

# THREAT TO POLAND'S EU APPLICATION

*Warsaw / Brussels, September 25, 2001*

Eurosceptic parties have become an unexpectedly powerful force in Poland politics after winning over a quarter of the vote in Sunday's parliamentary elections. The EPP-supported [government alliance](#) of Jerzy BUZEK was swept out of power and - with only 5.7% of the vote - even out of parliament.

"We lost because of the high costs of internal disputes," Prime Minister Buzek (*right*) said on public TVP television. "It is a kind of sickness which eats away the Polish right."



The election marks a piquant end to the long influence of Solidarity, the popular movement which revolted against Communism in 1980, and finally swept it away altogether.

Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) leader Leszek MILLER - a former Communist Politburo member - has been asked by President Aleksander KWASNIEWSKI to form a government. His triumphant, and pro-European, alliance with the Labour Union (UP) is currently predicted to win about 220 seats out of the 460 in the Sejm (parliament), and a majority in the upper house.

But if he does not secure an absolute majority, he will find himself a hostage to the three parties most critical of joining the EU at all. They are the Polish Peasants Party (PSL), the radical farmers' union Samoobrona (Self-Defence,) and the Catholic nationalist Polish Family League (LPR). Together they won over 26%, according to exit polls.

The new centre-right Civic Platform looks set to come in second with 12.7% and 66 seats. It is resolutely pro-European, but has indicated it will not join a leftist coalition.

Miller has not ruled out finding a coalition partner to stave off the prospect of a minority government, but says that coalition-building would involve "difficult talks, a waste of time and perhaps violent conflict". He said there were few obvious potential coalition partners.

Today there was growing concern in Warsaw and Brussels about whether Poland - the largest of the EU applicant states - can complete negotiations next year and join the enlarged Union planned for 2004. Poland's negotiations are already behind schedule.

The radical Samoobrona party in particular, third in the election results, is likely to drive a hard bargain for support. The party led farmers' strikes in 1999 which paralysed the country for several weeks. It claims EU demands have led to Poland's production being halved.

Its leader Andrzej LEPPER said on Sunday that if Poland was not allowed to protect its farmland, "we are against joining and the negotiations are closed."

The Polish Family League, which looks set to win 7.7% support, has also blamed Poland's high unemployment of 2.9m (16%) on the European Union.

Allowing foreigners to buy agricultural land and accepting lower subsidies than current EU members receive have proved controversial, and the current Solidarity-AWS government failed to find compromises on the issues, leading to Poland falling behind in membership talks.

Although farming represents only 4.8% of Poland's GDP, over one-fifth of the country's workforce is involved in the sector, mostly on small subsistence farms that are unlikely to receive EU aid.