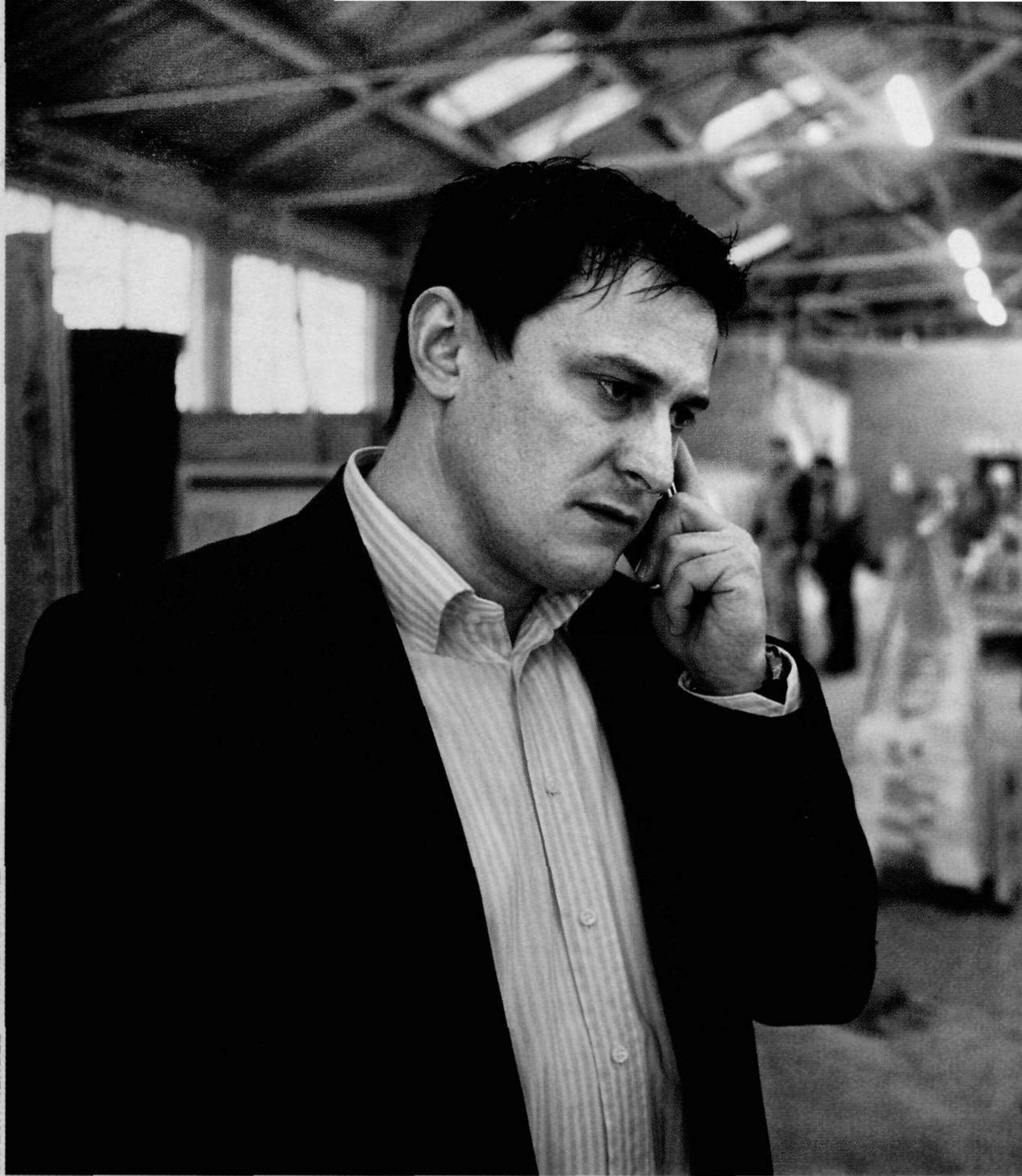


ADAM WASILEWSKI ENTREPRENEUR

Many of those who left Poland over the past few years did so because they couldn't find a job. Adam Wasilewski, 38, left because he couldn't create enough of them. Owner of a stoneware company in Warsaw, he found that increasingly his clients were not paying their bills. "I couldn't plan an expansion," Wasilewski recalls. "I had the money, but only on paper." Around the same time, a contract came up to apply interior cladding to a high-rise at London's Canary Wharf. He took it. Wasilewski then moved his family to Britain and, in 2004, invested in two small stoneware companies. He has not looked back. Turnover has doubled in the past three years. Instead of struggling to make his business thrive, Wasilewski now employs about 50 workers, most of them, like him, from Poland. Wasilewski hopes to return to his homeland some day. In fact, he'd like to move some of his own companies' production processes back there later this year. Meanwhile, his two young children, ages 5 and 8, are attending a special Polish school each Saturday. They are already bilingual.

GIDEON MENDEL—CORBIS FOR TIME



Later in a pub, Izabela Chudzicka, the former bank clerk, talks about the fund raiser, which she's helped to organize in the past. In an accent betraying a hint of an Irish brogue, she says the Poles and the Irish have a lot in common. "We socialize in the same way. We know how to talk to each other. We understand each other's sense of humor. It's great."

Listen to the rhetoric of politicians across Europe and you won't hear the relationship between Poles and their host countries described in such friendly terms. In 2005, Philippe de Villiers, leader of France's Euro-skeptic Mouvement pour la France, darkly warned of the "Polish plumber and Estonian architect" triggering "the demolition of France's social and economic model." Before the E.U. admitted 10 new members back in 2004, populist fears of unwashed hordes stealing jobs from local workers led most of the old E.U. countries, including Germany, Austria and France, to keep their labor markets closed.

In the end, of the European Union's then 15 countries, only three—Ireland, Britain and Sweden—agreed to open their labor markets in May 2004. Though East Europeans have settled everywhere from Scandinavia to Spain, the most evident result of the decisions taken on enlargement has been a concentrated flow of Poles into Britain and Ireland. And although politi-

cians and media in those countries warned that an influx of workers from Eastern Europe would undermine local economies, steal jobs and bankrupt the welfare system, the impact has been quite different. Polish migrants like Chudzicka have integrated seamlessly: 75%, in one survey, said the Irish have "made them feel welcome."

Well they might, for there is no evidence that incoming workers have systematically displaced locals or stolen their jobs. Unemployment is higher in France, from which Poles were turned away, than in Britain where they were welcomed. The jobless rate in Ireland is just 4.5%, and job vacancy rates reported by Irish businesses in the past two years have actually risen, from 11% to 17%. The positions migrants are filling, economists say, are either ones that locals don't want, or new positions altogether. In fact, the infusion of educated labor drove growth in host countries' most dynamic sectors.

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They are work-oriented. They want to work a lot. They will work whenever you ask them.

—JAREK CZERNEK,
general manager, Aluglass Ireland

Chudzicka arrived with a diploma in economics and now stars in her own Polish-language TV show (*see profile*). The majority of expatriate Poles have at least a secondary education, and many have a university degree. Most are working at jobs—in hotels and restaurants, construction and agriculture—well below their skill levels. (Plumbers are coming too, but immigration officials do not keep track of how many.)

Such an influx has not just ensured a better class of bathroom. Over the past two years, according to one estimate by the Dublin-based Economic and Social Research Institute, migrant workers have added two percentage points to Ireland's GNP. And in December, citing increased migration to the U.K., the British treasury raised its GDP growth estimate for the next five years from 2.5% to 2.75%. "It's been a fantastic success story," said Jonathan Byrne, a senior executive at the Bank of Ireland, which has conducted extensive market research on the new arrivals. "Economically, socially, in every way, it has been a positive experience for our country."

That hasn't gone unnoticed in the rest of Europe. The Polish story is feeding the debate as new countries such as Romania and Bulgaria join the E.U. As the Union continues to expand to the east, the toughest question facing its older members is whether to