

Poland



Poland is an ancient nation that was conceived around the middle of the 10th century. Its golden age occurred in the 16th century. During the following century, the strengthening of the gentry and internal disorders weakened the nation, until an agreement in 1772 between Russia, Prussia, and Austria partitioned Poland. Poland regained its independence in 1918 only to be overrun by Germany and the Soviet Union in World War II. It became a Soviet satellite state following the war, but its government was comparatively tolerant and progressive. Labor turmoil in 1980 led to the formation of the independent trade union "Solidarity" that over time became a political force and by 1990 had swept parliamentary elections and the presidency. A "shock therapy" program during the early 1990s enabled the country to transform its economy into one of the most robust in Central Europe, but Poland currently suffers low GDP growth and high unemployment. Solidarity suffered a major defeat in the 2001 parliamentary elections when it failed to elect a single deputy to the lower house of Parliament, and the new leaders of the Solidarity Trade Union subsequently pledged to reduce the Trade Union's political role. Poland joined NATO in 1999 and is scheduled to accede to the European Union along with nine other states on 1 May 2004.

POLAND FACTS

Population: 38.6 million (UN, 2003)

Capital: Warsaw

Major language: Polish

Major religion: Christianity

Life expectancy: 70 years (men), 78 years (women) (UN)

Monetary unit: 1 zloty = 100 groszy

Main exports: Machinery and transport equipment, foodstuffs, chemicals

Average annual income: US \$4,230 (World Bank, 2001)

Internet domain: .pl

International dialing code: +48



Flag Description: two equal horizontal bands of white (top) and red; similar to the flags of Indonesia and Monaco which are red (top) and white. To listen to the Polish national anthem go to http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1054681.stm

