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### **Polish youth attitude towards the Orange Revolution**

The history of dramatic relations between Poland and Ukraine has caused the situation that Polish society feels an aversion to political life of its Eastern neighbour. This situation was changed in 2005 when the democratic transformation has been started. Since the Orange Revolution Ukrainian people have gained Polish understanding and support.

The most appropriate proof of this situation is an attitude of Polish youth towards the changes in Ukraine and the place in Europe which this country should hold. The young were chosen as a target group for analyzing attitudes because it is the most dynamic and open minded group of the society, which do not have personal and unpleasant recollections connecting with Polish and Ukrainian history. Moreover, youth is the group which will have the most significant influence on future relations between the countries and will be responsible for the shape of Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The knowledge on opinions and views on democratic changes in Ukraine could be very helpful in creating political, economic and cultural relations between both countries. It could also give support to Ukrainian youth in their way to building democratic and modern society.

During a one-week survey performed between 25 and 31 March 2006 students of European studies at WSiiz (University of Information Technologies and Management in Rzeszów) were asked to fill up a questionnaire. They were questioned about attitude towards the Orange Revolutions and how they perceived Ukrainian position in Europe and its accession to international organizations like NATO and the European Union.

In this survey method of unrepresentative sample was used, as the target of this study was only showing the general trend, not collecting complete statistical evidences<sup>1</sup>.

Occurrences which happened in October 2005 were followed by public opinion in Poland with a huge interest. Nearly 90 per cent of young people surveyed said that they had been observing in the media political situation in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution (69 per cent of this group declared watching this situation *often*, 31 per cent admitted observing Ukrainian political life *very often*).

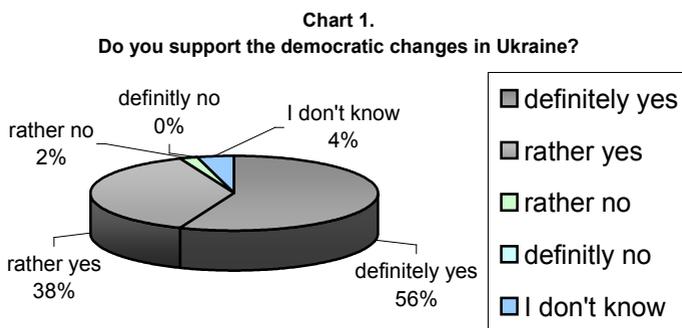
As Polish society did not stay unconcerned about the Orange Revolution, Ukrainian changes have influenced Polish people, too. According to the report from December 2004 prepared by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) the Orange Revolution has positive impact on Polish attitude towards Ukrainian people. Due to occurrences from October 2005 Ukrainian people were promoted from 28<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> position in ranking of nations Polish people sympa-

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<sup>1</sup> This kind of method was used by Marcin Szewczyk in *Polityka audiowizualna*, UKiE, Warszawa 2002, s. 106-107

thized with. At the same time the share of people who declare an aversion to Ukrainian society decreased from 51 to 34 per cent<sup>2</sup>.

The opposition followers who demonstrated in Kiev were given support from Poles, especially from youth. All questioned young people sympathized mentally with the Ukrainian opposition. A significant majority of students expressed their solidarity with protesters by wearing orange ribbon; some of them also took part in demonstrations or rallies. Polish support for democratic changes in Ukraine that we could observe in 2005, is still noticeable in young generation. The chart below presents youth's attitude towards the democratic changes in Ukraine.

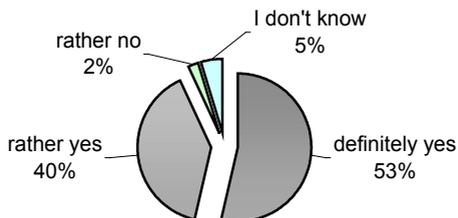


A picture of support for the democratic changes according to the gender is the following:

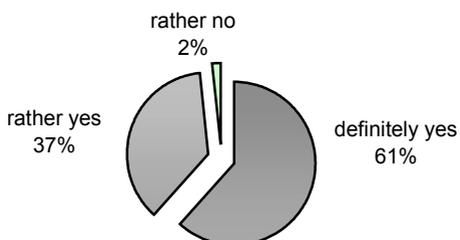
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<sup>2</sup> M. Strzeszewski, *Wpływ ostatnich wydarzeń na Ukrainie na stosunek Polaków do Ukraińców – Komunikat z badań*, BS/190/2004, Warszawa, December 2004.

**Chart 2**  
**Women's attitude towards the democratic changes in Ukraine**



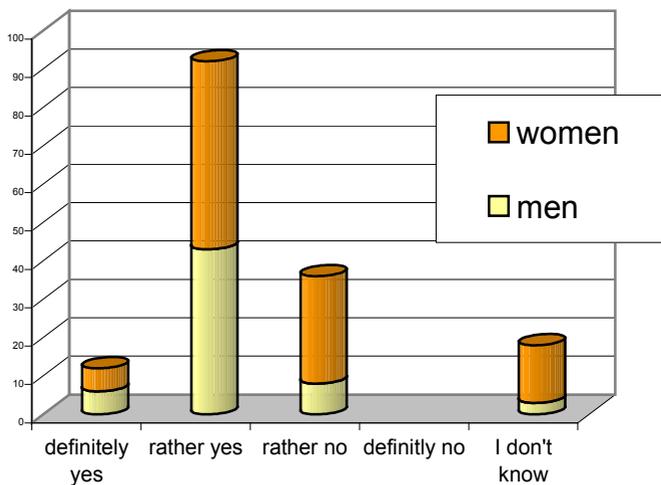
**Chart 3**  
**Men's attitude towards the democratic changes in Ukraine**



Similar responses were given to a question on youth's estimate of the Orange Revolution's benefits. Only 0,6 per cent of surveyed people claimed that the Orange Revolution had been completely disadvantageous, nearly a half of questioned group (41,1 per cent) was strongly convinced the events that had happened in October 2005 had influenced Ukraine and its political life positively. More than a half of this group (50,6 per cent) claimed that the Orange Revolution had been rather positive for our Eastern neighbour.

More optimistic opinions were provided by men: 48 per cent of them said that transformation process started in 2005 had been definitely good. According to this, permanence of democratic changes in Ukraine should be discussed. Young people were asked if, in their opinion, changes obtained during the Orange Revolutions would be permanent. Answers on this question, divided into gender categories, are presented in a chart below.

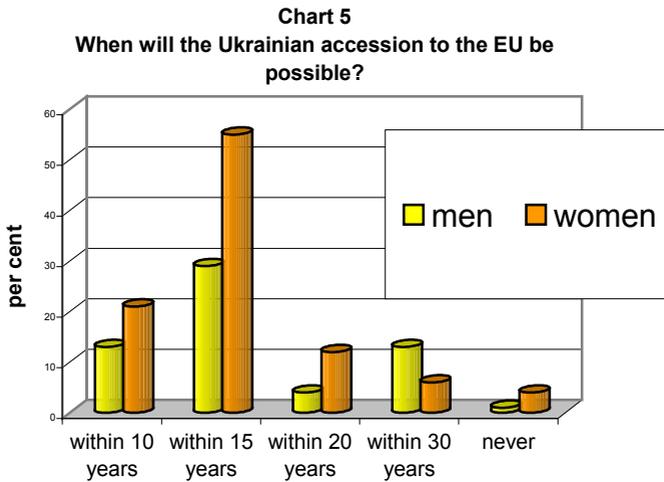
**Chart 4**  
**Youth's opinion about permanence of democratic changes in Ukraine**



Most of young people hoped that achievements of the Orange Revolutions would be continued and expended by future generations to reach completely stable and secure country. Due to the transformation Ukraine has a chance to accession to international organizations that could be a helpful hand in establishing democratic system of government and free-market economy. According to the

young, a great number of requirements which Ukraine has to satisfy to become a member of international organizations, do not require radical reforms. A significant part of surveyed people from a young generation are convinced that due to the Orange Revolution Ukraine has a great chance to accede the European Union (62,6 per cent claimed that it was rather possible, 13,3 per cent were deeply convinced that it was definitely possible). Only 11,3 per cent of questioned people regarded with scepticism democratic changes in Ukraine as a chance to become a member state of the EU.

There were diversifying opinions about a potential date of Ukrainian accession to the European Union that are presented in the chart below.



According to the diagram 56.1 per cent of women and 48.3 per cent of men predicted that Ukraine would accede the European

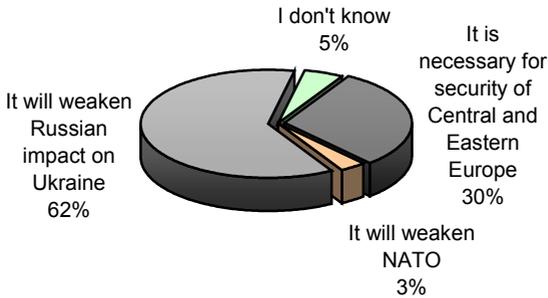
Union within next 15 years, 21 per cent of men and only 6,1 per cent of women thought that Ukraine needed 30 years to meet the requirements of membership.

Preparation to join the international organization such as the EU is a very long and complicated way that require the involvement of the whole society. Students from Rzeszów were asked to make suggestions about changes and reforms which Ukraine ought to implement to become a member of the EU. Development of human and civil rights, democracy, free mass media and free market economy are most often indicated improvements; pro-democratic changes in society awareness and law adaptation are also necessary. Students as a general requirement of membership mentioned absolute independence of Russia and friendly relations with EU-members, too. Other important things are also: a stability in Ukrainian parliament and government, performing public campaign related on informing society about benefits and costs of the accession to the EU as well as openness policy and inflow of foreign direct investments. The biggest obstacles in Ukrainian way to Europe are (according to young people): corruption, lack of efficient market-institutions, weak private sector and internal division into the Western part which aspires to European integration and the Eastern part supporting pro-Russian policy.

Most of terms mentioned above are also necessary in the context of Ukrainian potential accession to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It could be a significant, strategic step of Ukraine in its way to build a safe and stable country which might have a political impact for all the countries of Central and Eastern

Europe. The Polish youth were asked about their attitude to the potential Ukrainian membership in NATO. Their opinions are presented in as chart below.

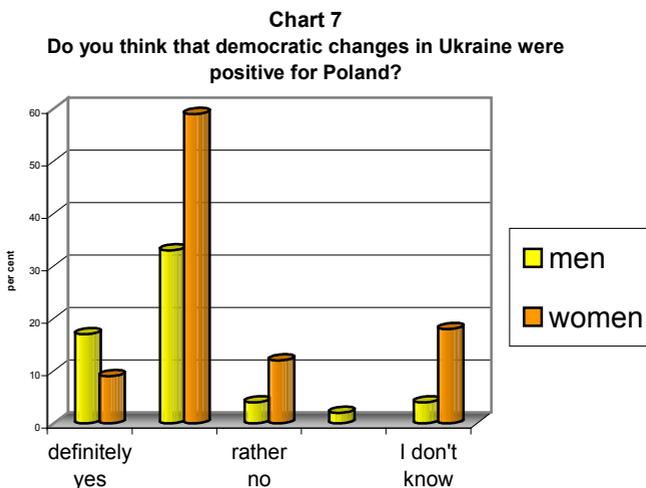
**Chart 6**  
**Youth attitude towards Ukrainian accession to NATO**



More than a half of questioned young people are strongly convinced that the Ukrainian accession to NATO would be a successful way to make political position, foreign affairs and economy independent from Moscow. Nearly a third of students claimed that security of Poland and other countries of this part of Europe depended on the Ukrainian participation in such an organization which would be a great alternative for bilateral military treaty with former Soviet republics. Only 3 per cent of surveyed people had doubts if the accession to NATO could be a success for both sides, especially for NATO countries.

There is a slightly larger group of people who claimed that democratic transformation in Ukraine had not been positive for Poland (11,3 per cent of asked people). The group that regarded the Orange Revolution as advantageous for Polish position in Europe

was dominated by women – 69,3 per cent of them claimed that situation in our Eastern neighbouring country was profitable for Poland (*definitely profitable, rather profitable*). A division of opinion about this issue is presented in a chart below.

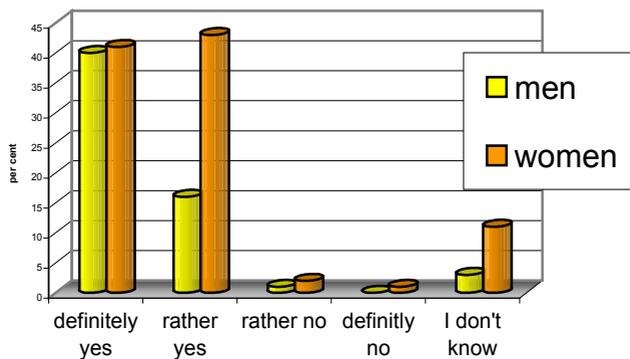


Regarding positive effects of the Orange Revolution for Poland, a significant and appropriate way for both sides to take advantages of this situation is to develop wide cooperation. This point of view was shared by 88,6 per cent of the questioned students, men were more optimistic – 93,3 per cent of them were certain that it was a great possibility to strengthen position of both countries (details of students' opinions on this issues are presented in a chart on the next page).

Reasons for developing co-operation are diversified. The most often motive of cooperation between Poland and Ukraine was a geographical position of both countries and the common border. It,

according to the youth, determined economic (especially trade) and political connections that should be used for a balanced development of Polish and Ukrainian society. It could also help Ukraine in building completely independent authorities and country. Surveyed people reminded that cross-board cooperation provided economic profits for countries and companies located on both sides of the border. Polish direct investments in Ukraine would be a valuable support in establishing free-market economy as well as big foreign market which Ukraine offered to its Western neighbour. From young point of view that cooperation should be directed towards future Ukrainian membership in the European Union, specially in Internal Market and ought to assure security in this part of Europe (particularly energetic security due to Ukrainian natural resources).

**Chart 8**  
**Do you think Poland should develop cooperation with Ukraine?**



Poland and Ukraine in view of common history, geographical location, political and economic connections are not able to pur-

sue effective and separate policy. Therefore Polish society could not stay unconcerned about the situation of its neighbour. Young generation seems to be aware of importance of cross-border relations and follows democratic changes in Ukraine. A significant part of Polish youth which took part in the presented survey supports transformation process started in October 2005 and following changes. They also opt for Ukrainian membership in European Union and NATO as a sign of a democratic reform, economic development and guarantee of security in this part of Europe. The Polish youth is ready to support Ukraine in its way to establish a completely independent, strong and safe country. Experiences of the Polish transformation may be very helpful.