

## Joanna Bar

### From Communism to Democracy: the Concept of Europe in Cracow's Press in the Years 1975-1995

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.1.941>

Reprint von:

Joanna Bar, From Communism to Democracy: the Concept of Europe in Cracow's Press in the Years 1975-1995, in: Europa im Ostblock. Vorstellung und Diskurse (1945-1991)/Europe in the Eastern Bloc. Imaginations and Discourses (1945-1991), herausgegeben von José María Faraldo, Paulina Gulinska-Jurgiel und Christian Domnitz, Böhlau Köln, 2008 (Zeithistorische Studien. Herausgegeben vom Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam. Band 44), S. 221-230

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Zitationshinweis:

Joanna Bar (2008), *From Communism to Democracy: the Concept of Europe in Cracow's Press in the Years 1975-1995*, Dokserver des Zentrums für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.1.941>

Ursprünglich erschienen als: Joanna Bar, *From Communism to Democracy: the Concept of Europe in Cracow's Press in the Years 1975-1995*, in: *Europa im Ostblock. Vorstellungen und Diskurse (1945-1991)/Europe in the Eastern Bloc. Imaginations and Discourses (1945-1991)*, herausgegeben von José María Faraldo, Paulina Gulinska-Jurgiel und Christian Domnitz, Böhlau Köln, 2008 (Zeithistorische Studien. Herausgegeben vom Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam. Band 44), S. 221-230

# Zeithistorische Studien

Herausgegeben vom Zentrum für  
Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam

Band 44

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# Europa im Ostblock

Vorstellungen und Diskurse (1945–1991)

Europe in the Eastern Bloc

Imaginations and Discourses (1945–1991)



2008

BÖHLAU VERLAG KÖLN WEIMAR WIEN

Gedruckt mit freundlicher Unterstützung  
der VolkswagenStiftung und der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft

Zentrum für  
Zeithistorische Forschung e.V.  
Bibliothek

ZZF 15333 (HBB) ~~ZZF~~

**Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:**  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der  
Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten  
sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

**Umschlagabbildung:**

Tvorba. Týdeník pro kulturu a politiku. Nr. 20/1957, 16. Května, Ročník XXII,  
Zeichnung: J. Pop

© 2008 by Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie, Köln Weimar Wien  
Ursulaplatz 1, D-50668 Köln, [www.boehlau.de](http://www.boehlau.de)

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Druck und Bindung: Strauss GmbH, Mörlenbach  
Gedruckt auf chlor- und säurefreiem Papier  
Printed in Germany

ISBN 978-3-412-20029-9

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JOANNA BAR

## From Communism to Democracy: the Concept of Europe in Cracow's Press in the Years 1975–1995

The first half of nineteen-seventies Europe was marked by visible signs of détente in the area of international relations and the resolutions from the final round of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki. It drew an important dividing line in the history of the twentieth century Europe, especially for the inhabitants of the eastern half of the continent. They had ever hopefully been looking for improvements to their situation since the end of the Second World War and the division of Europe, which was an indirect result of the war and was symbolically expressed in Winston Churchill's famous words:

*'From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line, lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia ...'<sup>1</sup>*

The partition of Europe was a fact and for a couple of decades attempts of integration were only thought of in the context of international political, military and economical organisations, which had been established in the opposing political blocks. In response to the successes achieved by NATO in Western Europe, the Warsaw Pact was brought to life in 1955 and the RWPG (the Board of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance) (1949) was a competitor to the first economic structures in Western Europe.

Although the Final Act of CSCE sanctioned this cold war division of the world by treating the postulates of peaceful coexistence of the countries with different political systems in a diplomatic way, it gave a glimmer of hope for economic and cultural exchanges between the systems. In fact over the next years a gradual increase can be observed e.g. the exchange of television programs and viewers were also watching films and documentaries from the other side of 'the Iron Curtain'.

Poles, as probably all citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic's dominated Eastern bloc, especially pondered the realisation of those postulates contained in the Helsinki Final Act, which guaranteed the sovereignty of the nations and the observance of

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1 Cited in: Norman Davies, *Europe. A History*, London 1996, 1065.

human rights. They learnt of these postulates from daily newspapers, which while highlighting the involvement of the Russian leaders in working towards world peace published detailed reports from the conference in Helsinki.

## Cracow's Press

At this point it is practical to present a brief overview of the situation on the newspaper market in Cracow and some data regarding the newspaper readership in Cracow during the nineteen-seventies and eighties. From the point of view of the authorities the most important national newspaper was *Trybuna Ludu*, which was published in Warsaw and was also an organ of the Central Committee of Polish United Workers' Party. Its 'twin sisters', which were organs of provincial committees, were published in the capitals of provinces. Although they resembled ordinary daily newspapers and party reports did not constitute their sole content, the readers were perfectly aware, who published them. In Cracow *Gazeta Krakowska* was an organ of Polish United Workers' Party and was bought by offices and various institutions because they were under obligation to do so, however it was sometimes purchased by an ordinary reader, who was not necessarily tied to the party but was rather attracted by the paper's high quality news section.

In the capitals of provinces daily newspapers, which were not directly linked with party institutions, were published although they also were forced to comply with the official ideological-propaganda policy. Such newspapers in Cracow were *Dziennik Polski* and an afternoon paper, *Echo Krakowa*, which was especially appreciated for its sports section. Both papers were relatively popular with their readers. A striking feature of the papers of this period was that the publishers had to make do with the very small amount of paper that they were allotted and there were periods, in which *Dziennik Polski*, the major Cracow daily newspaper, only had four pages at its disposal and only in exceptional cases ran to six pages. Thus, the mere amount of space available had a strong influence on the content of a paper. The results of the survey conducted by the Press Research Centre of the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, in 1969 provides more detailed data concerning the readership of those newspapers: 'Over 80% of Cracow's citizens read daily papers on a regular basis and 13% read them occasionally (...) *Gazeta Krakowska* is read by about 38% of the inhabitants of our city. *Echo Krakowa* is still the most widely read daily paper.'<sup>2</sup>

However, papers published by church organisations were treated in a different manner. The most popular was *Tygodnik Powszechny* published by the Cracow metropolitan curia and had a much wider readership than the Catholic intelligentsia.

Its motto being: 'we didn't tell the whole truth, because of the censorship, but we never lied'<sup>3</sup>, the paper was highly respected and trusted, which was most likely an exception position on the newspaper market in the Eastern bloc.

Thus, in practice an average Cracow citizen bought one or two daily papers per day and a

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2 Z. Bajka, *Czytelnictwo dzienników w Krakowie*, Prace Badawcze Ośrodka Badań Prasoznawczych (Researches of the Press Research Centre), Cracow 43/1969, 3.

3 M.S. journalist, born 1930, (Interview 2002, own materials).

large proportion of the intelligentsia tried to read the latest issue of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, in addition to other weekly magazines. However, 'reading' did not necessarily mean 'buying' especially when it came to magazines, whose circulation was limited for propaganda reasons and were mostly available by subscription. The subscription to *Tygodnik Powszechny* in the nineteen-seventies was one of the 'commodities', which were difficult to acquire. One generally required influential clerical acquaintances to become a subscriber and it was often combined with waiting for a current elderly subscriber to pass on. Thus, one edition was passed from one person to another and was read by several readers. However, let us return to the main issue of our considerations that is the press in the nineteen-seventies.

## The conference of Helsinki

As was already mentioned, between July and September 1975 Cracow's daily newspapers regularly published the reports on the proceedings of the conference in Helsinki, whose name was treated as a sign of the advent of a new period of cooperation and security in post-war Europe:

*'It will be the conclusion of a long process aimed at changing Europe into a continent characterized by equal peaceful cooperation of the countries of different political and social systems.'*<sup>4</sup>

Other first-page headlines predicted *'the era of peaceful coexistence between European countries'* and highlighted the security of the continent after 20 years of continual confrontation. One of the objectives of the treaty was the reduction of the armed forces and general disarmament, which was supposed to result in a peaceful coexistence between countries of different political and social systems:

*'The countries taking part in the conference have realised that in today's Europe, divided into military blocs and opposing political systems, plenty of mutual, superior issues exist requiring the cooperation of all countries, which should be dealt with in a climate of mutual trust. Those issues include: maintaining security and welfare for all countries, environment protection, the development of international commerce, transport and tourism, economic, scientific and cultural cooperation, the free flow of information, as well as the increase of personal contacts.'*<sup>5</sup>

The press eagerly highlighted the fact that all the conference participants unanimously accepted the ten rules of political cooperation, point 7 of which regarded human rights and the basic freedoms i.e. of thought, conscience, religion and belief. However, it was a propaganda piece intended to stress good will on the part of USRR leaders.

At this point it is worth noting that the press market at that time reflected all the scientific

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4 *Dziennik Polski*, No 167, 30 July 1975, 1.

5 *Dziennik Polski*, No 168, 31 July 1975, 1.

and publishing trends of the period. In relation to the most recent history academic papers were dominated by the notion of the dualistic development in post-war Europe divided into two separate blocs<sup>6</sup>, which only occasionally mentioned the subject of bilateral relations or regional aspects. One of the first Polish post-war historical analysis with the word Europe in its title made reference to the resolutions from the conference in Helsinki, however it did not acknowledge the existence of the other half of Europe. Its author, Janusz Stefanowicz, wrote in the introduction:

*“In the eighth decade of the current century a huge change took place in the common awareness of Europe's inhabitants. The conference of all the countries from the continent, which laid the foundations of the new stage of European relations, became the symbol and the proof of the new impulses (...). The Europe of the last 30 years was the post-war Europe with an accent on the prefix post. A new, dualistic political system was being developed, which strengthened by the 'Cold War' climate was forced on Europe by countries from the other side of the Ocean, disturbed the first half of the period only to be gradually replaced by a sense of common fate and mutual interest”.*<sup>7</sup>

## European images

The reports from the conference in Helsinki can be treated as an exception in depicting the propaganda world in *Dziennik Polski* and *Gazeta Krakowska*. The Cracow daily press of the nineteen-seventies did not as a rule deal with the historical-philosophical analysis of the unity (or its lack) of the European culture. Such thematic issues were outside the scope of the current political trends and were incompatible with the character of the two papers, which were ordinary daily newspapers and not weekly magazines dealing with cultural issues. However, the reports from the proceedings of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) sessions and the section entitled 'From the life of our brotherly countries' were published in absolute compliance with the rules of national propaganda.

At the same time as the lofty words of the cultural unity of the whole continent were heard in Western Europe, in Eastern Europe a truly socialist integration was being built that urged a wider introduction of planning into economic cooperation- *'Marching on the integration route we will achieve further successes'*<sup>8</sup>. The speech of the Polish Prime Minister, Piotr Jaroszewicz, delivered during the 39<sup>th</sup> session of COMECON, was published in *Dziennik Polski* to inform the readers that:

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6 For example: Zdzisław Nowak, *Koncepcja integracji Europy Zachodniej na tle procesów rozwoju ekonomicznego*, Poznań 1965; Marian Guzek, *Międzynarodowa integracja gospodarcza w socjalizmie*, Warszawa 1971.

7 Janusz Stefanowicz, *Europa powojenna*, Warszawa 1980, here 5–6.

8 *Dziennik Polski*, No 142, 25 June 1975, 1.

*'our socialist, planned economy and cooperation between countries belonging to COMECON is progressing according to the adopted plan and clearly shows its superiority when confronted with difficulties caused by the so-called energy crisis in the Western countries.'*<sup>9</sup>

From time to time newspapers printed news of talks on establishing such relations between COMECON and the EEC (European Economic Community) that would be helpful in enhancing economic cooperation in accordance with the Final Act of CSCE or news of postulates (coming, of course, from Russian sources) to begin negotiations concerning intermediate-range missiles in Europe (August 1980) and the reduction of nuclear armament in Europe (November 1981).

However, the reality of the period should be held in mind and it should be remembered that regardless of where the negotiations took place (it was usually one of the European cities), they were actually American-Russian talks, or rather, according to Polish press, Russian-American talks, naturally initiated by Leonid Brežnev (Geneva 1<sup>st</sup> December 1981). In conclusion it may be said (somewhat humorously) that in the Polish press of the decade, apart from propaganda articles on disarmament, the word 'Europe' could only be found in the sports section.

However, sometimes *Gazeta Krakowska*, a party organ with a greater assignment of paper, published interesting articles on cultural issues (for example, written by Maciej Szumowski or Dorota Terakowska), which dealt with the topic of European unity. On the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1979 an interesting interview with an eminent historian specialising in ancient history, Aleksander Krawczuk, was published. He stated:

*'We have to remember that we are all one tree. Our nation is only a branch of a huge cultural community, whose name is Europe. Antiquity, in turn, is a common denominator for all European national cultures'*<sup>10</sup>.

## Tygodnik Powszechny and Europe

In the second half of nineteen-seventies *Tygodnik Powszechny* with a much more journalistic approach informed its readers of the integration process in Western European countries. In 1976 in an article entitled 'What about Western European Integration?' by Krzysztof Kozłowski analyzed the economic and political consequences of EEC, created in 1957, as well as the controversies surrounding admission of new members. Back then no one thought that in 30 years Poland and the other Baltic countries would become members and that the EC's ally of the 'Cold War' period, namely Turkey, would still be waiting to accede to this 'exclusive club for the rich', as the author of the article put it.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of personal affiliations and conclusions the publishers of *Tygodnik*

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9 Ibid., 1.

10 *Gazeta Krakowska*, No 120, 30 May, 1979, 5.

11 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 4, 25 January, 1976, 1, 4.



Powszechny held realistic views on the political situation of the period:

*'The representatives of EEC have little to say about relations with countries belonging to COMECON. (...) There are numerous problems in this area, as two completely different systems are involved. The problems reach beyond the level of commerce and primarily call for political solutions that are compatible with the Final Act from Helsinki.'* (...) *'We should remember, however, that we are dealing with two different systems and two different concepts of integration. Common market integration was to be achieved by a slow flow of production factors, while the economic integration in socialist countries is based on coordination of long-term economic plans and the specialisation of production. Market economy is the principle in EEC, which implies decentralisation in the area of economic decision-making and respecting the freedom of the market and competition. The socialist economy is governed by a plan and international commerce is dependent on the state. (...)*

*It is not our purpose to express either pessimistic or optimistic predictions concerning future relations between both communities. The logic behind the warming of the relations is clear, technical difficulties can be successfully dealt with, but an awareness of the reality is a must. (...)*

As far as Western Europe is concerned:

*'The Common Market is certain to go beyond what has been already achieved and will laboriously try to work towards a mutual economic and monetary policy (...). Obviously, it is a long-term process and it is difficult to venture any particular data or predictions. However, it is vital that the development of the community, comprising of the richest countries in the world (...) and those situated closest to our country, should remain under careful observation.'*<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the political reality did not prevent the publishers from feeling and expressing the Poles' historical heritage. In March 1978 *Tygodnik Powszechny* printed an article by Andrzej Micewski entitled *'Identity and Differentiation of Culture'*. It read:

*'In our ideological lexicon the word 'identity' acquires a greater and greater role. It is used by people of various beliefs, when they want to make reference to humanistic and independent traditions and values of the European culture, including Polish culture.'*

Followed by:

*'Our cultural and ideological identity constitutes the answer to the question, who we are at an individual and social level; and is indispensable for our personal development; expresses our national identity and our understanding of belonging to the European culture. The answer to these questions is interwoven in history and our historical consciousness.'* (...)

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12 Ibid, 4.

Political reality hardly affects this identity, because:

*'Various political systems have different visions of the implications of the European culture, but certain humanistic values and the threats to them are perceived in an identical way.'*

Nevertheless, certain systems and structures of a country directly contravene European tradition of liberty:

*'The liberty of an individual is the basic value inherited from the European culture. And the power of the country? Can a country really be powerful without granting its citizens liberty and welfare?'*<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Catholic Church in this period played a great role in protecting the Polish national identity, ingrained in Western Catholicism. One of the first words of the newly elected Pope John Paul II in 1978 were:

*'The Cardinals have just elected a new Bishop of Rome. He comes from a faraway country, but his country has always been close thanks to common beliefs and Christian tradition.'*<sup>14</sup>

This attitude of the Church, which was hardened by a 30-year period that questioned the importance of religion and Christian tradition in the life of a nation, helps (especially Eurosceptics) to fully understand the involved attitude of the Church in Poland, which was displayed before the European referendum (2003, June). The Pope's subsequent visits to his homeland, which were extensively covered by all Cracow papers, highlighted this attitude:

*'... Christianity must regain its position in working towards the spiritual unity of Europe. Economic and political ideas will not be enough. We must descend deeper, reaching to the ethical level of (...). A Europe, which in the course of its history, was frequently divided and partitioned; a Europe, which was tragically divided by the horrific Second World War; a Europe, which although subjected to continuous contemporary divisions along political, ideological and economic lines, cannot stop searching for its basic unity, must turn to Christianity.'* (Częstochowa 1979, the Conference of Poland's Episcopate).<sup>15</sup>

It is true that *Tygodnik Powszechny*, as a weekly magazine devoted to cultural issues, was better predisposed to deal with such matters than the daily papers. However, it's worth bearing in mind that it was the most popular weekly magazine, especially among Cracow's intelligentsia and as such exercised a great influence on shaping its readers beliefs and opinions.

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13 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 11, 12 March 1978, 1.

14 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 43, 22 October 1978.

15 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 24, 17 June 1979, 5.



In 1985 *Tygodnik Powszechny* published Adolf Juzwenko's review of the book *Heart of Europe*. A short History of Poland by Norman Davies (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984). However, due to the marshal law imposed in 1981 a large part of the review (21 pages of the original manuscript) was censored and parts of the text were simply erased. Thus it might be deduced that the readers never learnt what Juzwenko wanted to tell them when he stated: 'The title Heart of Europe was not chosen by mistake ...' Yet, it has turned out that the author of the review quoted a fragment of Norman Davies's work, from which only one sentence was erased and replaced with the formulaic expression used by censors [----] [Act from 31.07.1981 On controlling publications and performances, article 2, point 1 (Official Journal of Laws No. 44, 204)]. Thanks to the publication of the archival yearbook of *Tygodnik Powszechny* from 2005 published with other censored materials, we can now quote this sentence. It should have read as follows:

*'Poland is a place in which competing cultures and philosophies of our continent come into strongest conflict, and where the tension of the European drama is played on a living body and nerves of a great nation.'*<sup>16</sup>

Despite the censorship, the press market in the second half of the nineteen-eighties was completely different from its predecessor a decade earlier. Ernest Skalski in his article 'The Peripheries of Europe' unmasks the myth of the superiority of Eastern Europe economy, which was often voiced in the following statement: '*But for the changes in our political system we would still represent the level of the peripheries of Europe: Spain, Greece ...*'<sup>17</sup> Skalski pointed to the rapid economic development of those countries and presented a detailed comparison between the economies of Poland and Spain.

## After the Fall of the Wall

A substantial change became felt in 1989 when Michail Gorbačev, the General Secretary of the CPSU (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) suggested a unilateral reduction of tactical nuclear rockets during a session of parliament of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. *Gazeta Krakowska* reported this event as the first public appearance of a leader of a socialist country and the first session, in which Polish representatives took part. In his speech Gorbačev confirmed the advent of a new reality and the development in tightening relations between European countries, discussed the idea of a common European house, however, stressed that one cannot overcome the division according to the concept of fighting socialism. Security and disarmament remained the most important issues to be dealt with. In December 1989 *Dziennik Polski* reporting from Prague on the termination of the political crisis, used the historic sentence: '*And again the Iron Curtain fell.*'

In July 1990 the publishers of the former organ of the communist party, *Gazeta Krakowska*, entitled one of its articles 'We speed up our march to Europe. Next year Poland

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16 *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1985 (No 18-34), Archival Yearbook on CD-ROM + censorship materials.

17 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 32, 4 August 1985, 8.

in EEC?', quoting the head of the Department of Foreign Economic Affairs (Marcin Świącicki), who said that the Polish government wanted to join EEC as soon as possible.<sup>18</sup> Normal newspapers published regular reports from the proceedings of the European Parliament when Poland was a subject of its discussions. Also, the reports on the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany were presented in the context of unification of the continent.

The first problems in this new political reality were also reported by daily papers, such as, the affair with toxic waste. According to the data provided by Greenpeace, within the preceding two years 72 companies from 13 Western European countries had attempted to sell Polish firms 22 million tons of toxic waste and 46 thousand tons of it were successfully smuggled to the country from Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and Sweden.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the reports from the talks regarding Poland's association and membership (since 1994) in the European Union were regularly published.

At the same time European issues started appearing in magazines, especially in light of the fact that by the end of nineteen-eighties two new popular daily papers entered Cracow's press market; the local paper, *Czas Krakowski*, and the national paper, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (from 1989). As early as 1989 *Tygodnik Powszechny* began publishing a series of talks with politicians, journalists and academics on potential changes in the political and cultural configuration in Europe. It is worth mentioning an interview with the Czech emigration journalist, Antonín J. Liehm (title: 'All this taken together gives Europe')<sup>20</sup>, Rafał Wiśniewski, who at that time worked at the Hungarian Philology Department of Warsaw University (Transylvania – Europe's business)<sup>21</sup> or with the then president of France, François Mitterrand ('The right to a place in Europe')<sup>22</sup>. In the same year *Tygodnik Powszechny* also published a report from the international conference '*Central Europe: an illusion or a chance*', stressing that in Warsaw at six important conferences dealing with European issues, one of which was entitled '*Poland in Europe*', were held simultaneously. The conference, or rather colloquium, took place in the Benedictine Abbey in Tyniec, near Cracow, in 'a homestead of the closest heirs of St Benedictine, the patron of Europe'.<sup>23</sup> The titles of the sessions are telling and they include: 'Central Europe', 'The West towards Central Europe', 'The issue of the European unity' and 'Future perspectives of our part of the continent'. Although the report was censored five times, its content clearly shows how much had changed in the last decade as far as the freedom of speech in Poland was concerned. Whereas before no one would publish a discussion on the validity of Brežnev's doctrine describing the limited sovereignty of the countries belonging to the Eastern bloc, now the participants of the colloquium openly demanded its official withdrawal:

*'Political discussions were permeated by one widely accepted idea: that we belong to an epoch-making era when [...] the post-war order was collapsing and a possibility*

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18 *Gazeta Krakowska*, No 161, 13 July 1990, 1.

19 *Dziennik Polski*, 12 October 1990.

20 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 3, 15 January 1989.

21 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 4, 22 January 1989.

22 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 23, 18 May 1989.

23 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 30, 23 July 1989, 2.

*for a new order appears, which can be a historical chance for the countries of Central Europe.*<sup>24</sup>

Changes were also visible in everyday life. Airlines informed of new connections with countries' capitals, private carriers advertised bus tickets to all European countries, travel agencies offered holidays abroad and language schools held language courses. Since 1995 newspapers regularly printed exchange rates and comparative economic analysis. The word Europe began appearing in advertisements of new privately-owned shops (Euromarket) or health centres (Eurodent), whose owners wanted to make reference to a Western stereotype and/or Western standards of services. The presence of Europe in Poland became a fact of public life and Poland started its endeavours to mark its presence in Europe.

## Conclusions

In this article we describe the discourses about the concept of Europe in the Press of Cracow between 1975 and 1995, in the context of the most important events for Poland of those years: the election of the Polish Pope and the political and economical transformations at the turn of the 80s and 90s.

The post-war partition of Europe was a fact not only in politics, but also in propaganda. For some time, the European integration had been only possible in the context of international political, military and economical organizations of the opposing political blocks. Changes in this point of view started in the first half of 1970s and were related to the final stage of the conference of Helsinki. From today's perspective the conference of Helsinki was however not such a crucial moment in the history of Europe as people in the nineteen-seventies wanted it to be.

Despite the official propaganda the idea of European unity was rooted in the consciousness of Poles, intellectuals and the man in the street alike. Much greater influence on its revival in the area of public discussion should be placed on the election of the Polish Pope, August 1980 in Gdańsk, where workers' strikes resulted in the birth of the Solidarity Movement, Round Table talks and the first free elections in the Eastern bloc in 1989. What happened in nineteen-eighties, which ended with the Autumn of Nations, the reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union, was the result of both the anti-totalitarian policy of Ronald Reagan, the Vatican City's diplomatic efforts and the gradual reconstruction of the Soviet Union led by Michail Gorbačëv. The mutual result of all these, superficially independent, processes was a gradual return to the idea of the European unity. Combined with the end of the 'Cold War', it gradually became the main element of the civilization identification also for the inhabitants of the former Eastern bloc, i.e. the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians and citizens of the Baltic countries, Balkans and with time also the Ukrainians.

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