

Poland



Republic of Poland

National name: Rzeczpospolita Polska

President: Lech Kaczynski (2005)

Prime Minister: Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (2005)

Land area: 117,554 sq mi (304,465 sq km); **total area:** 120,728 sq mi (312,685 sq km)

Population (2006 est.): 38,536,869 (growth rate: -0.1%); birth rate: 9.8/1000; infant mortality rate: 7.2/1000; life expectancy: 75.0; density per sq mi: 328

Capital and largest city (2003 est.): Warsaw, 2,201,900 (metro. area), 1,607,600 (city proper)

Other large cities: Lodz, 778,200; Krakow, 733,100; Wroclaw, 632,200; Poznan, 581,200; Gdansk, 456,700; Szczecin, 415,700

Monetary unit: Zlony

Language: Polish

Ethnicity/race: Polish 96.7%, German 0.4%, Belorussian 0.1% Ukrainian 0.1%, other 2.7% (2002)

Religions: Roman Catholic 95% (about 75% practicing), Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, and other 5%

Literacy rate: 100% (2003 est.)

Economic summary: **GDP/PPP** (2005 est.): \$489.8 billion; per capita \$12,700. **Real growth rate:** 3.5%. **Inflation:** 2.1%. **Unemployment:** 18.3%. **Arable land:** 46%. **Agriculture:** potatoes, fruits, vegetables, wheat; poultry, eggs, pork. **Labor force:** 17.02 million; agriculture 16.1%, industry 29%, services 54.9% (2002). **Industries:** machine building, iron and steel, coal mining, chemicals, shipbuilding, food processing, glass, beverages, textiles. **Natural resources:** coal, sulfur, copper, natural gas, silver, lead, salt, amber, arable land. **Exports:** \$75.98 billion (f.o.b., 2004 est.): machinery and transport equipment 37.8%, intermediate manufactured goods 23.7%, miscellaneous manufactured goods 17.1%, food and live animals 7.6% (2003). **Imports:** \$81.61 billion (f.o.b., 2004 est.): machinery and transport equipment 38%, intermediate manufactured goods 21%, chemicals 14.8%, minerals, fuels, lubricants, and related materials 9.1% (2003). **Major trading partners:** Germany, France, Italy, UK, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Russia, China (2003).

Communications: **Telephones:** main lines in use: 8.07 million (1998); mobile cellular: 13 million (2002). **Radio broadcast stations:** AM 14, FM 777, shortwave 1 (1998). **Radios:** 20.2 million (1997). **Television broadcast stations:** 179 (plus 256 repeaters) (Sept. 1995). **Televisions:** 13.05 million (1997). **Internet Service Providers (ISPs):** 19 (2000). **Internet users:** 6.4 million (2001).

Transportation: **Railways:** total: 23,420 km (2002). **Highways:** total: 364,656 km; paved: 249,060 km (including 358 km of expressways); unpaved: 115,596 km (2000). **Waterways:** 3,812 km navigable rivers and canals (1996). **Ports and harbors:** Gdansk, Gdynia, Gliwice, Kolobrzeg, Szczecin, Swinoujscie, Ustka, Warsaw, Wroclaw. **Airports:** 150 (2002).

International disputes: small boundary changes made with Slovakia in 2003.

Geography

Poland, a country the size of New Mexico, is in north-central Europe. Most of the country is a plain with no natural boundaries except the Carpathian Mountains in the south and the Oder and Neisse rivers in the west. Other major rivers, which are important to commerce, are the Vistula, Warta, and Bug.

Government

Democratic republic.

History

Great (north) Poland was founded in 966 by Mieszko I, who belonged to the Piast dynasty. The tribes of southern Poland then formed Little Poland. In 1047, both Great Poland and Little Poland united under the rule of Casimir I the Restorer. Poland merged with Lithuania by royal marriage in 1386. The Polish-Lithuanian state reached the peak of its power between the 14th and 16th century, scoring military successes against the (Germanic) Knights of the Teutonic Order, the Russians, and the Ottoman Turks.

Lack of a strong monarchy enabled Russia, Prussia, and Austria to carry out a first partition of the country in 1772, a second in 1792, and a third in 1795. For more than a century thereafter, there was no Polish state, just Austrian, Prussian, and Russian sectors, but the Poles never ceased their efforts to regain their independence. The Polish people revolted against foreign dominance throughout the 19th century. Poland was formally reconstituted in Nov. 1918, with Marshal Josef Pilsudski as chief of state. In 1919, Ignace Paderewski, the famous pianist and patriot, became the first prime minister. In 1926, Pilsudski seized complete power in a coup and ruled dictatorially until his death on May 12, 1935.

Despite a ten-year nonaggression pact signed in 1934, Hitler attacked Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. Soviet troops invaded from the east on Sept. 17, and on Sept. 28, a German-Soviet agreement divided Poland between the USSR and Germany. Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz formed a government-in-exile in France, which moved to London after France's defeat in 1940. All of Poland was occupied by Germany after the Nazi attack on the USSR in June 1941. Nazi Germany's occupation policy in Poland was designed to eradicate Polish culture through mass executions and to exterminate the country's large Jewish minority.

The Polish government-in-exile was replaced with the Communist-dominated Polish Committee of National Liberation by the Soviet Union in 1944. Moving to Lublin after that city's liberation, it proclaimed itself the Provisional Government of Poland. Some former members of the Polish government in London joined with the Lublin government to form the Polish Government of National Unity, which Britain and the U.S. recognized. On Aug. 2, 1945, in Berlin, President Harry S. Truman, Joseph Stalin, and Prime Minister Clement Attlee of Britain established a new de facto western frontier for Poland along the Oder and Neisse rivers. (The border was finally agreed to by West Germany in a nonaggression pact signed on Dec. 7, 1970.) On Aug. 16, 1945, the USSR and Poland signed a treaty delimiting the Soviet-Polish frontier. Under these agreements, Poland was shifted westward. In the east, it lost 69,860 sq mi (180,934 sq km); in the west, it gained (subject to final peace-conference approval) 38,986 sq mi (100,973 sq km).

A new constitution in 1952 made Poland a "people's democracy" of the Soviet type. In 1955, Poland became a member of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and its foreign policy became identical to that of the USSR. The government undertook persecution of the Roman Catholic Church as a remaining source of opposition. Wladyslaw Gomulka was elected leader of the United Workers (Communist) Party in 1956. He denounced the Stalinist terror, ousted many Stalinists, and improved relations with the church. Most collective farms were dissolved, and the press became freer. A strike that began in shipyards and spread to other industries in Aug. 1980

produced a stunning victory for workers when the economically hard-pressed government accepted for the first time in a Marxist state the right of workers to organize in independent unions.

Led by Solidarity, an independent union founded by an electrician, Lech Walesa, workers launched a drive for liberty and improved conditions. A national strike for a five-day workweek in Jan. 1981 led to the dismissal of Prime Minister Piskowski and the naming of the fourth prime minister in less than a year, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski. Martial law was declared on Dec. 13, when Walesa and other Solidarity leaders were arrested. It formally ended in 1984 but the government retained emergency powers. Increasing opposition to the government because of the failing economy led to a new wave of strikes in 1988. Unable to quell the dissent entirely, the government relegalized Solidarity and allowed it to compete in elections.

Solidarity members won a stunning victory in 1989, taking almost all the seats in the Senate and all of the 169 seats they were allowed to contest in the Sejm. This gave them substantial influence in the new government. Tadeusz Mazowiecki was appointed prime minister. Lech Walesa won the presidential election of 1990 with 74% of the vote. In 1991, the first fully free parliamentary election since World War II resulted in representation for 29 political parties. Efforts to turn Poland into a market economy, however, led to economic difficulties and widespread discontent. In the second democratic parliamentary election of Sept. 1993, voters returned power to ex-Communists and their allies. Solidarity's popularity and influence continued to wane. In 1995, Aleksander Kwasniewski, leader of the successor to the Communist Party, the Democratic Left, won the presidency over Walesa in a landslide.

In 1999, Poland became part of NATO, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary.

In Sept. 2001 parliamentary elections, former Communists, reconstituted as the center-left Democratic Left Alliance, won 41% of the vote. The election seemed to mark the demise of Solidarity, which did not win a single seat.

Poland was a staunch supporter of the United States and Britain during the Iraq war and sent 200 troops to Iraq (60 were combat soldiers). In Sept. 2003, Poland became the leader of a 9,000-strong multinational stabilizing force in Iraq. It contributed 2,000 of its own soldiers. In April 2005, Poland announced it would withdraw all troops from Iraq at the end of the year.

On May 1, 2004, Poland joined the EU. Prime Minister Leszek Miller resigned on May 2, 2004. His popularity had plummeted to 10% because of the country's continued economic troubles and a number of corruption scandals. Former finance minister Marek Belka succeeded him. On Oct. 24, conservative Lech Kaczynski was elected as the new president, replacing former communist Aleksander Kwasniewski.