro as obligatory currency. Especially, since over 72% of respondents believe that living standard of their households is lower in comparison with standard of living of their neighbours on the other side of border, and one third of this percentage perceives this standard as considerably lower. Only 7% of respondents are of opposite opinion, and as comparable the situation has been evaluated by less than 20% of people.

Another problem submitted to study, is comparison of selected features of Polish consumers with consumers of the other EU states. The study confirms the beliefs of a higher rates of the Poles' religiousness and the family spirit (such opinion is expressed by 67% of respondents, while 12% of them are of opposite opinion), as well as of the lower standard of their own

living (more than 72% of respondents believe so)⁴. Particularly, the last problem is determined by social status and financial situation of the respondents; and so, conviction of lower degree of needs satisfaction is predominant among the unemployed (100%), and also among pensioners (80%), not working people (78%) as well as among the blue-collar workers (77%) and lower-ranking white-collar workers (75%). It is expressed decidedly by people of lower education level, and at definitely less percentage by better educated people. Along with growing level of education, the percentage of this kind of answers is going down, while conviction of comparability of the living standards is increasing (such opinion is expressed by 5% of respondents of basic vocational education, 14% of secondary and 20% of higher education level).

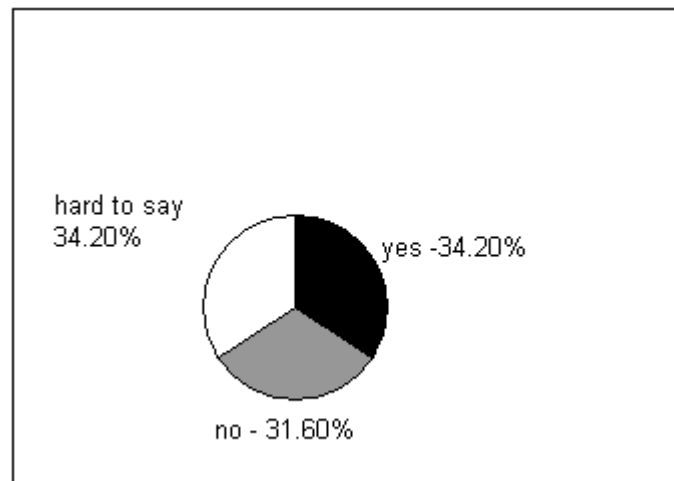
Figure 4. Goods and services bought by inhabitants of western border zone during their travels to the other EU members states the most often (in % of total answers)



Source: poll results.

⁴ The obtained results confirm a stereotype functioning in Poland in field of material situation, family spirit and religiousness of the Poles. The results of CBOS poll about stereotype of a Pole and European, carried out in years 1996-2001 show it. The difference between perception of oneself and citizens of the other European states can be found on two planes. On one hand, the Poles evaluate themselves as persons orientated towards community, patriotism, religion and preferring family to work. The Europeans are perceived as their opposite – as individualists, not religious and oriented towards their own success. On the other hand, their opinion about the Europeans is more favourable than about themselves. They are convinced that a European lives in good conditions, works well, is economical, well educated, good mannered as well as honest and friendly. This opinion functioning in imagination of the Poles is subject to changes to little extent, despite the quantity of information about living in the other European states, growing from one year to another. (Stereotyp Polaka i Europejczyka, Report on study, CBOS, <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2001/KOM062/KOM062.HTM>)

Figure 5. Attitude of inhabitants of western borderland zone to Poland joining EURO zone in % of total answers



Source: poll results.

Exceptions from established stereotype of a Pole and a European are the opinions concerning differences in level of education, tolerance and extent of satisfaction of needs related to clothes. 40% of respondents believe that the Poles are better educated, while one third does not have unambiguous opinion on this question. Conviction of better education is presented by white-collar workers (48%), by holders of managerial positions or by people of freelance occupation (38% each group), as well as by every fourth blue-collar worker.

The changes take place also in a level of needs satisfaction in field of clothes. 34% of respondents are of opinion that Poles are better dressed. The same group does not have any established opinion. The factors, which diversify standpoints in this field are, among others, age and obtained income. Only people over 55 are less convinced of better satisfaction of this kind of needs.

Little changes take place in case of comparison of tolerance level of the Poles and the Europeans, where the respondents do not have an established opinion (this is what one third of respondents thinks). At the same time, the same percentage of respondents considers their own nation to be less tolerant. Here, it is worth stressing that a factor, which has influence on such evaluation is a place of residence. Nearly a half of respondents from Dolnośląskie Voivodship is convinced of higher tolerance of the Poles, only 22% of consumers from Lubuskie Voivodship are of the same opinion, and as little as every sixth person from Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. The reason of such situation is probably a relationship, raised in the other publications, between perception of oneself and a general atmosphere of social and political life at place of residence (Jasińska-Kania A, 1996).

Considering our virtues and vices, and appreciating the strengths of the other European nations, inhabitants of the western borderland zone, would willingly transfer to Polish ground some traditions, customs and every day behaviours of consumers from the other union states. The features they appreciate the most are: good manners, tolerance and openness towards the others, as well as optimism and life satisfaction of the Europeans from more affluent states of EU. They consider worth implantation to the Polish ground also the following: good road manners, behaviour in the streets, in particular, having high standards of cleanliness, segregation of rubbish and respect for natural environment.

Recapitulation

Looking from the point of view of consumers and their households, Poland accession

to EU should be a factor favourable for general improvement of their situation, mainly due to liberalisation of individual markets followed by better quality and choice of goods, wider range of services, or stronger guarantee of consumer rights. The studies carried out show that the inhabitants of western borderline zone of Poland are aware of changes, which have taken place after accession of Poland to EU, admitting that, first of all, they are visible in functioning of the national economy, but also they can be seen in functioning of the regions and households. The majority of consumers, mainly the young ones, well educated and of high income, have a positive opinion on these changes by discerning the new chances and opportunities, which appear for them from process of integration.

REFERENCES:

1. Euroregiony w nowym podziale terytorialnym Polski, (1999), GUS, Statistical Office in Wrocław, Warszawa - Wrocław.
2. Jasińska-Kania A., (1996) Stereotypowe wyobrażenia Polaków o sobie i o innych narodach, in: Marody M., Gucwa-Leśny E. (ed.), Podstawy życia społecznego w Polsce, ISS, Warszawa.
3. Stereotyp Polaka i Europejczyka, (2001), Report on study, CBOS, <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2001/KOM062/KOM062.HTM>