

Reflections on the Treaties of Rome and Polish achievements in health

To the Editor In one of the recent issues of *The Lancet*,¹ an editorial was published on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome, summarizing the benefits that the European countries gained with respect to the health of their citizens. The Treaties of Rome were the basis for the European Economic Community, the precursor of the European Union (EU), while the 1992 Maastricht Treaty gave the EU countries the possibility to carry out common health policy.

The authors of the editorial underlined the burden of disease in EU countries and the resulting challenges experienced by the EU and particular governments, especially in the face of population aging. Particular emphasis is laid on the threats related to comorbidities of numerous chronic diseases, both somatic and mental. According to the authors, the biggest achievements of the EU in the field of health are:

- 1 tobacco control policy, especially legislation;
- 2 creation of European guidelines for treatment of numerous diseases, in collaboration with professional associations;
- 3 establishment of the European Reference Networks for diagnostics and treatment of rare diseases or particularly complicated cases;
- 4 establishment of the European Medicines Agency in London, United Kingdom;
- 5 establishment of the DG SANTE – Directorate General for Health and Food Safety within the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium;
- 6 establishment of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in Stockholm, Sweden; and
- 7 establishment of the European Food Safety Agency in Parma, Italy.

One of the important tools for public health improvement is the European Code Against Cancer, a document published in 1987 as a result of the initiative of European governments and containing recommendations for healthy lifestyle. The recommendations were updated several times as new evidence for cancer prevention was revealed. The most recent 4th edition is available in Polish at www.europejskikodekswalkizrakiem.pl. The European Code Against Cancer is a strategic tool that helps reduce not only the incidence

and mortality of cancer but also contributes to lowering the burden of other noncommunicable chronic diseases, including cardiovascular ones.²

Poland has its share in some of the European successes. In 1995, the tobacco control act that was enacted in Poland was acknowledged by the World Health Organization as “golden standard” for tobacco control legislation, as it was the most comprehensive and advanced document in the region.³ The bill was amended several times, most recently in 2016 in relation to the Tobacco Products Directive. Currently, in Poland, we have one of the best legislations protecting Poles from the health consequences of tobacco smoking, including comprehensive regulations regarding electronic cigarettes.⁴ Part of the National Health Program dedicated to reducing tobacco-related harm for the years 2014–2018 is the implementing act of the above bill.

In Poland, the National Quitline has operated for more than 20 years (since 1996) and is financed by the Ministry of Health. Smokers who wish to quit smoking can also use the stationary services of a reference smoking cessation clinic, available since 1999 at the Cancer Center and Institute of Oncology in Warsaw, Poland. The clinic offers medical and psychological support services financed by the National Health Fund and conducts research on tobacco dependence treatment (ICD-10 Diagnosis Code F17), including clinical trials of smoking cessation drugs.

Poland is undoubtedly in the forefront of the EU countries with respect to tobacco control legislation. Polish researchers are active in the European Reference Networks (eg, Eurosarcoma project implemented in the Cancer Center and Institute of Oncology in Warsaw). The Institute also collaborates within the Joint Research Center with the European Network of Cancer Registries, and has implemented one of the most important public health projects analyzing the health gap between the old and new EU member states (HEM – Closing the Gap – Reducing Premature Mortality. Baseline for Monitoring Health Evolution Following Enlargement).

The activity of Polish researchers and health professionals in creating health policy of the EU cannot be overvalued, and the 60th anniversary

of the Treaties of Rome should be an opportunity to review Polish achievements in this respect.

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