

*Being successful and awarded means
seizing new perspectives*

The IRON LADY

ELISABETH LÜRENBAUM, President of the Management Board at solvadis polska sp. z o.o., talks to Andrzej K. Kazimierski.

PM A few weeks ago you received the European Medal, which is yet another award for your company, solvadis polska. Congratulations!

Thank you very much. Yes, this award means a lot to us. First, because it comes from the Business Centre Club, the largest business organisation in Poland. Secondly, it sort of confirms our status as a company operating on the European scale and offering European quality. And thirdly, the award serves to highlight that it's been 25 successful years since we entered the Polish market. I took over the helm of the Company in 2000.

PM Then let me congratulate you again, this time on being this lucky in business.

Yes, I do seem to be lucky. With all these problems and concerns which of course come up every now and then, I always deal with them and carry on, doing something cool. The year 2000 still marked a period of rapid growth for private businesses in Poland, a time when they had yet to adapt to European standards. But seeing Polish people, so resilient and quick to grasp everything, I believe that the Polish economy and businesses are on track to become an important part of the European system, and companies such as solvadis polska only confirm this trend. Trading in the distribution of chemical additives and raw materials, we have grown to be a major player on the EU market.

PM How did you get into the chemical industry?

By accident, I guess. By the time I graduated, I had started my own business which involved projects on the eastern markets, Ukraine mostly. Out of the many partners I worked with, Kloeckner Chemiehandel GmbH offered me a job at their headquarters in Duisburg. I spent three years there, and was then asked to become the head of a Polish company which had run into some difficulties. Those must have been quite serious, because none of the male managers agreed to take them on. I, however, did not hesitate for a moment, and it turned out to be a great challenge. I reckoned Poland would be an exciting opportunity for me. And I was right, although, admittedly, I had my doubts, sometimes not believing I would pull it off. The Polish market was different from the German one, or the Ukrainian, which I knew a bit. It was only after I had found



my way around it that I could launch a reconstruction and development plan for the company. But I wouldn't have done it all by myself. Our success as a leader in the distribution of chemical additives and raw materials was possible through the combination of my business vision with what had been proposed by my Polish colleagues holding various positions. It was their commitment which became the foundation for our achievements and position on the market.

PM In this business, just like Margaret Thatcher, you are widely regarded as the "Iron Lady" of the Polish chemical industry, a woman of success?

Yes, I've heard, and I must admit it is very nice to be compared to the likes of Margaret Thatcher, because it means people recognise that I'm consistent in what I do and that I push ahead with a programme, whatever the obstacles. But, let me stress again, I enjoy working with those who pursue similar goals, and that's why, when facing difficulties or challenges which call for joint decisions, I usually try to reach some kind of compromise. This is because, to me, a sensible compromise is one of the key tenets on which business relationships can build, especially in this sector.

PM And why here??

It is a very important segment of the Polish market, and one which takes various forms – from small companies to international corporations – although these are largely owned by the state. With such centralisation and state control, their operating patterns are often determined by the political situation in the country, which might adversely impact on their growth as individual entities and on business as a whole. When it comes to drafting legislation, certain problems can indeed be observed, often stemming from ineffective cooperation between ministries and businesses. In my view, these mutual contacts should be better. Nevertheless, whatever the difficulties, we continue to grow.

PM Can you name any other factors in your market success?

Customer trust would be one of them. Even though occasionally pricey, our products remain the first choice for customers who can be sure that they are getting exactly what they want. We remain faithful to the "Customer is always right" principle, by choosing reliable partners and building long-term relationships. And that's how I see business.

PM I heard you were about to change the Company's name. Why?

That is right, in the following months the Company will be renamed "Solvachem" as a consequence of the changes to our corporate structure. Our operating philosophy, however, remains the same. What's more, the experience we have gained will be utilised in new, broader and multifaceted perspectives. We want to embark on a new stage in our development by expanding into the Chinese and Ukrainian markets. Of course, we hope for the best but the future is yet to come. □

 solvadis
polska

 solvachem