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Polish leader: Joining European Union was tough
Former prime minister speaks at Furman's Younts Center

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Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Poland's former prime minister, said at Furman University's Younts Center on Tuesday night that he still supports his country's membership in the European Union even though it caused enormous changes in people's lives.

In just about the same time period — three years ago — Poland also joined NATO, he told 250 students.

Earlier, Cimoszewicz had a key role as foreign minister when the country changed to a democratic form of government from a dictatorship.

He was prime minister from 1996 through 1997.

Advertisement "Joining the EU broadened the economy and roadened the approach," he said.
"There was also a lot of naivete."

Appearing at Furman on behalf of the Riley Institute, Cimoszewicz said there was and is much still to be done in Poland. His speech was titled "Entering a Uniting Europe: The Polish Experience."

He said joining the EU was a formidable task and there were a host of laws to be changed as well as attitudes.

He said most of Poland's military spoke Russian, something that would have to change. "If you join NATO, you have to speak English," he said.


Since its beginning in 1992, the European Union has become the largest political and economic entity in the world, according to a Furman spokesman.

As Cimoszewicz began his 45-minute speech, Jason Williams, 19, of Columbia said the Polish leader had spoken earlier to his political science class. "He was a very personable speaker," the sophomore said.

When the country joined the EU, 50,000 of the country's leaders had to reorientate to an EU philosophy. "We had to train 50,000 public officials," Cimoszewicz said.

Cimoszewicz, former foreign minister from 2001 to 2005, said EU membership has also had some direct benefits.

He said Poland's economy has been bolstered and far more students are going to college. The number of university students skyrocketed from 300,000 to 2 million, many of whom left Poland for elsewhere in Europe. □

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Cimoszewicz said he believes that joining NATO and the EU has strengthened Poland's security overall. He said Poland "had been part of the Soviet block for 40 years." He said a recent poll reveals that 76 percent of Polish people believe joining the EU has produced "a benefit" in their lives.

He said about 1 million Poles have "migrated to European countries for jobs." He said there weren't enough jobs to go around. "We also have become competitive in the business area," Cimoszewicz said.
