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978-0-521-85332-3 - A Concise History of Poland: Second Edition

Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki

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A Concise History of Poland

The second edition of *A Concise History of Poland* has been revised to shed more light on the highly complex past of this state prior to 1795, as well as to include most recent developments, notably its accession to the European Union. Once a dominant force in central and eastern Europe, home to a remarkable experiment in consensual politics in an area covering not only its present-day borders, but also Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus, in 1795 its neighbours excised it from the map. Resurrected in 1918, partitioned afresh during the Second World War, it survived to become a satellite of the Soviet Union. Yet in the 1980s, it was Poland which blazed the trail in casting off communism, and it was finally able to reassert its Christian and European heritage. This book is the ideal companion for all looking for a clear and comprehensive survey of this fascinating country.

JERZY LUKOWSKI is Reader in Polish History at the University of Birmingham. His previous publications include *The partitions of Poland 1772, 1793, 1795* (1999) and *The European nobility in the eighteenth century* (2003).

HUBERT ZAWADZKI teaches history at Abingdon School. His publications include *A man of honour: Adam Czartoryski as a statesman of Russia and Poland 1795–1831* (1993).

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SECOND EDITION

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and

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

We are delighted to be able to bring out a second edition relatively soon after the original and are grateful to Cambridge University Press for allowing us both to expand the text and to add further illustrative materials. Most of the expansion has gone into the pre-1795 section of the book. A number of reviewers felt, rightly, that there was too dense an accumulation of materials (though some also appear to have failed to appreciate this belongs to a series of ‘Concise Histories’) and we trust that our additions will help readers come to grips more comfortably with what was one of the most complex states of Europe. The present day adds its own complexities and we have tried to take these on board at least to the extent of showing readers the challenges and problems that face today’s republic and member of the European Union.

Our thanks to Steven Rowell for his generous insights into the history of the medieval and early modern Lithuanian state, and to Michael Laird for his very useful comments on chapters 6–8. Isabelle Dambricourt at Cambridge University Press has been a model of editorial tact and assistance.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Writing Concise Histories is an activity more rewarding than satisfactory. The begetters know how much has been omitted; readers, no matter how much or how little they know, have to put up with those omissions. This present offering in the Cambridge Concise Histories series is no exception. It is, however, the first to have been written by two authors, one an eighteenth-century specialist, the other more at home in the nineteenth century. Neither of us felt quite up to the undertaking of an all-embracing treatment of Poland's entire past; if some of the difficulties which such an undertaking might have created become apparent to our readers, then we will have achieved something.

For there have been at least two 'Polands'. One disappeared from the political map of Europe in 1795. For over one hundred and twenty years afterwards, it either did not exist, or did so in the form of spluttering, half-formed entities, which had a kind of relationship with what had gone before, but a relationship so uncertain, be it at a wider political level or be it at that of the individual 'Pole', that it is almost impossible to define it in any satisfying detail. The state that emerged in the aftermath of the First World War was very different indeed from the one which met its end in the late eighteenth century; these differences are even more striking in the state which appeared after the Second World War, following an excision from the political map more brutal than anything the country had endured before.

The links between the two 'Polands', the one pre-1795, the other

post-1918, remain indissoluble. Poles have always had to rebuild their past, not least because of the systematic attempts to deprive them of it. The most tangible sign of that of course is Warsaw itself: the so-called Old and New Towns are bijou replicas not just of structures destroyed by the Germans during the Second World War but of buildings going back to the old, pre-1795 state and to the Middle Ages. And similar extensive reconstruction has taken place in Gdańsk, Wrocław and Poznań – to mention only the most notable examples.

Here historians enter very treacherous waters. To say that there are two Polands is not so much a necessary simplification as a gross distortion. Indeed, virtually anything that can be said about ‘Poland’ by one observer can be plausibly demonstrated to be false by another. Its territories in their length and breadth have been the abode not only of the Slavonic people who call themselves ‘Poles’ but also of (among others) Germans, Jews, Armenians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Tatars – and these, in turn, have often intermarried, absorbed each other’s cultures and faiths, become one another. As late as the 1850s, one in five marriages in the city of Poznań (or, as it was known to its then Prussian rulers, Posen) was between Poles and Germans. Across wide stretches of territory, for much of their history, the degree of intermarriage between Poles and Lithuanians/Ukrainians/Belarusians was at least as high. It remains reflected today in the frequent incidence in the Polish population of surnames of diverse linguistic-ethnic origins (a comparable diversity can, of course, be found among Poland’s neighbours). In the great and bloody ethnic untanglings that have blighted the twentieth century, these people were often forced to choose their ‘ethnic identity’, whatever this concept (scientifically bizarre but conventionally indispensable) is understood to mean.

For much of its history, Poland was very much a border region of more or less peacefully co-existing peoples and cultures. From the late Middle Ages onwards, its elites evolved a remarkable consensual political culture, without which the Polish state would probably have fallen apart under the strains of accommodating its differences. These divergences and the less than satisfactory mechanisms of consensus brought the Polish state close to disintegration during the seventeenth century and, we can see with hindsight,

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contributed massively to its destruction by the end of the eighteenth. While there is much to criticize in that failed political and constitutional experiment, it is worth pointing out that the governance of multi-ethnic political entities in our own times has left at least as much to be desired. The ruling elites' consensual commitments translated into a strong attachment to 'liberty', which, in turn, helped those who considered themselves to be Poles to survive the nineteenth century, yet also helped to bring about the catastrophically unsuccessful insurrections of 1830–1 and 1863–4.

By the late nineteenth century, amid universally burgeoning nationalisms, the old notion of the Pole as a nobleman who could readily accommodate more than one 'ethnic' identity showed itself to be unsustainable romantic nostalgia. Some within the diverse ethnic groups living on territories which once formed part of the Polish state would indignantly deny that they ever shared a common homeland. Poland's current homogeneity is very much an enforced product of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. It is also something not seen in Poland since at least the middle of the fourteenth century. The pasts of Poland and its neighbours are too intertwined for easy, compartmentalized analysis. The nation-state is not yet dead, but, if it were, a reading of Poland's history might be much facilitated. It may not matter very much to a Briton or American (not that these labels are without their own pitfalls) that a Pole will refer to the city of L'viv (in Ukraine) as Lwów; it would probably not matter to a Ukrainian. But it might matter to a Ukrainian if the label Lwów is applied to L'viv in a book such as this, aimed at a wider, non-Polish or non-Ukrainian readership. In such a context, 'Lwów' might say something which 'L'viv' does not (and vice versa): a descriptor with a baggage of Polish overtones and belongings; whereas to a Pole, in the same context, 'L'viv' might well appear a denial of the Polish character of a great trading city which was once part of Poland. Seemingly innocuous 'Lemberg' – how Lwów/L'viv was labelled by Austrian bureaucrats – is a hopeless anachronism. Comparable alarms and suspicions can still be generated over other descriptors: Gdańsk/Danzig; Toruń/Thorn; Wilno/Vilnius; Grodno/Gardinas/Hrodna; even Oświęcim/Auschwitz. If this is a particularly acute problem for historians of Poland (even if born in Britain) seeking to

project their past for the benefit of others, it is a problem found throughout much of eastern Europe and bedevils the writing of any history of the region. In this context, the early part of this book is careful to use the term Rus' (not Russia) for the regions to Poland's east – if we cannot avoid the charge of furthering Polish terminological imperialism, we would certainly wish to avoid that of abetting its Muscovite variant.

We appreciate that our approach to such sensitivities will satisfy few who have any emotional involvement in or even substantial knowledge of eastern Europe's past. There are too many of these pasts to be quietly reconciled. We have therefore eschewed consistency in the naming of parts: we are conscious that this will only lead to historical absurdities; we have sometimes avoided the issue altogether. We have used terminology which seems right for the period. Thus, in chapter 2, Vilnius appears as Vilnius; as Wilno in chapters 3, 4 and 5; as both Wilno and Vilnius in chapter 6; 'Thorn' and 'Danzig' in the early modern period are labels meant to reflect the Germanic character of their elites, integral components of the late Jagiellonian state and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. English is insufficiently acquainted with east European toponymy to permit the consistent use of anglicized, and therefore neutral(?), descriptors such as Warsaw or Kiev. Even where such descriptors exist, current usage tends to the adoption of Polish forms (Kraków, rather than Cracow; even British football commentators have been known to struggle with Łódź, rather than Lodz). We are only too happy to encourage this development. We have listed some alternative versions in the index. Readers should feel at liberty to argue among themselves as to what form we should really have used. At a hopefully less contentious level, we have chosen to retain some established anglicizations of Polish proper names (thus, John Casimir, as opposed to Jan Kazimierz); and drop other anglicizations in favour of the Polish (Bolesław, Władysław or Stanisław, rather than Boleslas, Ladislas, or Stanislaus/Stanley). Once again, we have been guided by our own instincts rather than any spurious consistency, though we accept that what feels right to us will not seem so to others.

This is primarily a political history. It is here that we feel the need for a coherent narrative to be most pressing. This has meant

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some regrettable sacrifices: economic and social developments receive comparatively limited attention, particularly in the first three chapters. The Jews, so important in Poland's past life, receive far too little acknowledgement. To do them justice, and the many others who have received altogether too short shrift in these pages, would mean abandoning all hope of conciseness. For those who want their histories sprawling and expansive, we cannot do other than point them in the direction of Norman Davies' *God's playground: a history of Poland* (2 volumes, Oxford, Clarendon, 1981 and 2005).

Numerous persons have helped and encouraged us, not least by pointing out our shortcomings. Our thanks for their advice and apologies for not always having followed it to Danuta Manikowska, Robert Frost, Robert Swanson, Chris Wickham, Jūratė Kiaupienė, Michael Laird and Richard Hofton. Graeme Murdock has provided pleurably clear illumination of the darker crevasses of late medieval and early modern Hungarian and Balkan politics. Will Zawadzki and Anna Zawadzki have helped with the search for illustrations in the second half of the book. Will has also provided invaluable advice on the design of the maps, while Meg Zawadzki has removed some stylistic infelicities from the text. Our mistakes remain ours alone. We both owe a particular debt of gratitude to William Davies at Cambridge University Press: he has been a model of forbearance, patience, understanding and all-round helpfulness.

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A NOTE ON POLISH PRONUNCIATION

The pronunciation of Slavonic languages, not least Polish, can be something of a problem for the uninitiated. The following can only be a very simplistic guide; it is not meant for philological or phonetic perfectionists.

ą	similar to the French ‘on’ if crossed with the ‘o’ in ‘dome’
ę	similar to the French ‘on’, if crossed with the ‘e’ in ‘get’
ó	u, as in ‘shook’
y	i, as in ‘bit’
ci	short ‘chee’, as in ‘chit’
si	short ‘she’, as in ‘ship’
Ć, ć	‘ch’, as in ‘chop’
cz	as the above, but harsher
c	‘ts’ as in ‘pots’, except in the combinations ‘ci’ and ‘cz’
Ł, ł	‘w’ as in ‘wet’
ń	slightly softened ‘n’ – as in Spanish ‘ñ’
Ś, ś	‘sh’ as in ‘shut’
sz	as the above, but harsher
rz, Ź, ź	as the above, but with a ‘z’ sound (zh as in ‘Zhukov’)
w	‘v’ as in vile
zi	pronounced as first two letters of French ‘gîte’
Ź, ź	pronounced as first letter of French ‘gîte’

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- 966 Christianization of territories under the rule of duke Mieszko I begins
- c.* 980 Foundation of port of Gdańsk
- 997 Martyrdom of Vojtěch (Adalbert) of Prague, on a Christian mission to the Prussian lands
- 1078 Execution of bishop Stanisław of Kraków
- 1138 Testament of duke Bolesław Krzywousty ('Wrymouth') opens the way to a prolonged fragmentation of Polish territories
- 1227 Teutonic Knights are established on the left bank of the Vistula
- 1295 Przemysł II crowned king of Poland
- 1307 Teutonic Knights seize Gdańsk
- 1309 Teutonic Knights establish their headquarters at Marienburg (Malbork)
- 1320 Władysław I Łokietek crowned king of Poland in Kraków
- 1340 King Casimir III begins expansion into the Rus' principalities, south-east of Poland
- 1343 Treaty of Kalisz: king Casimir III recognizes the Teutonic Knights' possession of Gdańsk and Pomerania
- 1348 Treaty of Namysłów (Namslau): king Casimir III recognizes the Luxemburgs' rule in Silesia
- 1364–1400 Foundation and re-foundation of the University of Kraków (the Jagiellonian University)
- 1374 King Louis issues the privilege of Košice to the Polish nobility
- 1385 Treaty of Krėva paves the way to the accession of Jogaila of Lithuania in Poland
- 1386 Conversion of Jogaila to Catholicism, as Władysław II Jagiełło

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- 1387 Conversion to Latin Catholicism of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania begins
- 15 July 1410 Polish and Lithuanian victory over the Teutonic Knights at the battle of Grunwald/Tannenberg
- 1422–30 Privileges of Czerwińsk and Jedlnia: *Neminem Captivabimus nisi iure victum*
- 6 Mar. 1454 King Casimir IV decrees the annexation of the Prussian lands to the Polish Crown
- 1454 The ‘Thirteen Years War’ with the Teutonic Knights begins; the ‘Nieszawa privileges’ issued
- 19 Oct. 1466 The ‘Thirteen Years War’ is ended by the peace of Thorn: Royal Prussia is incorporated into Poland
- 1505 Privilege of *Nihil Novi*
- 1514 Lithuania loses Smolensk to Muscovy
- 1525 The Lutheran faith is formally established in the duchy of Prussia and the lands of the Teutonic order are secularized
- 8 April 1525 Treaty of Kraków: Albrecht of Hohenzollern accepts rule of the duchy of Prussia as a Polish fief
- 1561 Livonia is incorporated into Poland; establishment of the duchy of Courland as a Polish fief
- 4 July 1569 Polish–Lithuanian Union of Lublin
- 7 July 1572 Death of Sigismund II and extinction of the Jagiellonian dynasty
- 1573 The Confederacy of Warsaw: formal admission of the co-existence of different religious denominations in Poland; Henri of Valois becomes the first king to be fully elected by the body of the Polish nobility
- 1578 Creation of the Tribunal of the Crown
- 1581 Creation of the Tribunal of Lithuania
- 1596 Union of Brest: union of Catholicism and Orthodoxy
- 1610–11 Polish occupation of Moscow during the ‘Time of Troubles’
- 1619–29 Polish–Swedish conflict which sees the loss of most of Livonia to Sweden
- 1620–1 Polish–Turkish war
- 1632–4 Smolensk war between Poland and Muscovy
- 1648 Ukrainian revolt erupts under the leadership of Bohdan Khmel’nytskyi
- 1652 Wladyslaw Siciński is the first individual envoy to disrupt a Sejm through the liberum veto
- 18 Jan. 1654 Union of Pereiaslav between the Ukraine and Muscovy
- 1655 Muscovite and Swedish invasions of the Commonwealth: the ‘Deluge’ begins

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- 19 Sept. 1657 Treaty of Wehlau: Poland abandons its sovereignty over the duchy of Prussia
- 8 May 1660 Peace of Oliva ends the Polish–Swedish war
- 30 Jan. 1667 Truce of Andrussovo brings an end to the Polish–Muscovite war: Poland cedes eastern Ukraine to Muscovy (confirmed by the treaty of Moscow, 6 May 1686)
- 18 Oct. 1672 Treaty of Buczacz: Poland cedes Podole and Kamieniec Podolski to Turkey
- 12 Sept. 1683 Polish participation in the relief of Vienna: defeat of the Turks
- 1697 Election of Frederick Augustus I, elector of Saxony, as Augustus II of Poland
- 26 Jan. 1699 Peace of Carlowitz: Poland recovers Podole and Kamieniec Podolski
- 1700 Beginning of the Great Northern War (ends 1721)
- 12 July 1704 Election of Stanisław Leszczyński, as Swedish-backed anti-king
- 8 July 1709 Peter the Great defeats Charles XII at the battle of Poltava
- 1 Feb. 1717 The ‘Silent Sejm’
- 1733 Divided royal election between Stanisław Leszczyński and Frederick Augustus II, elector of Saxony
- 1733–6 War of the Polish Succession: Russian intervention secures the Polish throne for Frederick Augustus II as Augustus III
- 1740 Foundation of the *Collegium Nobilium* by Stanisław Konarski
- 1756–63 The Seven Years War: neutral Poland serves as a ‘wayside inn’ for the armies of Prussia, Russia and Austria
- 5 Oct. 1763 Death of Augustus III
- May 1764 Reforms of the Convocation Sejm
- 6 Sept. 1764 Election of king Stanisław August Poniatowski
- Feb. 1768 Confederacy of Bar inaugurates civil conflict in Poland
- 5 Aug. 1772 Conventions of St Petersburg between Russia, Prussia and Austria: First Partition of Poland
- 14 Oct. 1773 Establishment of the Commission for National Education
- 1788–92 The Four Years Sejm
- 3 May 1791 Enactment of a reformed constitution
- May 1792 Russian invasion of Poland, supposedly at the invitation of the Confederacy of Targowica
- 23 Jan. 1793 Treaty of St Petersburg: Russia and Prussia agree on the Second Partition of Poland
- Mar.–Oct. 1794 Kościuszko’s Insurrection

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- 3 Jan. 1795 Treaty of St Petersburg: Russia and Austria agree on the Third Partition of Poland (accepted by Prussia, 24 October)
- 25 Nov. 1795 King Stanisław August Poniatowski abdicates
- 12 Feb. 1798 Death of Stanisław August Poniatowski
- 1798–1800 Polish legions in Italy under French aegis
- 1803 Tsar Alexander I reopens a Polish university in Wilno (Vilnius)
- 1805 Collapse of Czartoryski's plan for restoration of Poland in union with Russia (October)
- 1807 Creation of the Napoleonic duchy of Warsaw (July); abolition of serfdom in the duchy of Warsaw
- 1809 Duchy of Warsaw enlarged (October)
- 1812 Napoleon's expedition to Moscow with Polish participation
- 1813 Russian forces occupy the duchy of Warsaw
- 1815 Russo–Austrian–Prussian treaties on Poland (3 May); Final Treaty of Vienna (9 June): creation of the 'Congress' Kingdom of Poland with Tsar Alexander I as king; creation of the Grand Duchy of Posen (Poznań) and of the Free City of Kraków; introduction of Alexander I's constitution for his Polish kingdom (24 December)
- 1816 University of Warsaw founded by Tsar Alexander I
- 1818 Opening of the first session of the Sejm of 'Congress' Poland (27 March)
- 1820 Opening of the second session of the Polish Sejm (13 September): Alexander I warns against the abuse of liberty; Adam Mickiewicz's 'Ode to Youth'
- 1821 Alexander I bans all secret societies in 'Congress' Poland (November)
- 1823 Czartoryski dismissed as curator of Wilno university (October)
- 1825 Tsar Nicholas I succeeds Alexander I as Polish king (1 December)
- 1827–8 Trial of the Polish 'Decembrists'
- 1830 November Insurrection against Russian rule (starts 29 November)
- 1831 Deposition of Nicholas I by the Polish Sejm (25 January); Russo-Polish war; fall of Warsaw (September); beginning of the 'Great Emigration'
- 1832 Nicholas I's Organic Statute abolishes the Polish Constitution (February); Polish Democratic Society founded in Paris (March)
- 1834 Publication in Paris of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*

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- 1839 Greek Catholic Church absorbed by the Russian Orthodox Church
- 1840 Russian law replaces the Lithuanian legal code in the western governships of the Russian Empire
- 1846 Revolution in Kraków (February); Polish nobles massacred by peasants in western Galicia (February–March); Austria annexes Kraków (16 November)
- 1848–9 Polish participation in the ‘Springtime of Nations’; insurrection in Poznania and in Kraków and Lwów; abolition of serfdom in the Austrian Empire
- 1850 Abolition of customs barrier between Russia and ‘Congress’ Poland
- 1861 Abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire (February); unrest in Warsaw; Marquis Wielopolski appointed head of civilian administration in ‘Congress’ Poland (March); Jews granted equal rights in ‘Congress’ Poland
- 1863 Outbreak of insurrection against Russian rule in Russian Poland (22 January)
- 1864 Tsar Alexander II grants generous property rights to the Kingdom’s peasants (March); execution of last insurgent leader Romuald Traugutt (5 August)
- 1869 Introduction of provincial autonomy in Austrian Poland (Galicia)
- 1872 Compulsory German-language schooling introduced in Prussian Poland
- 1873 Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic Church extends to Prussian Poland
- 1882 First Marxist society on Polish soil founded by Ludwik Waryński
- 1886 Bismarck creates a special fund to buy out Polish-owned estates in Prussia
- 1888 Poles in Prussia found a Land Bank
- 1892 Polish Socialist Party (PPS) founded in Paris (November)
- 1893 Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP) formed by Rosa Luxemburg in Warsaw (July); becomes the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) in 1900
- 1895 Polish Peasant Party founded in Rzeszów (August)
- 1897 National Democratic Party (‘Endecja’) founded by Roman Dmowski
- 1905 Revolution in the Russian Empire (and in Russian Poland); October Manifesto promises liberalization within the Russian Empire
- 1906 Opening of the First Duma in St Petersburg; Polish Socialist Party splits (November)

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- 1907 Universal male suffrage introduced in Austria
- 1911 Introduction of elected local councils (*zemstwa*) in the western governorships of the Russian Empire
- 1912 Region of Chełm detached from ‘Congress’ Poland and incorporated into the Russian Empire
- 1914 Outbreak of the First World War; Piłsudski’s legions enter Russian Poland with little success (6–9 August); Russian commander-in-chief issues manifesto promising a reunified Poland under the tsar (14 August)
- 1915 Russian forces expelled from Poland by the Central Powers (August)
- 1916 Restoration of the Kingdom of Poland by German and Austrian emperors (5 November)
- 1917 Creation of a Polish army in France (June); Dmowski establishes the Polish National Committee in Paris (15 August); Regency Council created in German-occupied Warsaw (15 October); Lithuanian ‘Taryba’ calls for Lithuanian independence (11 December)
- 1918 Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points include an independent Poland with access to the sea (8 January); treaty of Brest-Litovsk (3 March); Belarusian National Council in Minsk proclaims the independence of Belarus (25 March); start of Polish-Ukrainian fighting for control of Lwów and east Galicia (31 October); declaration of Polish Independence in Warsaw (11 November); Piłsudski assumes power in Warsaw; creation of the Polish Communist Party (16 December); start of successful anti-German uprising in Poznań (27 December)
- 1919 Elections to the first Sejm of re-born Poland (26 January); National Democrats the largest party; France, UK and Italy recognize the independence of Poland (24–27 February); treaty of Versailles transfers Poznań and West Prussia (the so-called ‘Polish Corridor’) to Poland (28 June); Polish forces occupy Wilno (19 April) and Minsk (8 August); Poles establish complete control over east Galicia (June–July); ‘Curzon Line’ proposed by the Great Powers as Poland’s provisional eastern demarcation line (8 December)
- 1920 Polish–Ukrainian alliance (21 April); Polish forces enter Kiev (8 May); plebiscite in southern East Prussia (11 July); coalition Government of National Defence formed under Witos (24 July); Bolshevik counter-offensive turned back at the battle of Warsaw (16–18 August); ‘mutinous’ Polish forces seize Wilno (9 October)

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- 1921 Franco–Polish alliance (9 February); Polish–Romanian defence treaty (3 March); adoption of a new constitution (17 March); treaty of Riga with Bolshevik Russia (18 March); plebiscite in Upper Silesia (20 March); Witos’ centre-left government toppled (June); German–Polish partition of Upper Silesia (20 October)
- 1922 Incorporation of Wilno by Poland (24 March); assassination of president Narutowicz (16 December)
- 1923 Conference of Ambassadors in Paris recognizes Poland’s eastern border (15 March); centre-right coalition government under Witos (May–December); non-party government under Władysław Grabski (19 December)
- 1924 Monetary reform: Polish *złoty* introduced (April)
- 1925 Construction begins of a new port in Gdynia; Concordat with the Catholic Church (10 February); German–Polish tariff war starts (15 June); a grand coalition government under Aleksander Skrzyński replaces Grabski’s administration (20 November)
- 1926 Skrzyński resigns (5 April); centre-right government under Witos (10 May); Piłsudski’s coup d’état (12 May); beginning of the ‘Sanacja’ regime
- 1928 Creation of the Non-Party Bloc of Co-operation with the Government (BBWR); parliamentary elections (3 March); eclipse of the National Democrats
- 1929 Parties of the centre and the left form alliance against the ‘Sanacja’ (September); the Great Depression hits Poland
- 1930 Piłsudski becomes prime minister (August–December); incarceration in Brześć of political opponents of Piłsudski’s regime (10 September–29 December); pacification of eastern Galicia (September–November); BBWR largest party in the November elections
- 1931 Formation of a single Polish Peasant Party (PSL)
- 1932 Polish–Soviet Treaty of Non-Aggression (25 July); Colonel Józef Beck becomes foreign minister (2 November)
- 1933 Polish–German tension over the Free City of Danzig (February–March)
- 1934 Polish–German Treaty of Non-Aggression: end of Polish–German tariff war (26 January); Polish–Soviet Treaty of Non-Aggression extended for ten years (12 February)
- 1935 New Polish constitution strengthens presidential powers (23 April); death of Marshal Piłsudski (12 May)
- 1936 Centrist opposition politicians form the ‘Morges Front’

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- (February); General Edward Rydz-Śmigły becomes Marshal of Poland (10 November)
- 1937 Launching of the four-year state investment plan and of the Central Industrial Region (COP) (February)
- 1938 Polish ultimatum to Lithuania (17 March) leads to the establishment of diplomatic relations (31 March); Stalin dissolves the Polish Communist Party (March); Polish ultimatum (30 September) leads to the surrender of Teschen by Czechoslovakia (1 October)
- 1939 Polish government declines Hitler's offer of alliance (26 March); British guarantee of Polish independence (31 March); Hitler repudiates the Polish–German treaty of 1934 (28 April); Franco–Polish military agreement (19 May); Poland declines consent for the transit of Soviet forces through its territory (19 August); Nazi–Soviet Pact (23–24 August); Anglo–Polish treaty of alliance (25 August); Nazi Germany invades Poland (1 September); Soviet forces invade Poland (17 September); Polish government and High Command cross into Romania (17–18 September); Warsaw surrenders to the Germans (27 September); Nazi–Soviet demarcation line established across partitioned Poland (28 September); Polish government-in-exile formed in Paris under General Sikorski (30 September)
- 1940 Deportations of Poles to the Soviet interior begin (February); Sikorski's government moves to London (June); Polish pilots in action during the battle of Britain (August–September); creation of the Warsaw ghetto (October)
- 1941 Nazi invasion of the USSR (22 June); Polish–Soviet treaty signed in London by Sikorski and ambassador Maisky (30 July)
- 1942 Wannsee conference (January): gradual liquidation by the Nazis of Jewish ghettos in occupied Poland; creation of the communist Polish Worker Party (PPR) (January); creation of the Home Army (AK) (14 February)
- 1943 Union of Polish Patriots formed in USSR (March); Jewish insurrection in the Warsaw ghetto (April–May); revelation of the Katyn massacre (April); Stalin suspends diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile (25 April); General Sikorski killed off Gibraltar (4 July); decisions of the Three-Power conference at Teheran on Poland's future frontiers (November–December)
- 1944 Creation of the Soviet-backed Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) (22 July); Polish forces in