

## UACES Scholarship 2007

Simona GUERRA, *University of Sussex*

My doctoral research is entitled *Domestic proxies and the European factor before and after accession: Polish attitudes toward EU integration in a comparative perspective*. It focuses on patterns of support and opposition toward EU integration in post-communist new EU Member States. The study investigates to what extent domestic proxies and the EU factor can impact on attitudes toward the EU in Poland and the new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

Among the eight CEE countries which joined the EU in May 2004, Poland constituted both in terms of size, and GDP half of the fifth enlargement, is currently the sixth largest EU Member State, and has the numbers to be one of the key players in the EU27. In order to present the most comprehensive study, the research employs both a quantitative and qualitative research methodology, expecting that, despite the lack of information and experience as Member State and the impact of domestic proxies, the EU has a mobilising force also before accession.

After using the statistical analysis on national and European data sets, preliminary findings suggested further issues to be tested and explored. As public opinion is the main interest of the research, focus groups could provide the best analytical tool for a social scientist. Focus groups are a technique that we can trace back to the 1920s, and their increasing use in market research has influenced politics and social research. They are now a useful qualitative research method for those aiming to (i) listen to and learn from people, (ii) test hypotheses, (iii) explore one's topic by analysing others conversations, (iv) obtain in-depth knowledge, (v) answer interpretive questions such as "how and why", and to understand diversity.

If we study public opinion, we are usually caught up by the numbers and opinion poll data. Yet, it is also fundamentally important to test our hypotheses by actually talking to people. Receiving the UACES scholarship allowed me to travel and stay in Poland in order to organise my focus groups. It is extremely difficult to organise and contact participants for a focus group from the UK. On the contrary, it was fundamental to have the scholarship, that enabled me to stay in Poland, and implement my focus groups from the field.

In addition, my research uses different types of data, as such CBOS (*Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej*, Public Opinion Research Centre) surveys and reports. The UACES scholarship enabled me to carry out further research at the CBOS Information Centre, close to the collaboration of the secretary, Krystyna Bonicka, who is gratefully acknowledged. Without my stay in Warsaw, I would have never had the possibility of collecting data and analysis since 1990, where I could find reports on the long-awaited 'return to Europe' of Poland.

The scholarship was also essential to carry out my research at the Library and European Documents Centre of the Committee for European Integration (*Biblioteka Depozytowa Wspólnot Europejskich, Departament Europejskiej i Publikach, Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej*), collecting invaluable documents and briefings – as at the Institute of Public Affairs - and make contacts with officers in the Polish institutions. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Jakub Michalek, Warsaw University, and Dr Mikołaj Cześnik, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, and Institute of Political Science, Warsaw School of Social Psychology (*Instytut Nauk Politycznych and Szkoła Wycsza Psychologii Społecznej*).

Finally, findings from the fieldwork are reported in an article currently under review, and were presented at the PSA Annual Conference in Bath in April, at the 4<sup>th</sup> ECPR Conference in Pisa, and at the WAPOR Annual Conference in Berlin in September, at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference 'Debates on Europe' in Siena in October, and at the conference on the first three years of Polish EU membership organised by the SEI and the Polish Embassy in London, in November 2007.

I would like to thank UACES and the European Commission for their support, enabling me to carry out a fundamental part of my doctoral research.