
**”EURO CHANGEOVER – WHAT SHOULD OR SHOULDN’T BE DONE? CONFERENCE ON
EURO CHANGEOVER PREPARATIONS”, 10-11TH MARCH 2011**

OPENING SPEECH

Ludwik Kotecki – Government Plenipotentiary for Euro Adoption in Poland, Ministry of Finance

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my sincere pleasure to address such a distinguished audience at today’s conference “Euro Changeover – what should or shouldn’t be done”. I warmly welcome our guests, delegates from the European Commission, the European Central Bank and representatives of leading institutions in many EU Member States – both euro area members and those such as Poland, which are preparing to adopt the single currency in the future. I am truly honoured that you have agreed to participate in this event, bringing your expertise and deep knowledge on changeover preparations.

Allow me to express my special gratitude to the European Commission representatives for their involvement in co-organizing the conference, in particular to Ms Linda Corugedo-Steneberg and her team, for their invaluable help and support in preparing this event.

Ladies and gentlemen, over a decade ago the introduction of the common European currency strengthened the bonds between the 11 European Union Member States and was a vital step forward in the process of economic integration. Since that time, the euro has been adopted by 17 EU Member States, the latest being Estonia in January 2011.

As a result of economic turbulence in the euro area and the uncertain financial situation of some EU countries, the enthusiasm for adopting the common currency among the peoples of the member states with derogation seems to have waned. This does not change the fact, however, that the enlargement of the euro area is important for all European economies and businesses, given the increasing challenge that global economic competition poses to all of them. The response of the Member States and EU institutions to the crisis has proved that the determination to keep the single European currency is much stronger and longer-lasting than the transitory problems that many countries have recently encountered.

Continuous efforts to strengthen the policy framework of the euro area make me certain that Poland will be joining a monetary union which has sounder fundamentals and which will be much more resilient to

economic disturbances than in the past. Adopting the euro and benefiting from full membership of the Economic and Monetary Union is one of the top priorities of the Polish government's economic policy. The government aims to achieve this goal as soon as possible, taking into account however, the necessary conditions for secure euro area membership. The recent turbulence in the euro area has shown that one of these conditions is careful preparation for monetary integration. In particular, the importance of sustainable fulfillment of the convergence criteria has now become more evident than in the past.

The theme of this conference is thus good preparation for euro adoption. We will not, however focus on economic policies, but on practical and technical issues such as the information campaign in the period preceding and during euro adoption, measures aimed at preventing price abuses, or the details of the cash changeover. These practical issues are of critical importance to the smoothness of the euro introduction process, which requires the involvement not only of public servants but also the general public. The smoothness of the euro changeover will in turn strongly influence public perception of the common currency, and thus its support for the idea of economic and monetary integration.

In order to facilitate euro changeover preparations in Poland, at the end of 2009 the Council of Ministers established an inter-institutional organizational structure, comprising the National Coordination Committee for Euro Changeover, the Coordinating Council and 8 Working Committees. I have the privilege of co-chairing the Committee and the Council together with the NBP's Board Plenipotentiary for Euro Adoption – Vice President Witold Koziński. The role of the Polish organizational structure is, *inter alia*, to outline a set of procedures and guidelines for individual sectors and the public on how to prepare for euro introduction. These will be reflected in the National Euro Changeover Plan, which is being prepared this year and which will identify the key tasks for euro implementation in Poland.

During the preparatory process, Poland will have the advantages of being a latecomer – by learning from the experiences of those member states that have already adopted the euro. Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus, Slovakia and Estonia have made good use of the lessons learned during previous changeovers, which helped them develop best practices that can now serve as a blueprint for subsequent euro area candidates. Of course, we are fully aware that member states differ with respect to their geographic, economic, political and cultural backgrounds and that there is no such thing as “one-size-fits-all”. In particular, Poland is the largest of the new Member States of the EU, which means that challenges in the area of logistics could be much more demanding than in other countries that adopted the euro between 2007 and 2011. We also expect to benefit from the experience of the large member states, who formed the common currency area over 12 years ago, and whose representatives we are hosting today. The differences just mentioned make it necessary for each country to prepare a changeover strategy customized for its own needs. However, individual elements of the changeover process should also be modeled on examples of previous best practice.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me express my gratitude to all the speakers who have agreed to participate in this event and share with us their deep knowledge on euro changeover preparations. The conference has been divided into sessions concerning different aspects of the euro changeover process. In each session we will hear two presentations: one on the experiences of a “first-wave” euro area member and the other on the experiences of a New Member State which introduced the common currency between 2007 and 2011. The aim of this approach is to contrast and compare the solutions developed by these two groups of countries in their preparations for changeover. The chair of each session will summarize the information presented by both speakers. The topics of presentations include:

- Cash Changeover
- Preparing the financial sector
- Preparing the non-financial sector
- Preparing public administration
- Consumer Protection
- The Information Campaign

We will also have the opportunity to hear the European Commission’s comments on the practical preparations for euro changeover. Moreover, we will learn about Estonia’s recent experience of adopting the euro and about Polish preparations for introducing the common currency. The panel discussion will close the conference.

I truly hope that the conference will provide an excellent opportunity for the exchange of ideas and experiences, not least to the benefit of those EU member states that have not yet introduced the euro and who will be able to use this information to further optimize their changeover preparations.

Thank you for your kind attention.