



# Poland

## **Background**

Poland was restored as an independent state in 1918 after the World War I. It was invaded by Germany in 1939 and the Soviet Union divided Poland between them and treated Polish people with extreme brutality. Germany built concentration camps whose names - Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek - became synonymous with the Holocaust. When the World War II broke out, it affected the country terribly from many aspects. No less than 21.4 % of the population died during the war, including nearly the whole Jewish population. Towns were ruined and the infrastructure destroyed as a result of the German invasion. 80% of the capital, Warsaw, was destroyed during the war, partly because of extremely heavy fighting between Polish partisans and the German Army (the Warsaw Uprising) but mainly because of the systematic use of dynamite by the German army in the last days of the occupation. The post-war years were marred by economic depression and social unrest. Following pressure from the Soviet Union, the Communist government rejected an offer of support from the United States to rebuild the country (the so-called Marshall Plan). Soviet forces drove German forces from Poland, whose borders were set by Potsdam conference; Poland lost territory to the Soviet Union but gained some from Germany in 1945. Poland became a Communist People's Republic after Soviet-run elections and subsequently joined the Soviet-run Warsaw Pact military alliance. In 1989 round-table talks between Solidarity, the Communists and the Catholic Church paved the way for fall of communism in Poland. Partially free elections saw landslide win for Solidarity, which helped form coalition government. Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-Communist Polish prime minister since 1946. In 1991, first parliamentary elections were made since the fall of communism and Soviet troops started to leave. Finally, in 2004 Poland became a member of the EU.

## **Geographical Profile**

The Republic of Poland is a country in central Europe with a coastline on the Baltic Sea in north.

Poland is bordered by Germany in west, the Czech Republic in south west, Slovakia in south, Ukraine in south east, Belarus in east and Lithuania and Russia in north east. The country shares maritime borders with Denmark and Sweden.

## **Political System**

Poland is a semi-presidential parliamentary republic with a representative democracy and a bicameral parliament which consists of a 460-member lower house and a 100-member

Senate, together they form the National Assembly . Head of state is the President, he has the power to dissolve parliament in special cases. Head of government is the Prime Minister, who is the leader of the cabinet (Council of Ministers). Poland's legislative power is vested in the parliament.

### **Economic State**

Poland is one of the most economically free countries in the world. Even though the country's overall score is below the regional average , it is still above the world average. Poland's positive economic reputation was earned through structural reforms: trade liberalization, low taxes, and business-friendly regulations. Enthusiasm for reform has waned in recent years amid political and policy uncertainty that has contributed to currency volatility and weakened rates of investment. Challenges include deficiencies in road and rail infrastructure, a rigid labor code, a weak commercial court system, government red tape, and a burdensome tax system for entrepreneurs. Reforms are also needed to buttress the independence of the judiciary and reduce opportunities for corruption. Modernization of the regulatory environment has facilitated the transition to a market-oriented economy. The nonsalary cost of employing a worker is relatively high. Unions exercise considerable influence on contract termination and other labor issues. Poland has been the largest recipient of EU subsidies, but the European Commission has threatened to freeze its subsidies unless Poland cooperates with the "founding values of the EU." The combined value of exports and imports is equal to 102.8 percent of GDP. The average applied tariff rate is 2.0 percent. Poland implements a number of EU-directed nontariff trade barriers including technical and product-specific regulations, subsidies, and quotas. A new investment promotion law was adopted in 2018. The financial sector continues to expand. FTSE Russell has upgraded the Polish stock market to "developed market" status. The Polish economy continues to perform strongly. Unemployment is below 4 percent, while shared prosperity indicators continue to improve. The three main challenges ahead for Poland are a shortage of labor in the economy, procyclical government policies encouraged by the political calendar, and adverse global factors. The shortage of labor will eventually weigh heavily on potential GDP growth and be exacerbated by the early retirement of an increasing share of the workforce. A scarcity of workers could negatively affect production capacity and investment. The problem may be amplified by the possibility that other European Union (EU) countries open their labor markets to workers from Ukraine, who have so far helped Poland mitigate the shortfall in the labor supply. A dense political calendar, with EU, presidential, and general elections all coming up within one year, has inspired a range of procyclical policies. Proposed measures to increase social benefits, lower tax rates, and inflate the cost of pension payments are expected to put pressure on public finances in the medium term. Due to their irreversible nature, such policies would weigh on Poland's fiscal position in the coming years.

### **Security State**

Poland's 1,100-kilometer eastern border is the longest external border in the European Union. Poland's geographic location within Europe makes it a logical gateway for legal and illegal immigrants entering the European Union. Law enforcement experts indicate that drug and weapons traffickers transporting their prohibited cargo into the rest of Europe also use the pathways used by illegal immigrants. Poland placed border controls with Germany, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic to provide better security during 2016 NATO Summit held in the Polish capital Warsaw on July 8-9. Also, added security checks in Polish ports and airports during that time remained much tighter than usual. After Poland witnessed a series of international crises, the government began to focus more on improvement of overall national security. In addition to the increased demand for more traditional security, concerns over conventional and cyber terrorism attacks and protection against biological agents have come to the center of attention. Poland has no indigenous terrorism, and no known terrorist organizations are known to operate inside Poland. It would be difficult for a non-Caucasian group to operate in this very homogenous country. However, Poland's support in international intervention including Iraq and Afghanistan, presents a possible political or terrorist objective for international terrorist organizations. In December 2014, the Polish Council of Ministers approved the National Counter-Terrorism Program for 2015-2019. The Program was prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, together with other agencies and institutions involved in activities carried out by the Inter-ministerial Group dealing with the Terrorism-related Threats. Its main goal is to reinforce anti-terrorist system and to increase the citizens' awareness within the scope of the terrorists-related threats.

### **Health Care**

Health care in Poland is free and is delivered through a publicly funded health care system called the Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia, which is free for all the citizens of Poland provided they fall into the "insured" category. In Poland, everyone has a right to have access to health care and citizens are granted equal access to the publicly funded healthcare system. In particular, the government is obliged to provide free health care to young children, pregnant women, disabled people and to the elderly. However, private healthcare use is very extensive in Poland. Patients who are uninsured have to pay the full cost of medical services. Ministry of Health is responsible for creating and executing national health programs, controlling and supervising on general health situation. Besides that the health care system in Poland has had problems for many years. Some of those problems are difficult access to specialist physician, bad results in cancer treatment due to lack of access to modern medicines and lack of digital structure of health information: difficulties with electronic prescriptions and referrals, no access to examination results or list of authorised physicians.

### **Foreign Affairs**

The Republic of Poland is a Central European country and member of the European Union and NATO, among others. Poland wields considerable influence in Central and Eastern Europe and is a middle power in international affairs. The foreign policy of Poland is based on four basic

commitments: to Atlantic co-operation, to European integration, to international development and to international law. The Polish economy is fairly open and relies strongly on international trade. Since the collapse of communism and its re-establishment as a democratic nation, Poland has extended its responsibilities and position in European and Western affairs, supporting and establishing friendly foreign relations with both the West and with numerous European countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the establishment of seven new sovereign states in Poland's immediate neighborhood (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia), of which Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia (through the Kaliningrad Oblast) border Poland. Poland has actively pursued good relations with all its neighboring countries, signing friendship treaties replacing links severed by the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. The Poles have forged special relationships with Lithuania and particularly Ukraine in an effort to firmly anchor these states to the West. Due to its tragic historical experience with aggression of powerful neighbors, Polish foreign policy pursues close cooperation with a strong partner, one apt enough to give strong military support in times of critical situations. This creates the background of Poland's tight relations with the USA and their sensitivity in relations towards its partner within the European Union, Germany. At the same time, the equally burdened attitude towards Russia results in very tense diplomatic relations, which have been constantly worsening since Vladimir Putin's rise to power. This is an important factor for the special attention Poland pays to the political emancipation of all its Eastern neighbors: Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.

### **Strategic Challenges of the Republic of Poland**

- Better use of the potential of the most important urban areas to generate growth and employment and to stimulate the development of the remaining areas,
- Assurance of internal cohesion of Poland - preventing excessive spatial differences,
- Increasing the potential to create, diffuse and absorb innovations,
- Preventing negative demographic trends and more complete use of workforce resources,
- Improvement of the quality of workforce resources,
- Response to the climate change and ensuring energy security,
- Protection and rational use of environment resources,
- Use of the cultural and tourist potential for regional development,
- Supporting development of the social capital,
- Ensuring relevant transport and ICT infrastructure to support competitiveness and guarantee
- Territorial cohesion of the country,
- Enhancement of institutional capabilities to manage the development at the national and regional level.

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