



## **The Republic of Poland**



### **National Anthem**

Originally called the "Anthem of the Polish Legions in Italy", from its initial verse, "Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła" it is also informally known in English as "Poland Is Not Yet Lost" or "Poland Has Not Yet Perished". The words were written by Józef Wybicki in 1797.

The song originated during the formation of the Polish Legions in Italy in 18th century. Józef Wybicki, a poet and an officer in the Legions, wrote it in Reggio Emilia in July 1797.

Beginning with the words, "Poland has not yet perished," it was a patriotic call to arms to save the Polish state which had fallen under foreign rule. It quickly became very popular with the Polish Legionnaires and eventually, after Poland regained independence in 1918, was declared the national anthem

### **EMBLEM**



The emblem of Poland consists of a white eagle on a red field. Its current appearance consists of a turned towards right, single-headed, crowned eagle with golden claws and beak. The heraldic description of the national emblem is a silver eagle with the golden crown pictured on a red field.

According to the legend, the White Eagle emblem originated when Lech, Poland's legendary founder, once saw a white eagle against the setting sun which appeared tipped with gold. He was so delighted with the view that he decided to settle nearby and chose eagle as his emblem.

## A short history of Poland

Between the sixth and ninth century the area that is now Poland is settled by West Slavonic tribes. These tribes establish in 966 Poland as the Polish Principality (legends say that this state was already founded in 501). Poland becomes the Polish Kingdom in 1024. The Polish unity states is divided into several principalities since 1138, until 1180 under nominal coordination by one of the princes, styled Senior Polish Prince. In 1320 Poland is reunited into Polish Kingdom. Since 1370 the kingship is elective, but de facto the Diet chooses the kings in hereditary order until 1572. Poland and [Lithuania](#) are united in a personal union since 1386. The two countries are united 1569 as the United Commonwealth of the Two Nations. Lithuania is from now on part of Poland. The Commonwealth includes areas from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

Three divisions between [Prussia](#), [Austria](#) and [Russia](#) in the period between 1772 and 1792 leads to de disappearance of the Commonwealth. During the Napoleonic Wars France constitutes the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807 as a French puppet state. After the Treaty of Vienna in 1815 the Russian parts of Poland become separate Poland as the Polish Kingdom in a personal, de facto subordinate, union with Russia. Southern Poland, Galicia, remains part of Austria, although Cracow is an independent republic between 1815 and 1848. The western parts of Poland are part of Prussia and with Prussia of [Germany](#).

During World War I (1914-1918) Germany occupies the Polish Kingdom and after the defeat of Germany and Austria as well as the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1918 representatives of the Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party, PPS) and of the agrarian Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People's Party, PSL) form a Polish government with Ignacy Daszyński as prime minister. Daszynski's government hands over power over to Józef Piłsudski and the Polish Republic is proclaimed. Jędrzej Moraczewski of the PPS becomes prime minister. The first elections are won by the Stronnictwo Demokratyczno-Narodowe (National Democratic Party, ND). Ignacy Paderewski of the ND becomes prime minister, later that year succeeded by Leopold Skulski. The Treaty of Versailles stipulates that Poland receives Pomerania, but [Danzig](#) or Gdańsk becomes a free city. Plebiscites are held to resolve the future of Eastern Prussia and Upper Silesia. The result is unfavorable to Poland. The eastern border is a greater problem. In 1920 Polish troops entered Kiev in alliance with the Ukrainian troops under Petlura's command. During the upcoming war the soviet army reaches the outskirts of Warsaw. Russia is defeated and in the treaty of Riga in 1921 Poland's eastern border becomes the Zbrucz River. Poland forms and later annexes the state of [Central Lithuania](#). Premierships last shortly in Poland: in 1920 Władysław Grabski (PPS) has become prime minister, later that year succeeded by Wincenty Witos of the PSL. In 1921 Antonin Ponikowski (ND) becomes prime minister.

After the 1922 parliamentary elections, Gabriel Narutowicz, the PSL-candidate of the center and left wing, supported by the national minorities, becomes president. Some days after his inauguration he is assassinated. Stanisław Wojciechowski of the PPS is elected President. 1922 brings four prime ministers: Artur Sławiński (PPS), Wojciech Korfanty (ND), Julian Ignacy Nowak and Władysław Sikorski (PPS). In 1923 Witos becomes prime minister again, but later that year an experts government is formed by Władysław Grabski. The fall of Grabski's government in 1925 and the ensuing difficulties in forming a new government - bringing Aleksander hrabia Skrzyński (1925-1926) and Witos in 1926 to the premiership - lead to an armed coup d'etat by Józef Piłsudski. Józef Piłsudski becomes Poland's strongman and he makes Ignacy Mościcki president. The political parties continue their activities with little change. Freedom of the press is maintained. In practice, however, an authoritarian regime is created, curbing the powers of the Sejm and harassing the opposition parties. Józef Piłsudski forms the Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem (Non-Partisan Blok for Co-operation with the Government, BBWR), and finally arresting the opposition leaders and putting them

on trial in 1931. After Józef Piłsudski's death in 1935 Edward Rydz-smigly assumes control and under a new constitution parliament becomes a tool of the ruling military. The new dictatorship establishes the Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodwego (Camp of National unification, OZN).

In 1939 Germany and the [USSR](#) sign the Ribbentrop-Molotov nonaggression pact, which secretly provides for the dismemberment of Poland into German and Soviet-controlled zones. In 1939 Germany invades Poland, followed by the invasion of Soviet troops. After the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, Poland is completely occupied by Germany. The Poles form an underground resistance movement and a government in exile, first in Paris and later in London, which is recognized by the USSR. During World War II, 400,000 Poles fight under Soviet command, and 200,000 go into combat on Western fronts in units loyal to the Polish government in exile. In 1943 the USSR breaks relations with the Polish government in exile after the German military announced that they had discovered mass graves of murdered Polish army officers at Katyn, in the USSR. In 1944, the Soviet Red Army enters Poland and establishes a communist-controlled "Polish Committee of National Liberation" at Lublin. During the war, about 6 million Poles are killed, and 2.5 million are deported to Germany for forced labor. More than 3 million Jews (all but about 100,000 of the Jewish population) are killed in death camps like those at Oświęcim (Auschwitz), Treblinka, and Majdanek.

In 1944-45 Poland is liberated by the USSR army and regains independence. Following the Yalta Conference in 1945, a Polish Provisional Government of National Unity is formed. The eastern parts of the country are incorporated into the USSR and Poland annexes large parts of Germany. Gdańsk or Danzig becomes part of Poland. Poland is geographically shifted to the west. Although the Yalta agreement called for free elections, those held in 1947 are controlled by the communist Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Workers' Party, PPR) of Bolesław Bierut and Władysław Gomułka. The communists then establish a dictatorship entirely under their domination. Gomułka resigns in 1948 and Bierut becomes party leader. He unites the party that year with the PPS into the Polska Zjedonoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party, PZPR). Poland is renamed Polish People's Republic in 1952. In 1956 Gomułka is rehabilitated and leads the country until 1970. After disturbances and strikes he is succeeded by Edward Gierek in that year.

An important event is the election of the bishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyła, in 1979 to become Pope John Paul II, head of the roman catholic church. In 1980 strikes start in Poland, centered in Gdańsk. The country is entering into an extended crisis that would change the course of its future development. The strikes end in the formation of an independent trade union, Solidarity. In 1981 Gierek is replaced by Stanisław Kania as party leader. A year later, general Wojciech Jaruzelski takes over with the support of a Military Council for National Salvation. This council tries to prevent an intervention by the USSR because of the strong position of the new trade union Solidarność (Solidarity) of Lech Wałęsa. The regime declares martial law, under which the army and special riot police were used to crush the union. Virtually all Solidarność leaders and many affiliated intellectuals are arrested or detained. It lasts until 1985 until nearly all political prisoners are released. Solidarity remained proscribed.

In 1988 the government recognizes Solidarność and in 1989 "roundtable" talks begin. A new parliament is elected, in which one third of the seats is open to free contest. The Solidarność candidates won virtually all of these seats. Jaruzelski, at that moment president, appoints Solidarność activist Tadeusz Mazowiecki of the Unia Demokratyczne (Democratic Union, UD) to form a government. For the first time in more than 40 years, Poland has a government led by noncommunists. Poland is renamed Republic of Poland. In 1990 Lech Wałęsa becomes the first popularly elected president of Poland. Poland's first free parliamentary elections are held in 1991. More than 100 parties participate, representing a full spectrum of political views. No single party receives more than 13% of the total vote. New elections are held in 1993, making the post-communist Sojusz Lewicy Demokratyczne (Democratic Left Alliance, SLD) the largest party. Waldemar Pawlak, leader of the agrarian Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People's Party, PSL), becomes prime minister in a

coalition of the SLD with the PSL. Pawlak resigns in 1995 and is replaced by Jozef Oleksy of the SLD.

In 1995 SLD leader Aleksander Kwasniewski defeats Wałęsa by a narrow margin. Olkesy is replaced inside the coalition by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz. The 1997 elections give way to a coalition of the Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (Electoral Action Solidarity, AWS) and the liberal Unia Wolności (Freedom Union, UW) under prime minister Jerzy Buzek (AWS). The 2001 elections are won by the SLD and a coalition of the SLD, the PSL and the Unia Pracy (Labour Union, UP) under Leszek Miller (SLD) is formed. In 2003 the PSL leaves the coalition. Miller resigns in 2004 at the moment that Poland joins the [European Union](#) in 2004.

## Currency

The monetary unit [PLN] is also marked as [zł.]. 1 złoty is divided into 100 groszy [gr.] The banknotes come at 200, 100, 50 and 10 zloty, and coins in 5, 2 and 1 zloty, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 groszy. Currency can be exchanged in banks or exchange counters (*kantor*).

On entering the EU, Poland has pledged to substitute her currency with the Euro; the date of substitution has not yet been set. Currently, it is forecast that the change of the monetary system will take place between 2009-2011.

## Language

Nearly 97% of Poland's citizens declare Polish as their mother tongue.

Polish is considered to be one of the more difficult languages to master by non-native speakers. Unlike English, Polish is pronounced phonetically. Once you understand where to break the word, and that the second-to-last syllable is always stressed, you'll do okay by keeping the following in mind.

One note: if the word looks nothing like it sounds, put it down to some uniquely Polish characters, like [ą] [ę] or [ź]. The Polish alphabet does have its own surprises. If confused, just look it up in a good dictionary.

## **Political system**

From the date of the earliest national assembly in 1493, Polish kings had to call the national assembly and regional assemblies every two years. From 1573 the system of free elections required the approval of the Sejm for the election of kings.

Poland's parliament is based on the two chamber system: the Sejm, the lower chamber, is composed of 460 Deputies, elected in general elections by secret ballot. The Senate, the upper chamber, consists of 100 Senators. The judicial system consists of the Supreme Court, common courts, administrative courts and military tribunals.

Laws are adopted by the two houses. The Senate has the right to amend or reject a law passed by the Sejm, which in turn can overrule the decision of the senate by a majority vote.

Also in general elections Poland elects a head of state, the President, whose term of office is five years. The President names the prime minister and, according to the recommendations of the prime minister, the cabinet, subject to the approval of the Sejm. The President cannot dismiss the government.

After a long period of Communist rule, from 1989 Poland is again a multi-party democracy. The current electoral threshold for a party to win seats in the general elections is 5%.

**Lech Kaczyński is the president of Poland**

**Donald Tusk is the prime minister of Poland**

## **Administrative regions**

The head of provincial administration, the *Voivod*, is nominated by the prime minister.

Both *powiaty* and *gminy* are governed by councils, elected for four years. The councils, in turn, elect the heads of local administrative bodies. All representatives to provincial legislature are also elected to four year terms.

The major Polish cities are Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań, Gdańsk, Szczecin, Bydgoszcz, Katowice, and Lublin. The main geographical regions are: Pomerania (*Pomorze*), Mazuria (*Mazury*), Greater Poland (*Wielkopolska*), Mazovia (*Mazowsze*), Podlasie, Silesia (*Śląsk*), Lesser Poland (*Małopolska*), and Sub-Carpathia (*Podkarpacie*).

## Public holidays observed on fixed dates

- 1 January - New Year's Day
- 1 May - May Day
- 3 May - Constitution Day
- 15 August - Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 1 November - All Saints Day
- 11 November - Independence Day
- 25 & 26 December - Christmas Days

## Movable feasts

### *Easter*

|      |               |
|------|---------------|
| 2007 | 8 & 9 April   |
| 2008 | 23 & 24 March |
| 2009 | 12 & 13 April |
| 2010 | 4 & 5 April   |
| 2011 | 24 & 25 April |
| 2012 | 8 & 9 April   |

### *Ascension*

|      |        |
|------|--------|
| 2007 | 20 May |
| 2008 | 4 May  |
| 2009 | 24 May |
| 2010 | 16 May |
| 2011 | 5 June |
| 2012 | 20 May |

### *Corpus Christi*

|      |         |
|------|---------|
| 2007 | 7 June  |
| 2008 | 22 May  |
| 2009 | 11 June |
| 2010 | 3 June  |
| 2011 | 23 June |
| 2012 | 7 June  |

## Geography

### **Territory:**

the total area of the country ..... 312,685 km<sup>2</sup> (120,727sqm)  
land area including inland waters ..... 311,904 km<sup>2</sup>  
internal waters ..... 1991 km<sup>2</sup>  
territorial sea ..... 8682 km<sup>2</sup>

The total area of the country according to the administrative division amounts to 312,685 km<sup>2</sup> and includes a land area (including inland waters) of 311,904 km<sup>2</sup> as well as a part of internal waters - 781 km<sup>2</sup>, i.e.: Wisla Bay including ports - 303 km<sup>2</sup>, Szczecin Bay, including: Lake Nowowarpienskie, Lake Wicko Wielkie, Kamienski Bay and ports - 466 km<sup>2</sup> as well as Gulf of Gdansk ports and border ports - 12 km<sup>2</sup>.

### **Borders:**

Length of national border ..... 3495 km

Length of sea border ..... 440 km

with Russia ..... 210 km

with Lithuania ..... 103 km

with Belarus ..... 416 km

with Ukraine ..... 529 km

with Slovakia ..... ♦.. 541 km

with Czech Rep. .... 790 km

with Germany ..... 467 km

### **♦The highest mountain's peak:**

Rysy ..... 2499 m

### Landscape

The eastern extremes of Poland are typical for eastern Europe, while the rest of the country is more like western Europe by climate, structure and the character of its vegetation.

Poland is a relatively low-lying country. 91.3 percent of its territory lies below 300 m above sea level.

The highest point is Mt Rysy in the Tatras (2499 m), while the lowest point is located west of the village of Raczki Elbląskie (1.8 m below sea level).

The highest-lying settlement is Gubałówka (today part of the municipality of Zakopane; 1125 m), the lowest-lying settlement is Żółwiniec (1.3 m below sea level).

There are three main mountain ranges in Poland: the Carpathians, the Sudetan Mountains, and the Góry Świętokrzyskie (Holy Cross Mountains).

The longest rivers are the Vistula (1047 km), Oder (854 km), Warta (808 km), Bug (772 km), Narew (484 km), San (443 km), Noteć (388 km), Pilica (319 km), Wieprz (303 km) and the Bóbr (272 km).

Poland has some 9,300 lakes with surface areas over 1 ha; they make up 1 percent of the country's territory. The largest is Lake Śniardwy (11,383 ha) in the Mazurian Lake District, and the deepest is Lake Hańcza (108.5 m) north of Suwałki.



## Nature

Because some changes in the natural environment caused by economic development occurred in Poland later than in the west of Europe, some species and habitat types which have disappeared in the West, still exist in Poland.

Also, the long tradition of nature protection in Poland has helped to save much of the great European primeval forest – Puszcza Białowieża (Białowieża Forest). There we can see how nature of Central Europe used to look like centuries ago.

The biggest animals in Poland are the European bison. By the 18th century, the European bison was almost extinct, with only small herds remaining in the Białowieża Forest and the Caucasus. At present, some 250 bison range freely in the Białowieża Forest. The entire bison population in Poland numbers about 660 animals. The species is now bred in most European countries - all European bison around the world have ancestors from Białowieża, and this is the only case in history when a species of this size has been saved by regeneration breeding.

There are also other places hardly touched by the civilization, like the wild and desolate Bieszczady Mountains with their spectacular pastures known as *poloniny*, and the inaccessible flood plains along the Biebrza River, home to many rare bird species, sometimes found nowhere else in Europe.

National Parks in Poland constitute the biggest form of nature protection. The area of a national park, may not be smaller than 2500 acres. The park protects an area distinctive for its unique scientific, natural, cultural and educational values. A national park protects the entire nature and specific landscape features within its borders. The main task of a national park is to study and preserve the unity of natural systems of the area, as well as to restore the disturbed or extinct elements of a native nature. The park is open to visitors, but nature conservation is its main objective and has priority over all other activities.

There are 23 national parks in Poland with total area of ca. 780,000 acres, which cover approximately 1 per cent of the country's area. Polish National Parks are exceptional in Europe for their range of wildlife, their size and varying geographical interest.





## Climate

Poland has a moderate climate with both continental and maritime elements. This is due to humid Atlantic air which collides over its territory with dry air from the Eurasian interior.

The average annual temperature ranges from 7 deg. C (44.6 F) in the hilly Pomeranian and Masurian lake districts and in the uplands to 10 deg. C (50 F) in the belt of the sub-Carpathian basins, the Silesian Lowland and the Wielkopolska Lowland.

For comparison, average annual temperatures in other European cities:

|        | deg.C | F    |
|--------|-------|------|
| Oslo   | 4.2   | 39.6 |
| Prague | 7.8   | 46.0 |
| Warsaw | 7.9   | 46.2 |
| Berlin | 8.7   | 47.5 |
| Zurich | 8.7   | 47.5 |
| London | 10    | 50.0 |

Only in the upper parts of the Carpathians and Sudetes the average temperature is about 0 deg. C (32 F)

The hottest month is July with the average temperature standing at 17.5 deg. C (63.5 F).

The coldest area in July is the mountains, where the air temperature drops as the altitude increases (on average by 0.6 deg. C [33 F] for every 100 metres).

The hottest area is central Poland, with the temperatures exceeding 18 deg. C (64.5 F).

## Time zone

Poland is in the Central European Time Zone. Central European Standard Time (CET) is 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+1)

Like most countries in Europe, Summer (Daylight-Saving) Time is observed in Poland, where the time is shifted forward by 1 hour; 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+2).

### Start dates:

2007 - 25 March

2008 - 30 March

2009 - 29 March

2010 - 28 March

2011 - 27 March

After the Summer months the time in Poland is shifted back by 1 hour to Central European Time (CET) or (GMT+1)

### End dates:

2007 - 28 October

2008 - 26 October

2009 - 25 October

2010 - 31 October

2011 - 30 October