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Profile

Introduction

Warsaw’s last champion from her height surveyed
Wide o’er the fields, a waste of ruin laid;
“Oh! Heaven!” he cried, "my bleeding country save!
Is there no hand on high to shield the brave?
Yet, though destruction sweep these lovely plains,
Rise, fellow men! our country yet remains!
By that dread name we wave the sword on high,
And swear for her to live! —with her to die!”
~Thomas Campbell

From The Pleasures of Hope (1799)

In 1795, the nation of Poland disappeared from the map and would not make its return until nearly 125 years later. During this period, what had once been one of the largest kingdoms in all of Europe was reduced to parcels divided among the empires of its neighboring states. In Britain’s House of Commons, the forced dissolution of Poland was condemned as “the most flagrant instance of profligate perfidy1 that has ever disgraced the annals of mankind.”

Yet, as one chronicler of Polish history and culture has noted, “in her moment of crisis, Poland could count on the sympathy of every state in Europe, and on the support of none.”2

In 1939, however, Poland’s friends did come to its support when German forces invaded, marking the beginning of World War II. Poland subsequently suffered six years of crushing destruction, including the extermination of most of its large Jewish population, followed by another 44 years as a Soviet satellite state. In 1989, it emerged as the first Eastern Bloc nation to cast off its communist government, and it quickly turned toward building military and economic alliances with Western Europe. In 1999, Poland became a member of NATO, and five years later, in 2004, it acceded to membership in the European Union.

Poland still faces many economic and environmental challenges as it integrates with the European Union, but history has shown that resiliency is a defining characteristic trait of the Polish people. In the years since World War II, the Poles have rebuilt cities that had been reduced to rubble, improved their air and water after decades of environmental

1 Profligate perfidy: a recklessly wasteful and deliberate breach of trust.
neglect, and forged a growing, modern economy after a wrenching transition from state-run control.

**Facts and Figures**

**Location:**

Central Europe, east of Germany

**Area:**

312,679 sq km (120,726 sq mi)

**Border Countries:**

Belarus 605 km (376 mi), Czech Republic 615 km (382 mi), Germany 456 km (283 mi), Lithuania 91 km (57 mi), Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast) 432 km (268 mi), Slovakia 420 km (261 mi), Ukraine 428 km (266 mi)

**Natural Hazards:**

Flooding

**Climate:**

Temperate with cold, cloudy, moderately severe winters with frequent precipitation; mild summers with frequent showers and thundershowers.

**Environment—Current Issues:**

The situation has improved since 1989 due to a decline in heavy industry and increased environmental concern by post-Communist governments. Air pollution nonetheless remains serious because of sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants, and the resulting acid rain has caused forest damage. Water pollution from industrial and municipal sources is also a problem, as is disposal of hazardous wastes. Pollution levels should continue to decrease as industrial establishments bring their facilities up to EU code, but at substantial cost to business and the government.

**Population:**

38,482,919 (July 2009 est.)

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Median Age:
39.7 years (2008 est.)

Population Growth Rate:
-0.047% (2009 est.)

Life Expectancy at Birth:
75.63 years (2009 est.)

HIV/AIDS—Adult Prevalence Rate:
0.1%; note - no country-specific models provided (2007 est.)

Major Infectious Diseases:

Degree of risk: Intermediate
Food or waterborne diseases: Bacterial diarrhea
Vectorborne disease: Tickborne encephalitis
Note: Highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza has been identified in this country; it poses a negligible risk with extremely rare cases possible among U.S. citizens who have close contact with birds (2009)

Nationality:

Noun: Pole(s)
Adjective: Polish

Sex Ratio:

At birth: 1.06 male(s)/female
Under 15 years: 1.06 male(s)/female
15–64 years: 0.99 male(s)/female
65 years and over: 0.62 male(s)/female
Total population: 0.94 male(s)/female (2009 est.)

Ethnic Groups:

Polish 96.7%, German 0.4%, Belarusian 0.1%, Ukrainian 0.1%, other and unspecified, 2.7% (2002 census)

Religions:

Roman Catholic 89.8% (about 75% practicing), Eastern Orthodox 1.3%, Protestant 0.3%, other 0.3%, unspecified 8.3% (2002)
Languages:
Polish 97.8%, other and unspecified 2.2% (2002 census)

Literacy:

Definition: Persons age 15 and over who can read and write.
Total population: 99.8%
Male: 99.8%
Female: 99.8% (2003 est.)

Country Name:

Conventional long form: Republic of Poland
Conventional short form: Poland
Local long form: Rzeczpospolita Polska
Local short form: Polska

Government Type:

Republic

Capital:

Name: Warsaw

Administrative Divisions:

16 provinces (województwa, singular - województwo); Dolnoslaskie (Lower Silesia), Kujawsko-Pomorskie (Kuyavia-Pomerania), Łódzkie (Łódź), Lubelskie (Lublin), Lubuskie (Lubusz), Malopolskie (Lesser Poland), Mazowieckie (Masovia), Opolskie, Podkarpackie (Subcarpathia), Podlaskie, Pomorskie (Pomerania), Śląskie (Silesia), Świętokrzyskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie (Warmia-Masuria), Wielkopolskie (Greater Poland), Zachodniopomorskie (West Pomerania)

Independence:

11 November 1918 (republic proclaimed)

National Holiday:

Constitution Day, 3 May (1791).

Constitution:

Adopted by the National Assembly 2 April 1997; passed by national referendum 25 May 1997; effective 17 October 1997.
Legal System:

Based on a mixture of Continental (Napoleonic) civil law and holdover Communist legal theory; changes being gradually introduced as part of broader democratization process; limited judicial review of legislative acts, but rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal are final; court decisions can be appealed to the European Court of Justice in Strasbourg; accepts compulsory International Court of Justice (ICJ) jurisdiction with reservations.

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Government:

*Chief of state:* President Lech Kaczyński (since 23 December 2005)

*Head of government:* Prime Minister Donald Tusk (since 16 November 2007); Deputy Prime Ministers Waldemar Pawlak (since 16 November 2007) and Grzegorz Schetyna (since 16 November 2007)

*Cabinet:* Council of Ministers responsible to the prime minister and the Sejm; the prime minister proposes, the president appoints, and the Sejm approves the Council of Ministers

*Elections:* President elected by popular vote for a five-year term (eligible for a second term); election last held 9 and 23 October 2005 (next to be held in fall 2010); prime minister and deputy prime ministers appointed by the president and confirmed by the Sejm.

*Election results:* Lech Kaczyński elected president; percent of popular vote—Lech Kaczyński 54%, Donald Tusk 46%.

Legislative Branch:

Bicameral legislature consists of an upper house, the Senate or Senat (100 seats; members are elected by a majority vote on a provincial basis to serve four-year terms), and a lower house, the Sejm (460 seats; members are elected under a complex system of proportional representation to serve four-year terms); the designation of National Assembly or Zgromadzenie Narodowe is only used on those rare occasions when the two houses meet jointly.

*Elections:* Senate—last held 21 October 2007 (next to be held by October 2011); Sejm elections last held 21 October 2007 (next to be held by October 2011)

*Election results:* Senate—percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party—PO 60, PiS 39, independents 1; Sejm—percent of vote by party – Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska, PO*) 41.5%, Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS*) 32.1%, Left

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*Sejm* refers to one of the Chambers of the Polish Parliament. The *Sejm* shares its legislative function with the Senate. *Sejm* of the Republic of Poland. “*Sejm in the system of power.*” No Date.

and Democrats (Lewica i Demokraci, LiD) 13.2%, Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) 8.9%, other 4.3%; Seats by party—Civic Platform 209, Law and Justice 166, Left and Democrats 53, Polish People’s Party 31, German minorities 1. Note: seats by parliamentary grouping as of February 2009—Civic Platform 208, Law and Justice 156, Left (Lewica) 42, Polish People’s Party 31, Social Democracy of Poland (SDPL)-New Left (SDPL-Nowa Lewica) 5, Poland XXI (Polska XXI) 6, Democratic Caucus 3, German minorities 1, nonaffiliated 8.

Note: One seat is assigned to ethnic minority parties in the Sejm only.

Judicial Branch:

Supreme Court (judges are appointed by the president on the recommendation of the National Council of the Judiciary for an indefinite period); Constitutional Tribunal (judges are chosen by the Sejm for nine-year terms).

International Organization Participation:


**GDP—Real Growth Rate:**

4.8% (2008 est.)

**GDP—Composition by Sector:**

* Agriculture: 4%
* Industry: 31.3%
* Services: 64.7% (2008 est.)

**Labor Force—By Occupation:**

* Agriculture: 17.4%
* Industry: 29.2%
* Services: 53.4% (2005)

**Telephones—Main Lines in Use:**

10.336 million (2007)

**Telephones—Mobile Cellular:**

41.389 million (2007)

**Radio Broadcast Stations:**

AM 14, FM 63, shortwave 2 (2008)

**Television Broadcast Stations:**

75 (2008)

**Internet Users:**

16 million (2007)

**Airports:**

123 (2007)
Airports—With Paved Runways:

*Total*: 84

*Over 3,047 m (1.89 mi)*: 4
*2,438–3,047 m (1.51–1.89 mi)*: 30
*1,524–2,437 m (0.95–1.51 mi)*: 39
*914–1,523 m (0.57–0.95 mi)*: 7
*Under 914 m (0.57 mi)*: 4 (2008).

Military Branches:

Polish Armed Forces: Land Forces (includes Navy (Marynarka Wojenna, MW)), Polish Air Force (Sily Powietrzne Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, SPRP) (2008)

Military Service Age and Obligation:

17 years of age for male compulsory military service after January 1st of the year of 18th birthday; 17 years of age for voluntary military service; conscript service obligation shortened from 12 to 9 months in 2005; by 2008, plans call for at least 60% of military personnel to be volunteers; only soldiers who have completed their conscript service are allowed to volunteer for professional service; as of April 2004, women are only allowed to serve as officers and noncommissioned officers (2006).

International Disputes:

Belarus and Ukraine

As a member state that forms part of the EU’s external border, Poland has implemented the strict Schengen border rules\(^5\) to restrict illegal immigration and trade along its eastern borders with Belarus and Ukraine.

Illicit Drugs:

Despite diligent counternarcotics measures and international information sharing on cross-border crimes, a major illicit producer of synthetic drugs for the international market; minor transshipment point for Southwest Asian heroin and Latin American cocaine to Western Europe.

\(^5\) Under the Schengen Agreement, participating countries (including most of the European Union and some non-European Union states) have free traffic access across their internal borders. Borders between Schengen and non-Schengen countries, however, require strict security checks and visa controls.
Geography

Introduction

Poland’s present borders reflect a westward shift since the period immediately preceding World War II. This redefinition of the Polish state in the post-war period is simply the most recent of a series of such changes during the last 1,000 years. Over the centuries, Poland has even disappeared altogether from maps after having been divided up by its larger neighbors: Prussia (modern-day Germany), Russia, and Austria. Ironically, the modern-day geographical definition of Poland more closely resembles that of the first Polish kingdom than any Polish state since that early time.

Despite these frequent territorial changes, the Polish people continued to retain a strong ethnic identity. They also sustained regional ties that continue to this day. Historical Polish regions such as Wielkopolska (Great Poland), Pomerania, Silesia, Maloposka, Mazovia, and Mazuria still generally define many of the nation’s provincial boundaries.

Geographic Regions and Topographic Features

Most of Poland, with the exception of its mountainous southern areas, lies within the North European Plain, an expansive geographical feature of low-lying undulating terrain that stretches eastward from northwestern France to the Ural Mountains in Russia. Glacier activity during the Pleistocene epoch (1.6 million to 10,000 years ago) is primarily responsible for the modern-day topography of the North European Plain. Within Poland, this landscape can be divided into five primary divisions, each of which runs basically east–west. They are, ranging from north to south, the Baltic coastal plains, the lakelands belt, the central lowlands, the southern uplands, and the southern mountains.

The Baltic Coastal Plain

In a strip running along the Baltic Sea lies a region of flat lowlands featuring long sandy beaches interspersed with coastal lagoons that are separated from the Baltic by thin strips of sandbars. Much of this coastal area lies in the ancient region known as Pomerania, which translates as “along the sea.” Viewed from the air, Poland’s Baltic coastline follows a smooth, gently curving path, broken up only by the few places where rivers or lagoons have outlets to the sea. Most prominent of these coastal inlets are the Gulf of Gdańsk and Pomeranian

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Bay. The Vistula (Wisła) River drains into the former, and the Oder (Odra) River empties into the latter.7

Like much of Poland’s terrain, the coastal region owes its existence to glacier activity. After the Baltic’s sea level rose following the most recent glacier retreat, waves swept the sand and gravel carried by the melting ice sheets into the sandy beach areas seen today.8 In one area of the coast (Słowiński National Park), the sand has accumulated into large coastal dunes, which the wind then blows inland at rates of 2 to 10 m (7 to 33 ft) per year.9 Further to the east is Gdańsk, the region’s largest city and a major port city, which lies near the Żuławy Wiślane (Vistula River marshlands). The fertile soils of the delta, some of which lie below sea level, make this the primary agricultural area of northern Poland.10

Lakelands Belt

As the glaciers retreated northward during the last Ice Age, the regions near the farthest southern advance of the glaciers were left with deposits of till, or unsorted accumulations of sand, gravel, clay, and even boulder. The resulting landforms created by these glacial deposits, known as moraines, display either a rolling topography or curved ridges, depending on whether glaciers were receding continuously or stopped temporarily during their retreat to the north. Today, these morainal regions host a belt of post-glacial lakes that spread across Poland. The largest of these lakes lie in northeastern Poland, within the provinces of Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Podlaskie, in a region known as the Mazurskie (Masurian) Lakeland. One of the more than 2,000 lakes within Mazurskie Lakeland is Lake Śniardwy, the largest body of water in Poland.11, 12

Other lake districts occur further to the west—most notably, the Pomorskie (Pomeranian) and Wielkopolskie (Great Poland) Lakelands. The Pomorskie Lakeland lies just south of the Baltic coast and contains numerous marshes and streams in addition to its more than 1,000 lakes.13 The Wielkopolskie Lakeland, to the south of the Pomorskie Lakeland, is

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heavily forested and relatively unpopulated except for the large city of Poznań, the Lakeland belt’s largest city.14

Central Lowlands

Continuing southward, the Polish terrain becomes flatter in a region of rolling lowlands that accumulated from deposits of sand and mud carried southward by streams flowing off melting glaciers.15 What topographic relief that does exist in these lowlands was usually produced by moraines during some of the most ancient glacial periods.16 Specific lowland regions are identified by the drainage basins that they are part of, including the Śląska (Silesian) lowland (upper Oder River basin), Wielkopolska (Great Poland) lowland (middle Warta River basin), the Mazowiecka (Mazovian) lowland (lower Vistula River basin), and the Podlasie lowland (Narew River).17 Some of Poland’s most productive agricultural regions are located within the lowlands area, as are some of Poland’s largest urban centers, such as Warsaw, Łódź, and Wrocław.

Southern Uplands

In south-central and southeastern Poland, the Małopolska (Little Poland) uplands lie between the lowland regions to the north and the higher mountain ranges to the south. Lying within the Małopolska uplands are the Krakowsko-Częstochowska uplands and the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, which are separated by the lower-altitude Nida River basin. Coal, iron, zinc, and lead deposits within the Krakowsko-Częstochowska uplands have fueled the growth of the Upper Silesia Industrial District, centered on the city of Katowice. Numerous contiguous medium-sized cities make this the most densely populated region in Poland.18 Directly southeast of the Krakowsko-Częstochowska uplands is Kraków, the largest city in southern Poland.

To the east of the Małopolska uplands, separated by the Vistula River, are the Lubelska (Lublin) uplands. The backbone of this uplands region is the Roztocze, a narrow range of


14
hills that trend southeastward into Ukraine. Except for the city of Lublin at the northern edge of the uplands, most of this region of eastern Poland is relatively unpopulated.\(^{19}\)

**Southern Mountains and Associated Features**

The rugged peaks of the Sudeten (Sudety) Mountains on Poland’s southwestern border with the Czech Republic rise as high as 1,602 m (5,256 ft) in the Karkonosze Range.\(^{20}\) To the west, several mountain ranges of the Carpathians, the dominant mountain chain in Eastern Europe, form Poland’s frontier with Slovakia and small portions of Ukraine and the Czech Republic. The loftiest peaks are in the Tatry Mountains, where Mt. Rysy, located on the Polish-Czech border, claims the title of Poland’s highest point at 2,499 m (8,199 ft). Just north of the Tatry Range is the Beskid Range. These mountains are generally lower in elevation, more rounded, and less steeply sloped than the Tatry Range. The highest Beskid peak is Mt. Babia at 1725 m (5,659 ft), located on the Polish-Slovakia border.

Both the Sudeten and Beskid Mountains are flanked on their northern edges by a range of foothills. In the Beskid region, several basins are located between these foothills and the upland regions to the north. The largest of these is the Sandomierska basin, drained by the Vistula and San Rivers.

**Climate**

Poland’s climate reflects both maritime and continental influences. Eastward-flowing moist air masses from the Atlantic Ocean and comparatively dry air from Eastern Europe and Asia often meet over Poland, producing highly changeable weather conditions over both the short term (daily) and longer term (annual). In most years, measurable precipitation occurs on at least 10 days each month, with the heaviest rainfall coming in the summer months (June through August). Central Poland is the driest region, with average precipitation around 450 mm (18 in), whereas the mountainous regions in the south average about 1,000 mm (39 in) of precipitation, almost all of which comes as snowfall during the winter. Overall, Poland’s average precipitation is about 600 mm (24 in.).\(^{21,22}\)

Except in the higher mountain elevations, temperatures across Poland do not vary much from region to region. Eastern locations, especially in the north, tend to be a little colder.

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on average during the winter than western areas, but the differences in temperatures are not great. Overall, winter temperatures reach average January lows of -7°C (19°F) to -3°C (37°F) in most of Poland. During the summer, average July highs range from 21°C (70°F) to 24°C (75°F), with the lowest temperatures along the Baltic coast and at the highest elevations in the south.

Rivers

Two rivers—the Oder (Odra) and Vistula (Wisła)—drain virtually all of Poland except for some short streams along the Baltic coast and parts of Poland’s northeastern corner. The Vistula River is the longer of the two rivers. All 1,047 km (651 mi) of its stretch lie within Poland, and for most of its length it is navigable. Located along its banks are several of Poland’s largest cities, including Warsaw, Kraków, and Bydgoszcz.

The Vistula River originates as a mountain stream in the Beskid Mountains near the Polish-Czech Republic border. After briefly flowing northward, the Vistula turns abruptly toward the east and then angles northeastward. During this stretch it receives the waters of several right-bank tributaries flowing down from the Beskid Mountains. At the northern end of the Sandomierska basin, the San River flows into the Vistula as it flows northward through the Southern Uplands. Just past Warsaw, the Vistula receives flow from the Bug River, its largest tributary, and shifts to a west–northwest path. At Bydgoszcz, the river once again turns northward as it starts on its final stretch toward the Baltic Sea. A canal at Bydgoszcz links the Vistula River basin to the Noteć River, a part of the Oder River drainage basin, via a series of locks, although today the canal is only usable by small barges.

To the west, the Oder River, at a total length of 854 km (531 mi), is the second longest river entering the Baltic Sea. The Oder rises as a mountain stream in the Czech Republic before crossing into Poland through the structural depression known as the Moravian Gate. Within Poland, the river flows northwestward until it reaches the Polish-German border at its confluence with the Nysa River, at which point the Oder turns northward toward the Baltic Sea. The river thereafter forms the border with Germany until south of the port city of Szczecin. After entering Szczecin Lagoon, it ultimately

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feeds into the Baltic at Świnoujście, another significant Polish port and home to an important Polish naval base.28, 29

### Population and Cities

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<tr>
<td>Warsaw (Warsaw)</td>
<td>1,689,201</td>
<td>1,707,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Łódź</td>
<td>789,318</td>
<td>750,125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kraków</td>
<td>758,544</td>
<td>756,441</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrocław</td>
<td>640,367</td>
<td>632,803</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poznań</td>
<td>578,886</td>
<td>559,458</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gdańsk</td>
<td>461,334</td>
<td>455,717</td>
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<td>Szczecin</td>
<td>415,399</td>
<td>407,260</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bydgoszcz</td>
<td>373,804</td>
<td>360,142</td>
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<td>Lublin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katowice</td>
<td>327,222</td>
<td>311,179</td>
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http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/630787/Vistula-River  
http://www.citypopulation.de/Poland-Cities.html  
http://www.citypopulation.de/Poland-Cities.html
Warsaw (Warszawa)

Warsaw is a relative newcomer compared with many historical Polish cities such as Kraków, Poznań, and Wrocław. The modern city was not founded until the early 14th century, and it did not really develop until 1569, when Poland and Lithuania unified and made Warsaw the site of their common parliament because of its central location. In 1596, Polish King Sigismund III Vasa transferred the capital to Warsaw from Kraków. During the third partition of Poland in 1795, Warsaw was in the area annexed by Prussia. Warsaw regained its status as a capital city during a brief period in the early 19th century when the country of Poland regained its status as an autonomous kingdom, only to be subsumed by the Russian Empire in 1830. Between 1918 and 1939, Warsaw once again became the capital of an independent Poland, but the city and its people suffered greatly during World War II. Roughly 85% of the city’s buildings were destroyed, with much of the destruction coming during and immediately after a 1944 uprising by Polish resistance fighters against German forces. It is estimated that more than 60% of the city’s population died during the war, including the vast majority of Warsaw’s large pre-war Jewish population.

After the war, Warsaw was completely rebuilt, with some of the city’s most historic sections painstakingly rebuilt to exactly their previous forms. The most prominent new building, however, was far from a historical re-creation. The Palace of Culture and Science, built in the 1950s by the Soviet Union using the socialist realist style of architecture much in favor during the Stalin era, dominated the Warsaw skyline for years after its creation. Even today, it remains the tallest building in Poland and one of the tallest in the entire European Union.

Warsaw quickly reclaimed its role as the governmental seat of Poland, and as the city was reconstructed, it also reestablished its status as an economic and educational center. During the communist era, about one third of Warsaw workers were employed in the city’s numerous manufacturing plants. More recently, however, service industries, such as banking and insurance, have become an increasingly important part of the city’s economy.

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Kraków

Like Warsaw, Kraków lies on the Vistula River. Unlike Warsaw, however, Kraków has been an important city of Central Europe for over 1,000 years, having been the home of the Slavic Wiślanie tribe (Vistulans). Sometime around 990, Kraków became part of the expanding Piast Polish dynasty built by Mieszko I.37 Less than 50 years later (1038) the city became Poland’s capital, and it would hold that title, with only periodic interruptions, until 1596. During that time, Kraków became the educational and cultural hub of Poland. In 1364, Kraków Academy (today known as Jagiellon University) was founded, making it the second oldest university in Central Europe. Another Kraków landmark dating from this period is Wawel Castle, located on a hill adjoining the Vistula River that also is home to the city’s Gothic cathedral. These two structures are symbols of Polish political and religious identity, respectively, which helps explain why Wawel Hill is the country’s leading tourist site.38

After Warsaw became Poland’s capital, Kraków began a slow decline that accelerated during the continual invasions of Poland during the late 17th and 18th centuries. The city became part of the Austrian Empire during the third partition of Poland in 1795. Under Austrian rule, which was less oppressive than that of Russia and Prussia (the other two powers that controlled Poland during the 19th and early 20th centuries), Kraków began to re-emerge and regain some of its lost stature.39

After World War II—during which Kraków suffered much less damage than most other Polish cities—Soviet planners targeted the Kraków area for development as an industrial center. Numerous local factories were built, including chemical works, metal processing plants, pharmaceutical factories, textile mills, and the huge Nowa Huta steelworks.40, 41 One unfortunate legacy of the heavy industries, however, is environmental pollution that has fostered both health concerns and damage to historical buildings and monuments.42 Fortunately, the last 20 years has witnessed a concerted effort to reduce the region’s pollution problems, and major improvements have been achieved.43, 44

Łódź

Although Łódź’s town charter dates back to 1423, it was only a village of less than 1,000 people even as late as 1820. In that year, a weaving center for cotton textiles was established at Łódź, and weavers and craftspeople began arriving in the city from all over Europe. Dominant among the early entrepreneurs and laborers were Germans and Jews. Russia became the primary market for Łódź’s textiles after tariff barriers were abolished in 1850, but even more distant markets such as China and Persia would eventually import textile goods from Łódź. Over time, the city attracted other related industries—such as processing plants for wool, silk, leather, jute, and hemp—and clothing factories. By the eve of World War I in 1913, Łódź’s population had reached 500,000 and the city was one of the world’s most densely populated places.

The city’s boom faded during the 20th century. The Russian market for Łódź’s textiles disappeared after World War I, although new industries such as machinery and chemicals helped pick up some of the slack. The city itself survived World War II without major destruction, although roughly 50% of the population perished, including almost all of the city’s large Jewish population. As in Warsaw, Jews were segregated into designated regions of the city (“ghettos”) by the Nazi occupiers, where they were forced to work in factories prior to being transported to extermination camps.

Modern-day Łódź continues to be the center of Poland’s textile industry, although its production has dropped significantly in recent years. With a highly skilled workforce, a central location with good road and rail infrastructure, and lower labor costs than many parts of Europe, Łódź has been successful in recent years in attracting foreign investment. Unemployment in the city has dropped from 20% in 2004 to 6.5% at the end of 2008.

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49 Originally, “ghetto” referred to any area of a city set aside for Jews.
Łódź also has been referred to as the “Polish Hollywood” because of the influential film school in the city. Some of Poland’s most famous film directors, including Roman Polanski, Andrzej Wajda, and Krzysztof Kieślowski, are graduates of the school, in Polish called Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna im. Leona Schillera w Łodzi. 53

Wrocław

Wrocław, long the most important city of the Silesia region of Poland, has been part of several kingdoms and empires during its long history. First established on the island of Ostrów Tumski (“Cathedral Island”) in the Oder River, Wrocław became part of the Piast dukedom of Mieszko I in the late 10th century. (Poznań, another historic Polish city, also traces its beginnings to an Ostrów Tumski in the Warta River.) 54 A few years later the city would subsequently become first bishopric in Silesia; in 1138 it took on the role as capital of the Duchy of Silesia when the Polish kingdom fragmented into five duchies upon the death of King Bolesław III the Wrymouth. 55

After Wrocław was devastated by a Mongol attack in 1241, it was rebuilt and quickly became a major trading center. In 1335, Wrocław and the rest of Silesia came under Bohemian administration; for the next 200 years the city would prosper. 56 Silesia then became part of Austria in 1526 after the accession of Emperor Ferdinand I, and in 1742 it passed to Prussia after an accession war. 57 It would remain as part of Prussia (later Germany) until the end of World War II. During this later period, Wrocław would become an increasingly culturally and ethnically Germanic city. 58

As the Russian Red Army entered Wrocław near the end of World War II, much of the city lay in ruins. The remaining German inhabitants of the city either moved west or were forcibly expelled, and the city was resettled by Polish refugees whose homes in the eastern part of the country were now part of the Soviet Union. 59 Similar to Warsaw, Wrocław’s most historic buildings and monuments have been carefully reconstructed to reflect their prewar state.

The city’s economy is quite diversified. Flour mills, electronics and data-processing industries, heavy machinery factories, chemical and metalworking industries, and food-processing plants are all part of Wrocław’s manufacturing sector. The city is also a regional financial services center, and its public universities enroll over 150,000 students, or nearly 25% of Wrocław’s total population.

Gdańsk

Gdańsk has long been the primary city of Pomerania, a region that comprises the country’s entire northwestern corner. Its history is a rich and complex one, full of a dizzying number of periods of alignment with, domination by, and freedom from the neighboring states and kingdoms. Gdańsk is also yet another major Polish city that was heavily damaged in World War II. World War II’s first battle, in fact, was the attack on Gdańsk by German forces after Poland refused to cede the city and an adjoining strip of territory to Germany. Between World War I and World War II, Gdańsk was known by the German name Danzig, and was a free city under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. The city’s independence was guaranteed by the League of Nations, while Poland represented the city in international affairs. Gdańsk’s population at the time was overwhelmingly of German ethnicity, and during the 1930s the city steadily established links to Nazi Germany.

Today the city is very much a Polish city, with almost all of its German citizens having fled the city during the late stages of World War II. As was the case with Wrocław, Poles from other areas resettled the city after the Germans left. The city, having been completely rebuilt, is now Poland’s most important port. In actuality, however, Gdańsk is really two ports. One is located on the Motława River near the city’s center (Stare Miasto, or “Old Town”) and contains shipyards, metallurgical and chemical factories, timber mills, and food-processing plants. It was in the Gdańsk shipyards that the establishment of the Solidarność (“Solidarity”) trade union, led by future Nobel Peace Prize–winner Lech Wałęsa, ignited a wave of strikes and protests that eventually would result in the fall of Poland’s communist government in 1989. Gdańsk’s newer port, located on the Gulf

of Gdansk northwest of the main part of the city, primarily handles coal exports and petrochemical imports that supply a large, nearby refinery.66

Environmental Concerns

Poland’s environment today continues to suffer from the decades of neglect during the time it was part of the Eastern Bloc. In 1990, after the collapse of the communist regime, Poland was among Europe’s most environmentally degraded countries. Much of the worst pollution occurred in southern Poland. In particular, the large industrial metropolis centered around Katowice and extending eastward to Kraków generated extensive water and air pollution from its coal, zinc, and tin mines; iron and steel mills; and chemical plants.67

Poland has been successful over the last two decades in reducing atmospheric pollution resulting from combustion of fossil fuels. In particular, a reduction in coal consumption and the introduction of new less polluting coal technologies have helped significantly in lowering atmospheric pollutant emissions.68 Coal-burning thermal electric plants produce much of Poland’s sulfur dioxide emissions, a major contributing cause of acid rain.69 These emissions dropped by 65% from 1989 to 2003.70 Nitrogen dioxide, a key component of photochemical smog, declined by 46% during the same time. The lesser percentage of reduction in the latter pollutant most likely reflects the higher contribution from non-coal sources such as automobile combustion engines.71

Despite its numerous lakes and rivers, Poland has one of the lowest available water supplies per capita within Europe.72 Surface water is the source of much of this supply.73 Shortly after the fall of the Polish communist government in 1989, an estimated 50% of Polish rivers did not meet the standards applied to water used for only agricultural or

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industrial use.\(^7^4\) Poland’s rivers remain polluted today, but positive changes in water quality have taken place over the intervening two decades. For example, untreated industrial and municipal wastewaters dumped directly into rivers decreased by more than 90% from 1990 to 2005. Nonetheless, numerous Polish municipalities still either do not have wastewater treatment plants or require upgrades of their existing facilities. With a deadline for meeting European Union water standards looming in 2015, the Polish government is investing roughly 70% of its environmental budget in the water and wastewater sector.\(^7^5\)

**Natural Hazards**

While the armies of humans have periodically leveled Polish cities over the centuries, nature has proven to be comparatively gentler. The country suffers little threat of danger from earthquakes, volcanoes, or mudslides, for example. However, flooding of Polish rivers periodically causes significant damage. Two such incidents have occurred in the last 15 years. In July 1997, both the Oder and Vistula Rivers experienced significant flooding in their southern reaches and along adjacent tributaries. These floods destroyed over 200 bridges, damaged nearly 50,000 homes, and left 55 people dead.\(^7^6, 7^7\) Four years later, in July 2001, parts of Poland along the middle and upper stretches of the Vistula River and its tributaries suffered damage from floods caused by summer rains. Near the coast during the same time span, local rains produced flooding in the cities of Gdański and Słupsk. Overall, 27 people died and 50,000 people had to be evacuated as a result of the 2001 flooding.\(^7^8, 7^9\)

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History

Origins

During the 9th and 10th centuries C.E., the region that now encompasses Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and eastern parts of Germany was occupied by a number of Slavic tribes that had earlier migrated westward. Among them, located in the region that approximates the present-day Polish province of Wielkopolskie (Great Poland), were the Polanie (“people of the plain”), from which the name “Poland” is derived. During much of the second half of the 10th century, the ruler of the Polanie was Duke Mieszko I, the first historically known figure in what has come to be known as the Piast dynasty (named after the legendary peasant founder of the ruling family). Early during his reign, in 966 C.E., Mieszko I and the royal court converted to Christianity. Today, this date is traditionally marked as the beginning of modern Polish history. Thereafter, the Duchy of Polonia continued to expand its sovereignty into adjoining Slavic tribal regions—Pomerania (Pomorze) to the north, Silesia (Ślask) to the south, and Małopolska (Little Poland) to the southeast.

The Polish Kingdom

After Mieszko’s death in 992, the boundaries of the Duchy of Polonia were very similar to those of modern-day Poland, with the exception of the northeastern part of modern-day Poland (which was still part of the Prussian tribal lands). Mieszko’s son, Bolesław I Chrobry (“the Brave”), who reigned from 992 to 1025, expanded the Polish realm to the east into modern-day Ukraine. Before his death in 1025, he was crowned King of Poland in the cathedral at Gniezno, the archbishopric of the kingdom.

The Polish state, however, would ebb and flow in both size and degree of autonomy under the rule of Bolesław’s successors. His son, Mieszko II Lambert (who reigned from 1025–1034), was weakened by a succession battle with his brothers that eventually led to the surrender of his throne and a pledge of fealty to the Holy Roman Empire of Germany to the west. Mieszko II’s son and successor,

Kazimierz I (r. 1034–1058), reclaimed much of Poland’s lost territory in Pomerania, Silesia, and Mazovia (Mazowsze), and as a result he earned the nickname Odnowiciel (“the Restorer.”) However, upon the death of Bolesław III Krzywousty (“the Wry-mouthed”) in 1138, the Polish kingdom succumbed to regionalist tendencies and was divided into five duchies, each ruled by one of Bolesław III’s sons. The Polish capital, located in Kraków since 1038, was situated in a domain placed under the rule of the oldest son, who was anointed Grand Duke of Poland. In theory, Kraków exerted loose suzerainty over the other duchies.

Decline of the Piast Dynasty

Over the next century, the Polish state continued to fragment. Some of the duchies were subdivided into smaller units to accommodate the claims of rival siblings. Large landowners, including the church, increasingly became exempt from the central jurisdiction of the state. However, such decentralization would lead to increased vulnerability to conquests and annexations by outside forces. During the 12th century, Mongol armies known as the Tartars, or Tatars, would sweep across southern and central Poland on three separate occasions over a 46-year period beginning in 1241. Some towns, such as Lublin and Kraków, were destroyed or heavily damaged during each of the three Tatar campaigns.

Meanwhile, the Duchy of Masovia continued to battle the Prussian tribes to the north with little success. As a result, the German crusading brotherhood known as the Teutonic Order of the Hospital of St. Mary in Jerusalem (better known as the Teutonic Knights) was invited by the Masovian Duke to enter the region and dislodge the pagan Prussians. By 1283, Prussia had been conquered and most of the native Prussians had been killed. The Teutonic Knights thereafter formed a feudal state in the Prussian region, repopulating the largely unpopulated countryside with German immigrants.

Further incursions into Polish lands came from the German Margraviate of Brandenburg to the west and the Kingdom of Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic) to the southwest. Even away from the border regions, Poland was increasingly becoming Germanized by a wave of landless settlers flowing into regions whose Polish population had been

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devastated by the Tatar invasions. Even the Polish capital of Kraków was primarily populated by ethnic Germans. By the end of the 13th century, the possibility that Poland would remain a distinct entity within the European landscape was becoming less and less likely.  

**Revival of the Polish Kingdom**

In 1300, the Bohemian king Wenceslas II was crowned King of Poland in a ceremony at Gniezno in Wielkopolska. The former prince of Poland, Władysław I Łokietek (“the Short”), left for Rome, where he developed political and military alliances that subsequently helped him reclaim Wielkopolska in 1306 and Małopolska in 1314. With these two key provinces back under Polish control, and a third, Mazovia, recognizing Władysław’s overlordship, Poland was once again united as a separate kingdom. Władysław’s son, Kazimierz III Wielki (“the Great”), consolidated these gains by annexing territories to the east (in modern-day Ukraine) and repossessing most of the previous Polish duchies, the notable exceptions being Silesia and Pomerania. Most of this territorial expansion came through skillful diplomacy and kinship alliances rather than through battlefield successes. Kazimierz would rule until 1370. Among the many achievements during his reign was the establishment of Poland’s first university; the centralization and reform of the country’s political, treasury, and legal institutions; and the construction of numerous castles, cathedrals, and river projects. Kazimierz’s Poland was also noteworthy for its tolerance. While other parts of Europe were deporting Jews, using them as scapegoats for problems as various as the plague and famine, Poland took in refugee European Jews, guaranteeing them rights and legal protections.

**A Period of Transition**

When Kazimierz III died in 1370, he unquestionably left Poland in a stronger, more stable position than ever before. However, he did not leave the country with a legitimate male heir. His nephew, King Louis of Hungary, acceded to the Polish throne, but was mostly an absentee monarch during his reign. When Louis died in 1382, his youngest daughter, 10-year-old Jadwiga, was selected by Polish nobles to be

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interim “king” of Poland, the only woman to ever carry this title in Polish history. Her reign was short, however, as Polish nobles quickly began a search to find her a politically expedient husband to serve as the new Polish king. In 1385, Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania agreed to marry Jadwiga after he (and, by default, his subjects) first converted to Christianity. Taking the baptismal name Władysław II Jagiełło, he became in 1386 the founding ruler of a new Polish dynasty that would rule Poland for the next 186 years.\footnote{The Polish Way. Zamoyski, Adam. “3. Tatars and Teutons [p. 43–45].” 1994. New York: Hippocrene Books.}

### The Jagiellon Dynasty

Looking at a map of modern-day Europe, Lithuania is a small Baltic state roughly equivalent to Ireland in size. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was one of the largest states in Europe, at one time controlling nearly all of the modern countries of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, and parts of the western Russian Plain. By the end of the 15th century, the Jagiellon rulers of Poland and Lithuania oversaw a domain that extended from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and occupied over one third of the European mainland.\footnote{The Polish Way. Zamoyski, Adam. “4. The Jagiellon Adventure [p. 50].” 1994. New York: Hippocrene Books.}

The dynastic union of Poland and Lithuania was not initially a close or stable one, being both literally and figuratively a forced marriage of political and military convenience. Although the armies of the two states fought together to successfully push the Teutonic Knights out of eastern Pomerania and western Prussia, the two states remained mostly independent in all other matters.\footnote{Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Poland: History: The States of the Jagiellonians: The Waning of the Middle Ages: The Rule of Jagiello.” 2009. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/466681/Poland} An early military success for the combined Polish-Lithuanian armies came at the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg) in 1410, where the Teutonic Knights suffered a major defeat that marked the beginning of their decline.\footnote{Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Battle of Tannenberg.” 2009. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/582673/Battle-of-Tannenberg}

The 16th century in Poland, much of it dominated by the reigns of Zygmunt I Stary (“the Old,” 1506–48) and Zygmunt II August (1548–1572), the last two Jagiellon kings, was a political and cultural golden age for Poland. Compared to other kingdoms, Poland had a relatively democratic system in which the sizable szlachta (gentry) developed significant power to enact laws through the Sejm, the nation’s parliament.\footnote{Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. Poland: A Country Study. Pease, Neal. “Chapter 2. Historical Setting: The ‘Golden Age’ of the Sixteenth Century: The Government of Poland-Lithuania.” Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. October 1992. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID=pl0023)} During this era, Jagiellon University in Kraków produced such notable figures as the astronomer Mikołaj Kopernik (Nicolaus Copernicus) and Jan Kochanowski, considered by many Poles to be their...
country’s greatest poet.⁹⁹ Poland also became well known for its religious tolerance, confirmed by the Compact of Warsaw enacted in 1573, which guaranteed religious freedom for all non-Roman Catholic denominations, such as the Calvinists, Lutherans, and Eastern Orthodox Christians.¹⁰⁰ Jews in Poland continued to avoid the restrictions and persecutions that they experienced in other areas, and by the second half of the 16th century Poland had the largest Jewish population in the world.¹⁰¹

The Commonwealth

In 1569, Poland and Lithuania cemented their relationship though the Union of Lublin, which established a Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania ruled by a single king/grand duke and governed by a single parliament.¹⁰²,¹⁰³ Zygmunt II August, the last Jagiellon king, died three years later, and for the first time the Commonwealth elected their new joint ruler. The electors were the szlachta, a group that has traditionally been defined as the Polish “gentry,” but nevertheless represented a wide swath of Polish-Lithuanian society, both wealthy and poor.¹⁰⁴ As much as 8–10% of the Commonwealth’s populace was eligible to vote, an astoundingly high percentage for any parliamentary kingdom during this time.¹⁰⁵

The second half of the 17th century saw the Commonwealth engaged in a series of conflicts with first, the Ukrainian Cossacks, and then Sweden, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. By 1687, Lithuania’s territory had been pushed back to the west, Prussia had become a sovereign state of Brandenburg (an East German state), and all of Poland’s territory in modern-day eastern Ukraine had become part of Russia.¹⁰⁶ One of the few instances of Commonwealth military glory during this period came in 1683, when King Jan III Sobieski’s forces turned back the Turkish army at Vienna, a key battle that stopped the western advance of the Ottoman Empire.

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Despite this brief battlefield success, the Commonwealth’s fortunes continued to decline. During the first decade of the 18th century, the Commonwealth, under its new King August II Mocny (“the Strong”)—originally from Saxon—became entangled in a costly war against Sweden. As a result, Poland-Lithuania found itself significantly weakened and increasingly beholden to its “guardian” Russia. To make matters worse, the Polish political system had evolved into chaos under the rule of unanimity (liberum veto), in which a single deputy within the Sejm could exercise a veto that would trigger the parliamentary session’s adjournment.

The Partitions

August II’s son, August III Sas (“the Saxon”), came to power in 1733 and would reign for over thirty years. He spent all but two years of that time in Saxony, and made only token efforts to reform Poland’s dysfunctional parliamentary system. Under August III, “there were no visible signs of a nationwide administration. The country seemed to run itself solely on the momentum of its own inertia.” In foreign affairs, Poland had fallen in status from being a European power to existing as a buffer state that separated the era’s regional powers: Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

August’s III’s successor, Stanisław August II Poniatowski, took the throne in 1764 as the favorite candidate of his former lover, Russian Empress Catherine the Great. Eight years later, the eastern, southern, and northwestern strips of the Commonwealth were annexed by Russia, Austria, and Prussia, respectively, following a Catholic uprising engineered by Russia and Prussia over the issue of religious rights for non-Catholic minorities. Ironically, the first partition of the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth triggered a series of educational, political, and financial reforms that raised the state from its continued decline. On 3 May 1791, after four years of debate, the Sejm approved Europe’s first written constitution, an extraordinary document whose passage is marked in modern Poland by the country’s most important civic holiday.

Opposition to the new constitution by conservative elements within the Commonwealth provided Russia an excuse for military intervention, and with Prussia, a second partitioning in 1793 of the remaining parts of Poland-Lithuania. A popular insurrection

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led by Tadeusz Kościuszko, who had served with distinction in the Continental Army during the American Revolution, was a valiant but futile last attempt to turn back the Commonwealth’s absorption by its more powerful neighbors. Despite some early successes, the ragtag, under-armed Polish-Lithuanian forces were no match for the Russian army. In 1795, having put down the Polish-Lithuanian revolt, Russia, Prussia, and Austria partitioned the Commonwealth for the last time. Western and northern Poland was now part of the Prussian empire, southern Poland was part of Austria, and eastern Poland and most of Lithuania was part of Russia.

**Partitioned Poland**

Poland would remain as a partitioned former state for most of the next 123 years. The only exception came early, in 1807, when the Duchy of Warsaw was formed in the wake of Napoleon’s successful campaigns against Prussia. By 1809, after Napoleon’s victories over Austria, the Duchy consisted of all of the lands of Poland taken by Prussia and Austria during the second and third partitions. However, the Duchy proved to be more a French puppet state than an independent nation. It dissolved when Napoleon was defeated in his Russian campaign of 1812, to be replaced by the Kingdom of Poland as outlined in the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

The new kingdom was never truly an autonomous state, but more a glorified province with the Russian tsar serving as its king. In 1830 and 1863, Russia’s crackdowns on Polish resistance groups triggered insurrections that were crushed and resulted in further repressive measures. Soon after the second revolt, Russians formally transferred Poland to the status of a province and began an intensive Russification process in which the Polish language was banned in schools, governmental offices, and commerce.

To the west, the German Empire (founded in 1871 as a conglomeration of Germanic kingdoms and duchies dominated by Prussia) also began its own policies of assimilation against Poles living in its eastern provinces. During this period and the decades that followed, as many as four million Poles left the region, many of whom immigrated to the United States. Only in the areas of Poland annexed by Austria, a region that included

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the southeastern corner of modern-day Poland, was a certain amount of autonomy allowed.\textsuperscript{117}

**World War I**

As Europe fell into continent-wide warfare in 1914, Poles found themselves living in regions on opposite sides of the conflict, with areas controlled by Germany and Austria battling against Russian-controlled regions. Approximately 2 million Polish soldiers fought with one of the three occupying armies during the war, and over 20% of them were killed in the fighting. The Polish lands, situated between the combatant empires, were frequent battlefields, and the countryside was heavily scarred by the scorched-earth tactics often employed in military retreats.\textsuperscript{118}

Among those nominally fighting on the German-Austrian side was Józef Piłsudski, leader of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), a pre-war organization that battled as much for Polish-Lithuanian nationalism based on the pre-partition Commonwealth borders as it did for its socialist political agenda.\textsuperscript{119,120} Piłsudski’s forces fought against the Russians, but their loyalty was ultimately to a free Poland rather than Germany or Austria. As a result, Piłsudski was jailed by Germany in 1917 for insubordination. This incarceration effectively established his credentials for leadership of a new Polish state when Germany and Austria were defeated by Allied forces in 1918.\textsuperscript{121}


The Second Republic of Poland

It would be four years before the boundaries of the new Second Polish Republic would become formalized. To the north, Lithuania declared itself an independent state soon after the war ended and would remain so until World War II. In the east, fighting broke out in 1919 between the Polish and Soviet armies over the status of Ukraine and Belarus, both of which had been part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before partition, but had become Soviet republics in 1919. The Red Army, after initially suffering some defeats in Ukraine, broke through the Polish lines in 1920 and marched all the way to the outskirts of Warsaw. There, Piłsudski’s forces halted the Russian advance and initiated a counter-offensive that eventually ended in a ceasefire in October 1920. In 1921, Soviet and Polish negotiators crafted a peace agreement in Riga that split most of the Commonwealth’s pre-partition eastern regions between the two sides.122

The Second Republic of Poland drafted a democratic constitution in 1921 modeled after that of France, but the nation’s political stability proved weak as a number of short-lived governmental administrations came and went. In frustration, Piłsudski emerged from political retirement in 1926, staging a military coup in 1926 that left him the nation’s unchallenged behind-the-scenes leader until his death in 1935.123

Anti-Semitism, previously more the exception than the rule in Poland, began to flare up as overcrowded conditions and economic pressures began to spur resentments and override traditional Polish tolerance toward Jews, who now represented about 10% of the Polish population.124 Ethnic tensions also occurred in Polish regions in which Ukrainians (about 16% of Poland’s population), Belarusians (about 6%), and Germans (about 3%) were prevalent.

Prelude to War

Poland, geographically lodged between Germany and Soviet Russia, focused its foreign policy on keeping these larger neighbors free of motives for taking actions against Poland. Nonaggression pacts were signed with both neighbors in the early 1930s, but neither of these treaties proved to be effective defenses against aggression.

Germany, in particular, became a threat under Adolph Hitler’s aggressively expansionist Nazi regime. In March 1939, Germany demanded that Poland cede the predominantly ethnically German port city of Gdańsk as well as a land corridor connecting East Prussia to the rest of Germany. Poland quickly negotiated a mutual defense alliance with Britain and France that it hoped would discourage Germany from invading its territory. At around the same time, Germany agreed on a secret protocol in a 10-year nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union that laid out the division of Soviet and German spheres of interest in Eastern Europe. In this protocol, initial plans were laid out for a new partition of Poland.

The German army attacked Gdańsk on 1 September 1939. Two days later, both Britain and France declared war on Germany, thus setting off World War II. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union attacked Poland from the east. Heavily out-armed and forced to fight on two fronts, Poland was unable to sustain a prolonged defense thereafter. Nevertheless, Warsaw did not fall until four weeks after the initial Polish invasion. Unfortunately, both France and Britain were unprepared for the rapid German invasion on Poland, and neither ally offered significant military support for the besieged Polish army, while the Poles expected such support would come within two weeks of the initial invasion.125, 126

**World War II**

It would not be an exaggeration to say that no country suffered more greatly during World War II than Poland. A recent updated estimate placed the number of deaths of citizens living within prewar Poland at roughly 5.6 million, or just under 16% of the nation’s entire prewar population.127 This total includes 3.1 million Jews, representing over 90% of the Poland’s prewar Jewish population. Despite these losses and the nation’s occupation by German and Soviet armies, Poland’s Army, Air Force, and Navy contributed significantly to the Allied forces, with its manpower provided by Polish escapees from Eastern Europe and Polish-French and Polish-American volunteers. Within Poland, the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, or AK) carried out a war of subversion tactics. The nearly 400,000 members of the AK in 1944 represented the largest underground army in Europe.128

In 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and for a brief period the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union found themselves as allies. All assistance between the two ended in 1943 after German forces in Russia reported finding mass graves containing the bodies of over 4,000 Polish military officers in the Katyn forest.

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located near the present-day Russia–Belarus border. Only in the 1990s did the Russian government finally release documents confirming that the Katyn deaths and other mass executions of Polish citizens within Russia or its occupied territories had been carried out by the Soviet secret police in 1940.129

As the German army began to retreat from Russia in 1943, Russian forces pursued, and by mid 1944 were only a few kilometers from Warsaw. The AK, wishing to demonstrate Polish self-determination prior to the Soviet attack on the city, launched a military uprising in the city that lasted over two months. The Red Army halted their offensive and withheld any support for the AK forces fighting on the Warsaw streets. At the end of the Warsaw Uprising, as it came to be known, 200,000 civilians lay dead.130 In retaliation, German forces dynamited the city, leaving it in rubble, before they left the city and continued their westward retreat. When the Soviets finally “liberated” Warsaw in January 1945, the city was completely abandoned.131

Postwar Poland

After World War II ended, Poland lay within the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. Political power shifted to the Provisional Polish Government of National Unity, which was dominated by ethnic Poles with ties to the Soviet leadership. The Polish government-in-exile in London, whose leadership of Poland had been recognized by the Allied nations during World War II, lost its official recognition as a result of an agreement reached between Allied leaders Joseph Stalin, Franklin Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill at the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences in 1945.132

Also determined at those conferences were the new Polish borders, which shifted westward from the prewar boundaries. Poland’s eastern border with the Soviet Union largely followed the Curzon Line, a boundary proposed as an armistice line during Soviet-Polish fighting in 1920, but never actually implemented at the time.133 Poland’s western border shifted to the Oder and Neisse (Nysa) Rivers, encompassing regions such as western Pomerania and Silesia that had been part of Germany prior to the war. The new Polish borders sparked a significant demographic shift within Poland, as Poles living in eastern areas now part of the Soviet Union moved to western Polish cities formerly inhabited by a dominantly ethnic German population that had been expelled from the

country after World War II. As a result of these border changes and population shifts, Poland became a much less ethnically diverse country.

**Soviet Domination**

Between 1948 and 1956, Poland increasingly became a Soviet satellite state. Many of the prewar and wartime Polish political and military leaders were forced into exile, sentenced to prison terms, or shot. Among them was Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the wartime Polish Prime Minister who was forced to flee after he and his party were harassed during rigged Sejm elections in 1947. Power became centralized in the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), whose first secretary of the Central Committee became the effective leader of the nation after the office of president was eliminated by a new constitution in 1952. Until 1956, this position was held by Bolesław Bierut, a staunch Stalinist hand-picked by Moscow leaders, who died only shortly after the famous 1956 speech by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev denouncing Stalin-era crimes.

Shortly after Khrushchev’s speech and Bierut’s subsequent death, the Polish government began a period of liberalization, but tensions between workers and the government remained high. In the summer of 1956, demonstrations broke out in Poznań’s largest factory over pay issues and working conditions. As the demonstrations evolved into street riots, tanks were sent into the city to quell the violence. A few months later, the Soviet Union threatened to invade Poland if perceived moderate Władysław Gomułka was chosen as the PZPR’s first secretary. But Gomułka, who had been imprisoned during the Stalin era for the crime of “nationalistic deviation” from Soviet communist principles, convinced the Soviet leadership that he could best defuse the growing

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confrontation. Khrushchev, in turn, revoked the Soviet threat of invasion. For Poles, it was a symbolic victory showing that they could break the bonds of Soviet dominance and influence the path of Polish socialism.

The Gomulka and Gierek Regimes

Gomulka, however, was not nearly the reformer that many had hoped for, and over time he began to stay closer and closer to the Soviet Party line. Early on, however, Gomulka instituted changes to curb the powers of the Polish secret police, to allow more independence for the Polish Catholic Church, and to reverse the policy toward the implementation of collectivized agriculture. As economic conditions continued to decline during the 1960s, however, protests began to occur every few years on a regular basis in Poland. During the first of these incidents, in January 1968, governmental hardliners used anti-Soviet student riots a few months after the Six Day War in the Middle East as a pretext to implement anti-Zionist purges that would eventually lead to the emigration of many of Poland’s remaining Jews.

Two years later, a strike by workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk spread to other ports on Poland’s Baltic coast. During the ensuing crisis, Gomulka was replaced by Edward Gierek as Polish party chief, who promised a new period of economic liberalization to be sparked by increased emphasis on Polish exports produced by foreign-financed factories. The new policy led to early improvements in the standard of living but soon gave way to shortages in consumer goods and price increases as the 1973 world oil crisis and economic mismanagement led to large budget deficits. A new round of price hikes led to worker strikes in 1976, the largest of which occurred in Warsaw and Radom. New foreign loans fueled even greater debt and set off another round of price hikes in 1980. Once again, workers around the country went on strike, including those at the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard, led by fired employee Lech Wałęsa. This time, however, the protests would help set off a decade-long chain of events that would eventually lead to the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Solidarity and the Collapse of Communism

Solidarity (Solidarność) was a nationwide trade union movement that evolved from the Gdańsk strike. There, the workers occupied the shipyard for over two weeks, whereupon the government backed down and agreed to the workers’ demand for independent trade unions free of PZPR involvement. Within a few months, the Gdańsk Solidarity trade union blossomed into a nationwide workers’ movement that included almost 10 million members, or 60% of the Polish workforce.¹⁴⁷

Gierek was removed from his party leadership position in February 1981 and was ultimately replaced by Polish general Wojciech Jaruzelski, whose immediate task was to squelch the Solidarity movement. Martial law was declared in December 1981, followed by arrests of most Solidarity members and other dissident leaders. While these moves effectively suppressed the Solidarity movement, they did nothing to improve Poland’s wobbling economy, which continued to fuel dissent and worker hostility toward the government.

Martial law was lifted in July 1983, and Wałęsa was released from detention. Solidarity now became an underground movement. In the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and soon signaled through his glasnost and perestroika programs that the era of Soviet interventions meant to rein in overly liberal regimes in Eastern Europe was now in the past.¹⁴⁸ With the fear of Soviet retaliation reduced, the Jaruzelski government began its own program of reforms that mirrored some of the policies being carried out in the U.S.S.R. However, Poles’ dissatisfaction with their government’s ability to improve living standards was not easily mollified by new reforms and lessened restrictions on dissent. Strikes were called once again in 1988, and as a result Jaruzelski agreed to hold negotiations on power sharing and other reforms. The “round-table talks,” as they came to be known, resulted in Poland’s first free parliamentary elections in June 1989. With Solidarity winning virtually every seat it contested, Poland soon had its first non-communist prime minister in over 40 years. A year later, Wałęsa was elected Poland’s first president, several months after the PZPR dissolved itself.¹⁴⁹ Poland became the first Soviet bloc nation to elect a non-communist government, initiating a cascade of similar changes in Eastern Europe over the next two years.

Recent Events

Poland’s transition to democracy and a market economy was a bumpy one, as was the case with virtually all of the former Soviet bloc states that became independent around 1989–1990. During Wałęsa’s five-year term as president (1990–1995), five different governments were formed as fragile parliamentary coalitions frequently collapsed during a period of economic “shock therapy” applied to quickly lift the country from a demand economy to a market-driven one. Parliamentary elections called by President Wałęsa in 1993 resulted in the ascendency of a coalition of parties associated with the Communist past. Nevertheless, Poland’s market reforms continued, although the pace of privatization of state-owned industries slowed down.150

The presidential elections of 1995 saw Aleksander Kwaśniewski, a former member of the PZPR, narrowly defeat Wałęsa. As president, Kwaśniewski exhibited a less confrontational style than Wałęsa, and he proved to be a popular leader with Polish voters, easily winning reelection to a second five-year term in 2000. During Kwaśniewski’s decade as Polish president, a new constitution was approved (1997) to replace the Stalin-era 1952 document; Poland became a member of both NATO (1999) and the European Union (2004); and the country’s economy generally grew at a steady rate (with gross domestic product growth mostly ranging between 3.6% and 7% per year).151, 152

Unemployment, however, remained very high through the first half of the 2000s, a major contributing factor to the collapse of several Polish governing coalitions during this time. Since Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004, over 1 million well-educated Poles have found work in England, Ireland, and Sweden, a development that has both helped reduce the unemployment problem at home and fostered concerns over a Polish “brain drain.”153, 154

In 2005, Lech Kaczyński, leader of the Law and Order Party, won a hard-fought election for the Polish presidency, defeating Donald Tusk of the Civic Platform Party. Two years later, Civic Platform dominated parliamentary elections called by Kaczyński’s twin brother Jaroslav, who was the nation’s prime minister at the time. Under the Kaczyński, Poland’s economy had continued to improve, but the twins were perceived by many Poles

to be unnecessarily divisive in their policies, frequently targeting perceived foreign and domestic enemies.\textsuperscript{155}

Economy

Introduction

During the early 1990s, Poland was in many ways the guinea pig for the process of economic transformation from a communist, mostly command economy, to a capitalist, market-driven one. It was here that the term “shock therapy” was first applied in an economic sense. Controls on prices were allowed to drive themselves to market levels while inflation was kept in check by restrictions on wage increases. Subsidies for state-owned businesses were phased out, while private business formation was encouraged. In essence, Polish economic planners decided to fast-forward Poland’s transition to a market economy. During this early period of economic transition, the standard of living for the average Polish worker declined significantly.156

The second half of the 1990s and most of the 2000s have seen a turnaround in Poland’s economic fortunes, as steady growth has created one of Eastern Europe’s healthiest economies. However, bumps continue to be felt. High unemployment and low wages during the early 2000s led to an exodus of workers to other European Union countries, a trend that has only recently reversed itself. Legacy issues, such as bureaucratic red tape and unnecessarily complex tax codes, also continue to harness the full force of Polish entrepreneurism.

Industry and Manufacturing

Poland’s industrial sector contributes about 31% of the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP), of which approximately 24% is basic industry (including energy) and 7% is construction.157 In comparison, in 1988, immediately prior to the dissolution of Poland’s communist government, industry accounted for nearly 42% of the nation’s GDP.158 The drop in industrial percentage reflects the major changes that occurred in the sector during Poland’s “shock therapy” economic transition in the early 1990s. During the post-World War II period, Poland’s economy saw intensive development in heavy industry. During the 1990s, Poland’s economy did better than most of the transitioning Central and Eastern Europe nations, but the growth primarily stemmed from new, private companies. Many of the large, state-owned industries were inefficient and not able to compete well in a

Some state-owned industrial enterprises were closed, while others limped along.\textsuperscript{161}

Traditionally Poland’s leading industries have been machinery, iron and steel, cement, chemicals, textiles, food processing, shipbuilding, and automobiles.\textsuperscript{162} Many of these industrial sectors, however, were especially hard hit in the transition to a market economy. While food processing and the automobile industry have remained strong, new sectors have expanded as foreign companies have invested in Poland. Among these growing industrial segments is household appliances manufacturing, centered in Łódź, where the city has quickly become the largest “white goods” production center in all of Europe.\textsuperscript{163}

The southeastern region of Poland—mostly rural, but home during the communist era to several large state-owned aircraft plants—has utilized a “cluster” approach to attract foreign companies. Aviation Valley, as the region has been marketed, has successfully attracted numerous aircraft builders and suppliers to construct factories in the area. A similar “technological clustering” approach continues in the region between Kraków and Wrocław, once Poland’s heavy industry heartland. Electronics appliance firms such as Toshiba, LG Phillips, and LG Electronics have established manufacturing operations in the region.\textsuperscript{164} Further to the north, Dell Computers in early 2009 announced that it would close its large plant in Limerick, which was responsible for 5% of Ireland’s GDP, and shift all operations to Łódź, where the company’s computer systems for Europe, Africa, and the Middle East will now be constructed.\textsuperscript{165}


**Agriculture**

Unlike other Soviet bloc countries, Poland’s farms remained mostly privately owned during the communist era.\(^{166}\) Today, roughly 60% of Polish land is used for agricultural purposes, split between croplands (47%) and pasturelands (13%).\(^{167}\) The majority of farms are small (less than 5 ha, or 12 a) and produce relatively lower yields compared with farms in other countries of Eastern Europe. This is partly because of the small, irregularly shaped farm plots, and the relatively decreased investment in equipment and fertilizers due to lesser farm earnings.\(^{168}\) Fertilizer application, in particular, is crucially important in Polish farming because much of the country’s soil is poor in quality.\(^{169}\) Periodic droughts also lessen agricultural productivity in dry years because very little of Poland’s farmlands are equipped for irrigation.\(^{170}\)

Despite these limitations, Poland is still agriculturally one of Europe’s major food producers. There are more farmers in Poland than any other country in the European Union (EU), and the average number of hectares of farmland per person in Poland is over twice the EU average.\(^{171}\) Poland is among the world’s top ten nations in the production of potatoes, oats, triticale (a wheat/rye hybrid), buckwheat, sugar beets, rapeseed, carrots, cabbages, apples, strawberries, raspberries, and numerous other crops.\(^{172}\) Poland is also a leading producer of pork.

In recent years, organic farming has become an increasingly important niche within Poland’s agricultural landscape. Many of the factors that have lessened Poland’s crop and livestock yields, such as limited use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and hormone-supplemented feedstock, have made the transition to organic farming techniques a natural

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progression for many farmers. From 1996 to 2008, the number of Polish organic farms has increased from 300 to roughly 13,500.173

**Banking and Currency**

Poland’s currency is the złoty (currency symbol: PLN), which is technically the “new złoty,” having replaced the inflation-racked “old złoty” in 1995. After several years of steadily strengthening value against major currencies, the złoty has been on a wild ride in the world currency markets since mid 2008. In July 2008 the euro (EUR) was trading at an all-time low of PLN 3.2, but the złoty subsequently weakened as the worldwide recession sparked an outflow of foreign investment from emerging markets such as Poland.174 By February 2009 the exchange rate had spiked to nearly PLN 4.9 per euro, only to back off to less than PLN 4.5 per euro by mid May 2009.175

As part of the terms of its accession agreement for the EU, Poland eventually must drop the złoty as its currency and convert to the euro. In late 2008, the Polish government announced plans to adopt the euro by the beginning of 2012, but the EU requirement that a country’s budget deficit be no more than 3% to join the Eurozone may force Poland to delay its currency transition. In addition, the Polish constitution must be amended to drop the złoty as official currency, a condition that has triggered strong political debate within the country.176

In the 1990s, Poland built a banking system up from scratch as the country transformed itself into a market-based economy. The National Bank of Poland became an independent central bank with the traditional roles of managing the nation’s currency and regulating its banking structure.177 Its commercial activities were splintered off into regional, state-owned banks that managed loans and deposits.178 Privately held banks quickly mushroomed in number and then contracted as stricter capital requirements were put in place. Over time, most of these banks became foreign-owned institutions, dominantly

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purchased by German, Dutch, and Austrian investors. Roughly 1,600 small cooperative banks that primarily serviced the agricultural sector in local communities affiliated themselves with three large regional banks. Over time, through mergers and bank failures, the number of banks in this sector has shrunk by over 60%.

Trade

During much of the communist era, virtually all of Poland’s trade was carried out through COMECON, an organization that oversaw multilateral economic activities between Soviet bloc states. Since 1990, Poland’s trading activities have shifted toward the countries of the European Union, which Poland joined in 2004.

Poland has consistently shown a trade deficit, although in recent years export growth has been faster than import growth. The nation’s top markets for its exports are all in the EU: Germany (27%), Italy (6.5%), France (6.2%), United Kingdom (5.7%), and the Czech Republic (5.6%). Among the leading items that Poland exports are cars and automotive parts, machinery (especially diesel engines), household appliances, electrical and electronic equipment (especially television receivers/video monitors and insulated wire and cable), furniture, coal and processed coal, articles of iron and steel, ships, and copper and copper products.

A large part of Poland’s trade deficit results from its oil and natural gas imports, most of which come from Russia. Many of Poland’s other leading imports are capital goods needed for expanding and upgrading industrial plants and items that are used as parts of manufacturing processes. Pharmaceuticals, plastics, and rolled iron and steel are some

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of the other major Polish imports. Germany (24.0%), Russia (9.7%), Italy (6.8%), China (6.1%), and France (5.5%) are the leading suppliers of all Polish imports.\textsuperscript{187}

**Investment**

Poland has been the beneficiary of an extensive amount of foreign investment since its economy stabilized after the early economic shocks during the transition to capitalism. Between 1990 and 2006, it is estimated that about USD 100 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI) has flowed into Poland.\textsuperscript{188} Almost 40% of this investment has been in manufacturing enterprises, with another 23% in financial services (mostly banking).\textsuperscript{189} The largest foreign investors have generally been companies from other European nations—most notably, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom—and from the United States.\textsuperscript{190}

The Polish government has tried to regionalize business investment in the country by establishing numerous Special Economic Zones (SEZs) spread throughout the Polish provinces. Fourteen such SEZs currently operate within Poland, offering tax advantages and investment grants to qualifying companies. As of mid 2008, the Polish SEZs had attracted over 1,110 businesses creating nearly 200,000 jobs since the first SEZ opened in 1995.\textsuperscript{191}

**Energy and Mineral Resources**

**Energy**

Southern Poland’s industrial development was supported for many decades by the coal fields of Upper Silesia, but those fields are now in decline and several mines have closed.
in recent years. Nevertheless, Poland remains heavily dependent on coal, both bituminous and lignite, for its electricity generation and is still the world’s eighth largest producer of this fossil fuel. As recently as 2006, roughly 93% of Poland’s electricity was generated by coal-fired plants, one of the highest percentages among the world’s nations. Several of these electrical generation plants use lignite, a notoriously dirty form of coal that emits carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and other forms of atmospheric pollution upon combustion. Some of Poland’s lignite power plants, such as the two largest at Turów and Belchatów, have been recently modernized by installing state-of-the-art emission-reduction technology and waste disposal systems.

Poland’s heavy reliance on coal for electricity generation results from its paucity of other energy reserves to draw upon. Poland does produce modest amounts of oil and natural gas, but not nearly enough to meet its own needs. In 2006, 94% of Poland’s oil imports and 66% of its natural gas imports came from Russia.

In 2007, only about 3.5% of Poland’s gross electricity consumption was from renewable energy sources (RES), but Poland’s EU accession treaty calls on it to raise this level to 7.5% RES by 2010. To date, the most used renewable energy source in Poland is biomass, although much of this energy use comes via heat generation in inefficient home stoves. Hydroelectricity provides about 43% of Poland’s total electricity from RES, although extensive further growth in the use of this energy resource is unlikely because of the country’s limited water resources. Wind power is probably the most likely RES

to substantially increase its contribution to Poland’s electricity production over the next decade or so.\textsuperscript{201, 202}

\textit{Minerals}

Poland has extensive deposits of several economically valuable minerals, including 6\% of the world’s copper reserves in ores, 19\% of the world’s silver deposits in ores, and significant deposits of feldspar, gypsum, lead, zinc, nitrogen, salt, sand and gravel, sulfur, and amber. Overall, mining and quarrying operations contributed about 2\% of the Polish GDP in 2007.

Copper ore and refined copper are Poland’s most important mineral resources for exports. The nation’s copper mines are located in a narrow mining district between the Oder and Bóbr Rivers in southwestern Poland. Within this region, the small city of Lubin serves as the corporate home of KGHM Polska Miedź, one of Poland’s largest companies and the world’s third largest producer of silver and ninth largest producer of copper.\textsuperscript{203}

Lead and zinc are mined at three locations in the region between Kraków and Katowice, although declining output in recent years puts the future viability of these mines in doubt. Additional amounts of lead are also extracted from the copper ore at the KGHM mines. Sulfur mining is also in decline in Poland, even though Poland has the world’s largest sulfur resources.\textsuperscript{204} In part the decline is due to competitive pressures created by the relatively cheap sulfur that is produced as a byproduct during the desulfurization of oil and natural gas.\textsuperscript{205}

\textit{Standard of Living}

By most measures, Poland is categorized as a mid-level developed nation, with a standard of living roughly comparable to its former closest neighbors in the Soviet bloc. In the United Nation’s most recent Human Development Index, which measures the world’s nations on the basis of their GDP per capita, life expectancy, and literacy and educational participation rates, Poland ranked 39th in the world, bunched in a group that included the Czech Republic (35th), Hungary (38th), Slovakia (41st), Estonia (42nd), Lithuania (43rd),

and Latvia (44th). Among these countries, however, Poland had the lowest GDP per capita.\textsuperscript{206}

Perhaps the biggest economic hurdle facing the Polish people in recent years is the nation’s high unemployment rate. During the early years of the 2000s, Poland’s unemployment rate was close to 20\%, contributing to an outflow of young Poles to job centers in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Sweden after Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004.\textsuperscript{207, 208, 209} In 2005 alone, 0.75\% of Poland’s working age population left the country for an extended period, a trend that ultimately helped reduce Poland’s high unemployment and caused labor shortages in some parts of Poland’s economy such as health and construction.\textsuperscript{210} By 2008, the unemployment rate in Poland had quickly declined to a post-Communist era low of 7.1\%, but the worldwide economic recession that began toward the end of that year has driven unemployment rates back up in 2009.\textsuperscript{211, 212}

Housing, an important area of Poland’s economy, is still lacking compared to other developed European nations. According to the 2002 census, there was a gap of nearly one million units between the number of Polish households and the number of available housing units. In addition, the quality of the existing housing stock is substandard in many cases. For example, only 80\% of rental units in Polish cities had access to indoor plumbing, a fixed bath, and a flush toilet in 2002.\textsuperscript{213} Several factors contribute to Poland’s current housing crisis, including a reduced rental market due to strong rent control and eviction restrictions, a shortage of building materials and skilled construction

labor, and a lack of urban development plans specifying developable acreage in some municipalities.214

**Tourism**

Since 1990, the number of tourists visiting Poland has increased dramatically. However, this trend reversed somewhat in 2007 and 2008, going from 15.7 million overnight visitors to Poland in 2006 to 13.0 million visitors in 2008. The general decline in the value of the euro and dollar relative to the złoty was partly responsible for the visitor drop during 2007, while the worldwide economic recession contributed to 2008’s more rapid tourism dropoff.215, 216

Slightly less than 70% of Poland’s tourist arrivals in 2008 came from other countries of the EU. Over half (53.6%) of these EU visitors were from Germany, distantly followed by Lithuania (7.8%) and the United Kingdom (5.5%). The majority of the remaining 30% of Polish tourists who did not arrive from EU countries came primarily from the three former Soviet bloc nations to Poland’s east: Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. The United States (2.1%) dominated the non-European tourism sector.217 The Polish provinces most frequently visited by tourists are Mazowieckie (location of Warsaw), Wielkopolskie (location of Poznań), Lubelskie (adjacent to Ukraine and Belarus), Dolnośląskie (location of Wrocław; adjacent to Germany and the Czech Republic), and Małopolskie (location of Kraków; adjacent to Slovakia).218

**Transportation**

Poland has an extensive road system, but unfortunately many of these roads are in poor condition and are often too narrow to be well suited for business transport.219, 220

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http://lysander.sourceoecd.org/vl=431640/cl=15/nw=1/rpsv/cgi-bin/wppdf?file=5kzc3f0hfm36.pdf

http://www.intur.com.pl/itenglish/forecasts.htm#koniunktura

http://www.intur.com.pl/itenglish/forecasts.htm#koniunktura


http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761559758_7/Poland.html

http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/poland/090423/polands-long-road-better-infrastructure
number of automobiles in Poland increases, the yearly death rate on Polish roads has soared to twice the EU average.

Plans have long been in place to construct three major cross-country motorways (two east–west and one north–south), interconnected by several two- and four-lane expressways. Combined, these roads would link Polish cities with 3000 km (1800 mi) of modern highway. Much of this system was pledged to be built by 2012 as part of Poland’s successful bid to co-host the European football (soccer) championships that year. At the current pace of construction, however, achieving this highway construction goal may prove difficult.\(^{221}\)

Poland’s rail system, both for freight and passenger transportation, is dominated by the state-owned Polish State Railways (Polskie Koleje Państwowe, or PKP). PKP is itself divided into several subsidiary units that specialize in freight operations, regional transportation, intercity transportation, and rail infrastructure, among other areas. As with Poland’s roads, the 2012 European football championships have proven catalytic in the upgrading of some of the existing rail lines connecting the venue cities of Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław, and Gdańsk.\(^{222, 223}\) Presently, no Polish rail lines allow for speeds faster than 160 km/h (100 mi/h), but the upgraded rail route between Warsaw and Gdańsk is expected to become Poland’s first 200 km/h (125 mi/h) operational line upon completion in 2012.\(^{224}\)

Warsaw’s Frederic Chopin Airport is Poland’s main international and domestic air gateway. It is the headquarters and central hub of LOT Polish Airlines, the national air carrier. Other international airports in Poland, in descending order of passenger traffic, are Kraków, Katowice, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Poznań, Łódź, Rzeszów, Szczecin, and Bydgoszcz.\(^{225}\)

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Poland’s main Baltic Sea ports are located in Szczecin, Gdańsk, and Gdynia. Szczecin’s port, Poland’s largest, is located within an inland water basin on the Oder River, and the subport of Świnoujście handles cargo from ships whose draft restrictions do not allow access to Szczecin.\(^{226,227}\)

**Business Outlook**

Poland has made huge strides in opening up its economy to business investors in the two short decades since the fall of the Polish communist government. Nonetheless, a recent ranking of the “ease of doing business” in 181 countries placed Poland as the 76th most business-friendly country in the world, far behind neighboring countries such as Slovakia and Lithuania.\(^{228}\) Poland’s ranking would have been much higher if not for its exceedingly low marks for dealing with construction permits (158th), starting a business (145th), and paying taxes (142nd). These are all reflections of the bureaucratic red tape that characterized governmental processes during the communist era, and that has yet to be fully addressed in the post-communist era.\(^{229}\) Poland’s frequently changing governments built on fragile coalitions of bickering political parties have generally been unable to muster the political will to tackle bureaucratic and regulatory reform head-on.\(^{230}\) Onerous paperwork requirements have been blamed at least partly for the slow pace of infrastructure improvements on Poland’s road and rail systems.\(^{231}\)

**International Organizations**

*International Monetary Fund*

Although Poland’s economy would seem to be in more stable condition than those of most Eastern European nations, the Polish government nonetheless applied to the International Monetary Fund for a USD 20.5 billion line of credit in the spring of 2009. Poland was one of the last countries in Europe to be affected by the worldwide economic recession beginning in 2008. However, as projections for the nation’s GDP growth in 2009 continued to be lowered as recessionary effects set in, the Polish government


decided that a hedge was needed in case declining state revenues and tightened private credit markets provide a heightened need to cover short-term debt repayments. As a side effect, the IMF loan strengthened the Polish Central Bank’s reserves, thus helping to bolster the value of the sagging zloty against major currencies.²³², ²³³

Society

Introduction

Traditionally, Poles have lived a largely agrarian lifestyle, with most people living on farms until after World War II. The end of the war produced wrenching shifts in the country’s fabric. Large swaths of the population moved from one part of the country to another, with the end result being the creation of one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in Europe. At the same time, Poland became increasingly industrialized under its postwar communist regime. New factories in the cities attracted workers from rural areas, triggering a demographic shift that continues to this day. In 1931, over 72% of Poles lived in rural areas, but today that percentage is less than 39%.\(^\text{234}\)

As might be expected, Poland has also undergone numerous cultural changes as its ethnic mix has fluctuated and it has evolved from a rural to an urbanized state. Nonetheless, many Polish traditions continue today much as they did centuries ago, particularly those centered around religious holidays and feasts. The Polish Catholic Church today continues to play a key role in the nation’s cultural fabric. In many ways it has become the sustaining symbol of Polish cultural identity, having survived the forty years of communist rule in which most other traditional Polish political and social institutions were cast aside.\(^\text{236}\)

Ethnic Groups and Language

Before World War II, Poland was one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Europe. Less than 69% of the people living within Poland’s borders in 1931 were ethnically Poles. Of the country’s remaining people, Ukrainians living in the country’s southeastern areas constituted nearly 14% of the population, Yiddish- and Hebrew-speaking Jews in cities made up another 8.6%, and Belarusians in the northeast represented 5.3%. Germans, Russians, Lithuanians, and other smaller groups made up the final 3.3% of the population.\(^\text{237}\)


World War II completely changed Poland’s ethnic landscape. Massive deaths, forced migrations, and radically altered borders shaped a nation that was one of the least diverse in all Europe. The 2002 Polish census revealed that 96.7% of Poland’s citizens are Poles whose native language is Polish. Silesians (0.45%), Germans (0.4%), Belarusians (0.13%), and Ukrainians (0.08%) are the largest groups among the non-Pole segment of the population.

Silesians throughout their history have often felt pressure to declare themselves either Polish or German, depending on whichever nation held control of Upper Silesia, the region in which most Silesians live.238 In modern Poland, this region is today approximated by the provinces (voivodeships) of Śląskie and Opolskie. (These two provinces are also home to the majority of Poland’s ethnic German population.)239) According to 2002 census figures, roughly one third of declared Silesians speak Silesian, a West Slavic language that is characterized by some linguists as a regional dialect of Polish.240

Another language that once was viewed by some as a dialect of Polish is Kashubian, which is spoken primarily in Pomorskie province.244 Since 2005, Kashubian has held the Polish legal status of a regional language, requiring that the government take steps to preserve the language’s use.242 Kashubians are descendants of the ancient Slavic tribes of eastern Pomerania, and their language and traditions have been preserved despite the region’s history as part of German-speaking states (e.g., Teutonic Order, Prussia, Germany).243

Two other minority groups with their own distinct language are the Romanies and Łemkos. The Romanies are a widely dispersed group whose language is of Indo-Aryan origin.244, 245 Polish Łemkos, who speak an East Slavic language sometimes characterized

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as a Ukrainian dialect, were relocated to the Silesian region after World War II from their homeland in the northern Carpathian region of southeast Poland.  

**Religion**

The Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religious and cultural institution within Poland. Over 88% of the Polish population are Catholic, and a large majority of these adherents continue to practice their faith. Another 1.3% of Poles belong to the Polish Orthodox Church, approximately half of which reside in Podlaskie province.

The fastest growing religious group in Poland is the Jehovah’s Witness, who now collectively represent the third largest religion in the country. Just under half of those belonging to Protestant and Protestant-tradition churches, which combined claim 0.41% of the Polish population as adherents, are members of the Evangelical-Augsburg (Lutheran) Church. The Masurian region in northeast Poland and the southern Silesia region near the city of Cieszyn are the centers of this religion.

In the past, Poland has had a relatively large Jewish population, but the Holocaust of World War II, followed soon after by two periods of emigration, has reduced the population of practicing Jews to just 1,000–1,500.

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Cuisine

“Hearty” is an adjective often applied to the traditional food items of Poland. Thick soups, stuffed dumplings, and numerous types of meat dishes are served each day on Polish dining tables, along with delicious (and often rich) desserts. Some of the standard ingredients for these dishes are sauerkraut, sausage, smoked sausage (kielebasa), beets, sour cream, potatoes, and mushrooms, flavored by spices such as marjoram, dill, caraway seeds, parsley, and black pepper. Always included as part of each main meal is chleb zwickey (regular bread), usually made from a mixture of rye and wheat that may also include a sourdough starter.

If Poland has a national dish, it is most likely bigos, a traditional stew made with sauerkraut, chopped sweet (white) cabbage, and one or more types of meat, including pork, beef, game, sausage or bacon. Prunes and mushrooms may also be included. Bigos is slow simmered for many hours and is a popular winter holiday dish, often served with bread and a shot of vodka.

Another popular Polish dish is pierogi, which is sometimes called “Polish ravioli” in English. Pierogi are dumplings made from unleavened noodle dough, stuffed with a wide variety of possible fillings, including sauerkraut, farmer’s cheese, minced meat, potatoes, wild mushrooms, or buckwheat groats. After the pierogi are boiled, they may be topped with melted butter, sour cream, fried fatback nuggets, or bread crumbs.

Favorite Polish meat dishes include schab pieczony (roast pork loin), pieczen walowa (roast veal), and pieczen wieprzowa (roast pork), and golonka (boiled pork hocks, often served with sauerkraut and pureed peas). Popular Polish soups include żurek (fermented rye flour cooked in sausage stock, often served with a boiled egg), zupa grzybowa (creamed mushroom soup), and barszcz (beet soup with meat stock, known as borscht in Russia and Ukraine). For dessert, babka (tall yeast-
rised cake), **sernik** (cheesecake, sometimes including mashed potato and often with raisins and grated orange peel added), and **pączki** (doughnuts) are just a few of the favorite Polish sweets.\(^{263}\)

Poles are tea drinkers, consuming both black teas and fruit and herb blends many times throughout the day. Coffee (**kawa**) is also popular; it is commonly served by pouring boiling water into a cup containing several teaspoons of ground coffee beans.\(^{264}\) Vodka and beer are the most popular alcoholic drinks.

**Traditions: Celebrations and Holidays**

As a predominantly Roman Catholic country, Poland’s holiday schedule is centered around the major Christian religious events and feast days. Among these, the Christmas (**Boże Narodzenie**) and Easter (**Wielkanoc**) cycles are the most festive times of the year.

Christmas is officially a two-day holiday in Poland (December 25 and 26). On Christmas Eve (**Wigilia**), families begin a 12-course supper when the first star appears in the night sky, breaking their day-long fast. Neither alcohol nor meat (excepting fish) is consumed during this meal, which begins with the ceremonial sharing of an unleavened wafer of bread (**opłatek**), frequently embossed with Christmas religious images. One seat at the table is traditionally left empty. After dinner, Christmas presents are exchanged and carols are sung. Finally, at midnight, the family attends Christmas Mass (**Pasterka**) at the local church. The following two days are marked by frequent eating, receiving visits from or making visits to other family members, and relaxation.\(^{265, 266, 267}\)

Easter, which may fall on any Sunday between March 22 and April 25, culminates a week-long series of ceremonies beginning with Palm Sunday (**Niedziela Palmowa**) on the preceding Sunday. On that day, “palms” made of local plants such as pussy willows, tree branches, dried flowers, grasses, and other materials are carried to church and blessed by the local priest. Some villages stage competitions for the most decorative palms.\(^{268}\)

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On the following Friday (Good Friday, or *Wielki Piątek*), which is not an official holiday, the Christian faithful attend services at their church, some of which set up life-size recreations of the Holy Sepulchre (tomb of Christ). On the following day, Holy Saturday (*Wielka Sobota*), a basket filled with food for the next day’s meal is brought to church for blessing. Included in the basket are elaborately painted eggs. On Easter Sunday, after the family attends early Mass, the Easter eggs and the other blessed food items are eaten at breakfast. The next day, Easter Monday (*Lany Poniedziałek*) is the only official holiday during Easter season. A custom of this day is the sprinkling of water, which symbolizes ritual washing. For Polish children, this rite often takes the form of water fights.

### Arts

#### Literature

Foremost among all Polish writers is the poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), whose poems exemplified Polish Romanticism and many of which remain today familiar to all Polish schoolchildren. His most famous work, the epic poem *Pan Taduesz* ("Lord Thaddeus"), recalls a short period during the early nineteenth century when Napoleon’s triumphs over Prussia gave brief hope to a resurgence of the Polish–Lithuania Commonwealth after the state was dismantled during the three partitions of the late 18th century.

During the first two decades after the founding of the Nobel Prizes, two Poles were winners of the literature award. In 1905, Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) won the award for his epic historical novels. Although several of these works are set during periods of Polish history, his most enduring novel was *Quo Vadis?*, a romance set in ancient Rome. In 1924, Władysław Reymont (1867–1925) became the second Pole to win the Nobel Prize for Literature for *Chłopi* ("The Peasants"), a quartet of books about Polish peasant life spanning a single year.

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During the period between the two world wars, Poland produced several innovative writers whose provocative, experimental works were not really appreciated until several decades later. Among them was Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885–1939), whose plays utilized many of the disjunctive elements that foreshadowed later works by the better known absurdist playwrights Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, and Jean Genet.275

A generation of post-WW II Polish writers found their works often severely constrained by the censorship practices of the Communist regime, especially in the early years after the war. Some of these writers, such as poet-essayist and 1980 Nobel Prize-winner Czesław Milosz (1911–2004), went into exile.276 Others, such as philosopher/science-fiction author Stanisław Lem (1921–2006), found ways to work within the confines of state control during the Stalinist years of the 1940s and early 1950s by writing novels that took place outside contemporary time frames.277 Others, such as poet Wisława Szymborska (1923–), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996, wrote in the mandatory Socialist Realism style until the loosening of literary restrictions during the post-Stalinist era. Szymborska seemingly alludes to her early poetry collections, which she later disowned, in her 1972 poem Discovery:

I believe in the refusal to take part.
I believe in the ruined career.
I believe in the wasted years of work.
I believe in the secret taken to the grave.

Music

Poland’s folk traditions strongly influenced the Polish classical composers of the 19th century. Foremost among these composers was Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), who transformed the rhythms and melodies of Polish folk music and dance to classical piano pieces. Chopin’s many polonaises, mazurkas, and waltzes remain today some of the most widely played piano pieces in concert halls around the world.

Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941) is another celebrated Polish pianist and composer who was also widely known during his lifetime as a spokesman for Polish nationalism. Off the musical stage, Paderewski briefly served as Poland’s Prime Minister after World War I. Paderewski’s concert performances featured not only the piano concertos of

Chopin, but also the compositions of Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937), Poland’s foremost composer during the first half of the twentieth century.

Like Paderewski, Łódź-born pianist Artur Rubinstein (1886–1982) became a classical pianist of world renown who was a master interpreter of Chopin’s works (1887–1982). Rubinstein, who admired Paderewski as a person but was less enthralled with his piano work, saw his own Chopin interpretations as a break from the Paderewski concert-hall tradition, an assessment that American composer Virgil Thomson disagreed with in his laudatory review of a Rubinstein’s Carnegie Hall performance.\textsuperscript{278, 279} Rubinstein spent only the early years of his life in Poland, and would later become a naturalized American citizen after World War II.

Among modern Polish classical composers, Krzysztof Penderecki (1933–) has been writing critically acclaimed avant-garde orchestral works since the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{280} Even those unfamiliar with Penderecki may have heard his compositions through their frequent use as eerie background music in film soundtracks, including Stanley Kubrick’s \textit{The Shining}, William Friedkin’s \textit{The Exorcist}, David Lynch’s \textit{Wild at Heart} and \textit{Inland Empire}, and Alfonso Curarón’s \textit{Children of Men}.\textsuperscript{281}

\textbf{Traditional Dress}

Modern Poles dress similarly to their colleagues in other European nations, both in urban and rural areas. To the extent that differences exist between how Poles dress versus, say, Italians, it is mostly a reflection of climate and budget. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, however, colorful folk dress that varied significantly from region to region was still relatively common. Such traditional dress ultimately became a cultural artifact as less expensive ready-made clothes became common.\textsuperscript{282} Today, traditional Polish dress is almost exclusively reserved for folk ensembles performing at festivals and heritage events.

\textsuperscript{280} Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Krzysztof Penderecki.”
Folklore

Poland, like many countries, has a rich folklore that often melds real persons with mythical exploits. (For example, George Washington, Johnny Appleseed, and Casey Jones are three historical American figures around which several folktales have taken root.) In Poland, King Bolesław I Chrobry (“the Great”), one of Poland’s great historical rulers, has become the subject of tales that are similar in some respects to those of England’s King Arthur. For example, legend has it that after a series of great victories on the battlefield, he and his knights retired to a mountain named Giemont in the Tatra range. There they sleep to this day, mounted on horses, waiting to be roused on the day that the Polish nation once again needs them.\(^{283}\)

Another real person whose exploits have become the stuff of folktales among Poles is Juraj Jánošík, an early 18th century highwayman operating in the Tatra Mountains along the modern-day Polish-Slovakian border. In frequently told tales, Janosik is a Robin Hood–like character, robbing and burning the houses of the wealthy and then dispensing some of his loot to local poor people.

Other traditional Polish folktales relate to the origin of the symbols of the Polish nation and its cities. The white eagle, which today adorns the Polish flag, emerges from a story in which Duke Lech, the first Slavic leader of the Polish region, becomes bloodied in a struggle with a female white eagle that is protecting her young. Moved by the eagle’s willingness to fight to the death for her eaglets, Lech thereupon decides that this bird shall henceforth be the symbol of his Dukedom. Then, at the location of the hill where Lech battled the eagle, soon rises the castle of Gnienzo (meaning “nest” in old Polish), the first capital of Poland.\(^{284}\)

Visitors to Warsaw may wonder why an armed mermaid appears on the coat of arms of a city that is hundreds of kilometers inland from the Baltic Sea. There are several folk tales that explain the city’s symbol, but the best known of these involves her rescue by a local fisherman from the grasp of a greedy merchant.


Sports and Leisure

Piłka nożna (football, or by its U.S. name, soccer) is by far the most popular sport in Poland. During the 1970s and 1980s, the national team was one of the strongest in the world, placing third in both the 1974 and 1982 World Cup and winning the Gold Medal at the 1972 Summer Olympics. Among the players on those teams were Zbigniew Boniek and Grzegorz Lato, arguably the two most popular athletes in Polish history. In World Cup competition since 1990, however, the national team has either failed to qualify or has been knocked out in the first round. Poland is scheduled to co-host (with Ukraine) the European soccer championships in 2012, although persistent corruption and match-fixing scandals have led to the nation’s soccer federation being discredited. In October 2008, Lato was elected as the new head of the Polish soccer federation, vowing to address the poor reputation of the nation’s leagues. By April 2009, nearly 200 governing officials, referees, and players had been detained in the ongoing corruption investigation.285, 286

Beyond soccer, other popular sports in Poland include volleyball and basketball. Skiing and snowboarding are increasingly popular winter sports. The largest concentration of ski slopes is in the area around the town of Zakopane at the foot of the Tatra Mountains.287 Many Poles also enjoy other outdoor activities such as cycling, hiking, sailing, and canoeing, with the nation’s mountain and lake regions being favorite locations for participating in these pursuits.288

Gender Issues

While public opinion polls reveal that an overwhelming number of Polish men and women support equal rights for women in all aspects of the economy and politics, in practice gender inequalities continue to exist in hiring and remuneration.289 Actually, the most recent survey of the “gender gaps” of 130 countries produced by the World Economic Forum shows Poland scoring better than 10 of its fellow European Union

members, including all of the eleven nations that have entered the EU since 2004 with the exception of the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) and Bulgaria.  

A deeper look at the data collected by the World Economic Forum shows that Poland is one of the lowest ranking countries on the measure “wage equality for similar work.” This ranking is based on a qualitative assessment by industry executives within the country. Follow-up assessments to determine why Poland scores so low on this measure are lacking and would be helpful in determining why a country that has constitutionally embraced the “equal pay for equal work” dictum is perceived to be lacking in this area. One potential reason is that term “work of equal value” has never been legally defined in Polish law.

Security

Introduction

As a member of NATO and numerous other international and regional organizations, Poland has been an active participant in various security and antiterrorism initiatives, including the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and the Counterterrorism Working Group. Poland does not have any border issues with its neighboring countries and carries on normal diplomatic relations with all of them, although in a few cases bilateral relations are not as warm as would be desired.

Military

Poland’s military consists of approximately 141,000 active-duty forces, including an army of 88,000, an air and defense force of 33,000, and a navy of 23,000.294 The country has been a fully integrated member of the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) since March 1999, and Polish troops continue to serve as parts of NATO missions in Afghanistan (1,600 Polish troops as of March 2009) and Kosovo (285 Polish troops as of January 2009).295296 In April 2009, Poland announced plans to increase forces in Afghanistan by 20%.297 They will be sent to Ghazni Province, south of the Afghan capital of Kabul, where Polish forces have been in charge of maintaining security since October 2008.298

Polish military units have also participated as parts of United Nations peacekeeping missions in Chad, Lebanon, and the Golan Heights region, although recent cost-cutting measures by the Polish government resulted in Poland pulling out of these operations.299 Poland also committed 2,500 troops to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The last

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Polish forces left Iraq in October 2008, having suffered 22 military and 5 civilian casualties during their five-plus years as part of the coalition.\(^{300}\)

Poland has had a conscription-augmented military since before World War II, but recently the government announced plans to move toward a fully professional force. Presently, Poland’s 48,000 conscripted soldiers are not legally allowed to serve on foreign missions and serve for only nine months, which reduces their overall operational usefulness. Eventually, Polish military leaders anticipate that Polish military strength will stand at 120,000 professionals after the last draftees phase out of duty.\(^{301}\)

**U.S.–Polish Relations**

Since 1989, when Poland formed its first non-communist government since World War II, bilateral relations between Poland and the United States have been consistently close. During this time, the two countries have worked closely on many issues, such as global terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human rights, and regional concerns in Eastern and Central Europe.\(^{302}\)

Historically, such close relations between the two countries have been the norm rather the exception, and over the years this relationship has been cemented by the existence of a large Polish-American community in the United States, the largest such population of people of Polish ancestry outside of Poland itself.\(^{303}\) Most Poles who came to the U.S. arrived during three great waves of immigration: the five decades between 1880 and 1930, World War I and the period following it (1939–1959), and then the 1980s and early 1990s.\(^{304}\)

In August 2008, Poland and the U.S. co-signed a bilateral security pact that, among several items, stated the U.S.’s intent to install 10 interceptor missiles in Poland.\(^{305}\) The U.S–Polish accord also contained a side agreement to rotate a U.S. Army Patriot short-
range air and missile defense battery from German to Polish soil. In response, Russia has strenuously objected to the deployment of the interceptor missile defense system so close to its border, arguing that it could be used for first-strike capability and that the interceptor missiles will actually contain nuclear warheads. After the change of U.S. administrations in January 2009, the Polish-based missile defense system was placed under review pending final decision for deployment. The rotation of the Patriot missiles from Germany to Poland, however, has been reported to be moving forward.

**Relations With Neighboring Countries**

**Germany**

The 1990s saw a thaw in Polish-German relations that overcame the traditional wariness and even enmity between the two neighboring countries. Germany provided economic assistance and development funds to Poland as it struggled in its early years of transition to a market economy, and it later supported Poland’s successful efforts to join the European Union. Poland, in return, supported the reunification of Germany once it received assurances that the postwar Oder-Neisse River boundary between Poland and Germany would not be challenged. In 1991, the two countries ratified a historic treaty of friendship and cooperation.

However, beginning in 2005, a series of events began to strain Polish–German relations. One cause was a planned Russia-to-Germany natural gas pipeline beneath the Baltic Sea that would bypass Poland. The rhetoric between the two nations soon heated up. Some Polish officials used the pipeline issue to revive memories of the secret 1939 Hitler–Stalin agreement to divide Poland. Meanwhile, German media and politicians strongly

criticized Polish political leaders Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński for stirring up anti-German sentiments for political purposes.  

Further complicating Polish–German relations are the reparation claims filed by the descendants of Germans expelled from Poland after World War II. The German government and mainstream German political groups do not support the complaints or activities of the Prussian Trust, the marginal expellee group pursuing reparations, but some Polish politicians were quick to express their strong concern about a Prussian Trust complaint filed at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in December 2006. German and Polish critics in turn noted that the highly reported Polish governmental response had served only to provide publicity for a small reactionary group whose efforts had virtually no chances for success. The latter opinion was seemingly proven true in October 2008, when the Prussian Trust complaint was dismissed by the ECtHR.

After the October 2007 Polish parliamentary elections, in which Donald Tusk was voted Poland’s new prime minister, tensions between Poland and Germany began to subside. In spring 2009, however, a controversial nomination to a board overseeing the building of a German expellee museum once again generated political crossfire between the two nations.

Czech Republic

Poland and the Czech Republic were among the first group of former Warsaw Pact countries to become NATO members in 1999. Five years later, they were among 10 nations, mostly from the old Soviet bloc, that became members of the European Union. The two countries have had generally close relations since the fall of the Soviet bloc in 1989–1990, symbolized through their mutual participation in the regional Visegrad Group, or V4. Initially this organization, consisting of Poland, Czechoslovakia (later to become the Czech Republic and Slovakia), and Hungary, focused on establishing regional integration with European institutions and developing fresh state-to-state relations established on cooperation in the post-communist era. The V4’s importance has lessened since all its founding states have become NATO and European Union members, but it still holds regular meetings to discuss issues of regional importance and to further cooperation on

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matters of mutual interest. As such, the V4 works to shape EU policy by “identifying and defending regional interests within the enlarged EU.”

Slovakia

Slovakia, another member of NATO and the European Union, as well as the V4, also has established strong ties with Poland since it broke away from its federation with the Czech Republic in 1993. Even as Slovakia developed increasing relationships with Russia and became increasingly isolated from the West during the mid 1990s, Poland continued to closely cooperate with its neighboring state to the southeast. Now that both countries are part of the EU, trade relations between the two nations have expanded greatly. Since 2004, overall Polish–Slovakian trade data show an increase of over 20% in every single year.

Ukraine

Despite a history of conflicts between Ukrainians and Poles as recent as World War II, the two nations have had stable and friendly relations since Ukrainian independence in 1991. Poland was, in fact, the first country to diplomatically recognize Ukraine after it broke apart from the Soviet Union. Numerous commemorative ceremonies have been held and reconciliation statements signed to help heal the divisive wounds of the past.

Since the 1990s, Poland has been very supportive of efforts by the Ukrainian government to increase its ties to NATO and the European Union. The two countries have also

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become increasingly economically linked by an influx of both legal and illegal Ukrainian workers into Poland, often to fill relatively low-paying jobs.\textsuperscript{324} Recently, however, many Polish workers who moved to the United Kingdom and Ireland after Poland joined the EU in 2004 have been returning to Poland, creating a situation in which Polish trade unions have called for stricter limits on the number of Ukrainian workers allowed into the country.\textsuperscript{325}

Even before the recent calls for tighter restrictions on Ukrainian workers in Poland, however, it had become more difficult for Ukrainians to enter Poland and then stay beyond the time allowed.\textsuperscript{326} In December 2007, Poland began its implementation of the EU’s Schengen Agreement, under which passport-free travel is allowed within EU member states, but visa requirements are tightly monitored with non-member states. Cross-border traffic between Poland and Ukraine became more difficult and more expensive for Ukrainian citizens soon after the Schengen rules went into effect. To ease some of the complaints of those living near the border, a subsequent agreement was approved by the EU in December 2008 to allow Ukrainians living within 30 km (19 mi) of the Polish border to obtain a multiple-entry border-zone permit allowing visa-free movement within Poland up to 30 km from the border.\textsuperscript{327}

\textit{Belarus}

Poland and Belarus have had a contentious relationship for much of the last decade. These relations reached a low point in August 2005, when Poland recalled its ambassador to Belarus after Belarusian police raided the offices of the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB), located in Hrodna, a city located close to the Polish border. The UPB is an organization representing the roughly 400,000 ethnic Poles living in Belarus.\textsuperscript{328} As justification for its actions, the government of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, who has run the country as a virtual dictatorship since 1994, accused the Polish minority in Belarus of

\textsuperscript{325} DailyMailOnline. “Unions Demand Poland Restrict Entry of Foreign Workers…to Make Room For All the Poles Leaving the UK.” http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1162477/Unions-demand-Poland-restrict-entry-foreign-workers--make-room-Poles-leaving-UK.html
plotting to overthrow him. He also accused the Polish government of orchestrating mass protests to topple the Lukashenko regime.\(^{329}\)

Belarus’ relations with most of its other neighbors have been little better than those with Poland, although a slow warming in relations between the EU and Belarus has been taking place ever since some Belarusan political prisoners were released from custody in August 2008.\(^{330}\) Belarus continues to remain closely tied, both politically and economically, to Russia, but the relationship is a highly uneven one. Belarus and Russia signed a treaty in 1997 outlining their intent to forge a “union state” of the two countries, but most of the economic integration measures outlined in that treaty have never been implemented.\(^{331}\) In May 2009, prior to a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, Lukashenko expressed irritation with the Russian government over Moscow’s failure to follow through on previous agreements, leaving Belarus no alternative but to improve its relationship with the EU.\(^{332}\)

One symbol of Belarus’ recent first steps towards better normalizing its relations with Poland and the rest of the EU is its participation in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program, an EU-sponsored organization consisting of six former Soviet republics (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). The EaP’s stated goals are to increase cooperation between EU states and EaP members on issues such as border control, customs, transit infrastructure, and energy.\(^{333}\) Poland and Sweden initially proposed the Eastern Partnership program in 2007, and the group’s first meeting was held in May 2009.

**Lithuania**

Although Poland’s border with Lithuania today is its shortest, at only 91 km (57 mi), the two nations share a long history in which they were closely linked politically and culturally for many centuries. This connection was severed to some extent in the late 18th century, when the Poland–Lithuania Commonwealth was partitioned by its larger neighbors Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Over a century later, in the period between World War I and World War II, tensions would arise after Poland and Lithuania once again became

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independent countries. But the region around Vilnius, the present-day capital of Lithuania, was annexed to Poland, a move that was never recognized by the Lithuanian government.\(^3\)

Nearly 70 years later, after Lithuania held a referendum in 1991 to declare independence from the Soviet Union, relations between the ethnic Poles living in the Vilnius region and the new Lithuanian government worsened. As a result, Poland and Lithuania’s bilateral relations were somewhat strained during the early part of the 1990s.\(^3\) After extensive negotiations, the two countries finally signed a Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighbourly Cooperation in April 1994, a full two years after Poland and Ukraine signed a similar treaty.\(^3\)

Although Poland and Lithuania have cooperated on many fronts since the early 1990s, the two nations have made little visible progress in connecting their energy grids. The topic has been discussed for well over a decade, and agreements have been reached to move forward on linking the grids. The project has seemingly snagged, because construction has not yet begun on a nuclear power plant in Lithuania that Poland hoped to tap for some of its energy needs.\(^3\), \(^3\), \(^3\)

Russia

Poland borders the Kaliningrad Oblast, an exclave of Russia that is surrounded by Poland to the south, Lithuania to the north and east, and the Baltic Sea to the west. Its current name derives from former Soviet Politburo member Mikhail Kalinin. Until the end of World War II, Kaliningrad was part of the German territory of East Prussia, and its main city and seaport was known as Königsberg. The city was leveled by bombs and artillery shells during the war, and its German citizens were expelled from the territory after the city and surrounding region became part of the Russian Soviet


Federative Federal Socialist Republic following the war. The region was subsequently resettled primarily by ethnic Russians and Belarusians. Since 1996, Kaliningrad has been granted the status of a special economic zone within Russia, allowing foreign companies to manufacture goods in Kaliningrad and then ship them to the main part of Russia without having to pay standard Russian export duties. As one of two countries with adjacent borders to Kaliningrad, many Polish companies have seen the region as a business opportunity. It is estimated that over 500 majority- or wholly-owned Polish companies have set up businesses in Kaliningrad.

Beyond Kaliningrad, Poland’s relations with Moscow have been marked by continued tensions, once again with roots in historical events that took place during World War II. Soviet leader Stalin’s secret pact with Nazi Germany to divide Poland, as well as the subsequent mass execution of Polish military officers at Katyń, left a legacy of distrust and animosity toward Moscow, which has simmered continuously during the more than four decades of Soviet domination following the war.

In recent years, matters of contention between Poland and Russia have included Poland’s support of the pro-Western government in Ukraine, the German–Russian Baltic Sea gas pipeline that bypasses Poland, and the agreement between the U.S. and Poland to station a missile defense system in Poland. Russia briefly threatened to install their own missiles in Kaliningrad to “neutralize” the perceived threat of the Polish-based interceptor missile, but reportedly backed away from such plans in January 2009 amid reports that the Obama administration was reviewing plans for the missile-defense system.

**Terrorism and Terrorist Groups**

While many if not most European nations have suffered terrorist attacks during the last decade, Poland has been free of such incidents. No terrorist organizations, either of external or internal origin, are presently known to be

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operating in Poland. Since 1993 when the U.S. began publishing yearly summaries of terro

ist acts around the world, only one incident within Poland has been reported—an April 1996 bombing of a Shell gas station in Warsaw self-credited to an organization calling itself GN-95. The bombing killed a police demolitions expert, and it was followed by a message demanding USD 2 million from the Royal Dutch Shell Group. No further attacks by GN-95 have been reported.

While internal terrorist activity has been minimal, Poles have occasionally been the victims of terrorist incidents outside the borders of their country. Most recently, in September 2008, Piotr Stańszak, a Polish geologist who was surveying oil and gas fields in northwestern Pakistan, was kidnapped by militant members of a Pakastani chapter of the Taliban. A little over four months later, a video was released by the Taliban, showing the beheading of Stańszak.

Other Security Issues

Corruption

One of the most widely discussed issues in Poland over the last decade has been the perceived rampant corruption that permeates Polish political and other institutions. Even football (soccer), the most popular sport in Poland, has been subject to scandals concerning match fixing and other irregularities. In 2004, Polish Prime Minister Leszek Miller was forced to step down after becoming a subject of the investigation into bribes being solicited by a Polish film producer. Shortly thereafter, another scandal broke out concerning the sale of the large Polish oil company Orlen, which was reportedly being secretly offered for sale to the Russian oil giant Lukoil. These scandals in some cases showed less evidence of official malfeasance than the massive publicity given to the investigations might have seemed to indicate. However, the result was an increasingly held perception that Poland’s political and business elites were hopelessly corrupt.

Commonly, repercussions of a perception of widespread corruption will include a potential lessening of outside investment in the economy and an increasing vulnerability to extremist political groups capitalizing on voter discontent with mainstream politicians in general. To date, neither of these scenarios have played out in Poland. In 2006, the Polish parliament authorized the creation of the Central Anticorruption Bureau (CAB),

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tasked with investigating and preventing governmental corruption.\textsuperscript{350} While perhaps not directly reflective of the CAB’s work, Poland’s improvement in the annual Corruption Perception Index produced by Transparency International has been noteworthy.\textsuperscript{351} Poland’s overall CPI score has improved by 35\% since 2005, the highest such increase of any nation in the EU, although Poland still only ranks higher on this scale than Bulgaria and Romania among EU members.\textsuperscript{352, 353}