Central and Eastern Europe have clearly “returned to Europe,” integrating with formerly Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union. Yet while this process may seem to be simply a part of inevitable globalization, national goals and bilateral relations still play a key role as well. This article will examine the role of Germany and of German-Polish relations in the EU expansion process. It will show that German economic and political interests drove it to push hard for the 2004 expansion and Poland’s inclusion in it, often over the objections of its EU partners. Thus, while underlying globalization may have set the stage, even in an organization like the EU—which seems to embody “post-national” ideals—national goals still play a role.

On June 7-8, 2003, the people of Poland voted in a referendum on their country’s future membership in the European Union. Almost 80 percent of the voters approved membership, and turnout easily passed 50 percent (as required under Polish law for a valid result). Poland thus took up the invitation which the EU extended to ten states at its December 2002 summit in Copenhagen. The ten—Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Cyprus, and Malta—joined the Union in May 2004, in time to take part in the elections to the European Parliament in June. This momentous expansion has transformed the political, economic, and social map of Europe, seemingly marking the end of the Cold War-era division of Europe into East and West.

Why, though, did this expansion take place? Many works have described the events of the recent expansion. Yet fewer have tried to explain what caused it. Often authors make it appear as if some impersonal, mysterious pan-European force was at work, making expansion a foregone conclusion. The competitive forces of the world economy and converging political, economic and social systems seemed to argue strongly for European unification, as part of a broader worldwide trend of globalization. The bland, unanimous communiqués of most past EU summit meetings only reinforced this impres-

1. “Poland’s Official EU Referendum Results Put “Yes” Votes at 77.45 percent and Turnout at 58.85 percent,” Interfax, June 11, 2003.
sion of harmony and steady progress. I believe that this impression is not entirely accurate. In fact, as Lenin reminded us, events do not happen on their own: politics is always a question of “kto-kovo” – who is doing what to whom? Who has the power? Whose interests are driving events? Globalization may have helped to make EU expansion possible, yet as this study will show, it was the interests of individual countries that shaped the timing and nature of this expansion.

This article will analyze one important part of the EU expansion story: the role of Germany as a key advocate of expansion. The article will be structured as follows: first, we will see that Germany had a uniquely strong interest in supporting the EU’s eastward expansion. Many other EU states, in contrast, had only a weak interest in expansion; some, in fact, had good reason to oppose it. Next we will look at some of the steps taken by the Germans to promote their expansion agenda, showing how they worked to keep the expansion on track and speed up the process, while other EU states often sought to derail or at least delay it. Finally, we will see what Germany has gained from supporting EU enlargement.

While other countries will be mentioned, the main focus throughout will be on German relations with Poland. Poland was by far the largest of the first round candidate states, accounting by itself for more than half of the 75 million people who joined the Union in 2004. Germany, of course, the largest and wealthiest of the original 15 EU members. As will be shown in the following section, Germany had a uniquely strong interest in pushing for EU expansion. And Poland was the state that Germany was most concerned with adding to the EU. As one author put it, “Germany, representing the ‘west,’ and Poland, the ‘east,’ are central actors in the enlargement process.” These states are central geographically as well, with their Oder-Neisse border forming a major part of the border between the “old” and “new” EU states. The importance of these two states is only underlined by the fact that Poland will receive over half of the net subsidies given to the new EU members, while Germany, by far the largest EU net payer state, will effectively provide over 60 percent of these subsidies. According to recent estimates, by 2007 Germany will be contributing 11.13 billion Euros yearly of the net 17.35 billion transferred between EU states (over 64 percent), while Poland will receive 9.40 billion of these transfers (over 54 percent). It is in German-Polish ties,


3. Figures calculated by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), and author’s calculations. See Christian Weise, “How to Finance Eastern Enlargement of the EU,” German Institute for Economic Research Discussion Papers, No. 287 (2002), Table A.2. While Germany contributes about a quarter of the EU budget, it receives relatively few subsidies from the organization, making its share of net contributions much higher.