

A CONCISE HISTORY OF POLAND

Poland is a tenacious survivor-state: it was wiped off the map in 1795, resurrected after the First World War, apparently annihilated again in the Second, and reduced to satellite status of the Soviet Union after 1945. Yet it emerged in the vanguard of resistance to the USSR in the 1980s, albeit as a much more homogeneous entity than it had been in its multi-ethnic past. This book outlines Poland's turbulent and complex history, from its medieval Christian origins to the reassertion of that Christian and European heritage after forty-five years of communism. It describes Poland's transformation since 1989, and explains how Poland navigated its way into a new Commonwealth of Nations in the European Union.

Recent years have witnessed significant changes within Poland, Eastern Europe and the wider world. This new edition reflects on these changes, and examines the current issues facing a Poland which some would accuse of being out of touch with 'European values'.

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Jerzy Lukowski , Hubert Zawadzki
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THIRD EDITION

JERZY LUKOWSKI
and
HUBERT ZAWADZKI

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For

Lesley and Francesca

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

It was gratifying to have been approached by Cambridge University Press with a request for a new edition of the *Concise History of Poland*, following the editions of 2001 and 2006. This latest edition is primarily concerned with casting light on Poland's evolution since joining the European Union: the economic and social contrasts resulting from the 'neoliberal' transformation of the country and the accompanying political battles which have produced a growing polarization in Polish political life.

For those who have a particular interest in the history of an earlier Poland, we strongly recommend the magisterially forensic work by Professor Robert Frost, volume 1 of the *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania* (Oxford 2015), which looks at the development of the Polish state under the Jagiellonian dynasty. We look forward to the appearance of the successor volume, covering the period 1569–1815 – though it will be some years before it appears.

For the extended Part Two we would like to thank Michael Laird again for his very useful comments on the revised chapter 8; Farrokh Assad for his regular supply of media reports on Poland; and Will Zawadzki for his technical help with maps and illustrations. And particular thanks for all their help and co-operation to Elizabeth Friend-Smith and Abigail Walkington at Cambridge University Press.

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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

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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

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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, 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

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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

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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

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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 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 pleasantly 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

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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.

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, ó	‘u’, as in ‘shook’
y	‘i’, as in ‘bit’
Ch, ch	‘h’ as in ‘house’
Ci, ci	short ‘chee’, as in ‘chit’
Ć, ć	‘ch’, as in ‘chop’
Cz, cz	as the above, but harsher
C, c	‘ts’ as in ‘pots’, except in the combinations ‘ch’, ‘ci’ and ‘cz’
J, j	‘y’ as in ‘yet’
Ł, ł	‘w’ as in ‘wet’
ń	slightly softened ‘n’ – as in Spanish ‘ñ’
Si, si	short ‘she’, as in ‘ship’
Ś, ś	‘sh’ as in ‘shut’
Sz, sz	as the above, but harsher
Rz, rz, Ź, ź	as the above, but with a ‘z’ sound (zh as in ‘Zhukov’)

A Note on Polish Pronunciation

W, w	‘v’ as in vile
Zi, zi	pronounced as first two letters of French ‘gîte’
Ż, ż	pronounced as first letter of French ‘gîte’

CHRONOLOGY

- 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

Chronology

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: <i>Neminem captivabimus nisi iure victum</i>
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 Apr. 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

Chronology

1648	Ukrainian revolt erupts under the leadership of Bohdan Khmel'nytskyi
1652	Władysław Siciński is the first individual envoy to disrupt a Sejm through the liberum veto
Jan. 1654	Union of Pereiaslav between the Ukraine and Muscovy
1655	Muscovite and Swedish invasions of the Commonwealth: the 'Deluge' begins
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 <i>Collegium Nobilium</i> by Stanisław Konarski
1756–63	The Seven Years' War: neutral Poland serves as a 'wayside inn' for the armies of Prussia, Russia and Austria

Chronology

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
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

Chronology

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 <i>Pan Tadeusz</i>
1839	Greek Catholic Church absorbed by the Russian Orthodox Church
1840	Russian law replaces the Lithuanian legal code in the western governorates 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 Poznań 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)

Chronology

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| 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 <i>Kulturkampf</i> 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) |
| 1907 | Universal male suffrage introduced in Austria |
| 1911 | Introduction of elected local councils (<i>zemstva</i>) in the western governorates 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) |

Chronology

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| 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 reborn 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) |

Chronology

- 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)

Chronology

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| 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’ (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); mass executions of Polish officers, policemen and officials by the Soviet NKVD in |

Chronology

- Katyn and elsewhere (April–May); 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 Workers' 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 in plane crash 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 action at the battles at Monte Cassino (May), Falaise (August) and Arnhem (September); Warsaw Uprising (1 August–2 October); Mikołajczyk resigns from the premiership of the government-in-exile (24 November); PKWN declares itself the 'Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland' (31 December)
- 1945 Yalta Conference (February); communist-led Polish 'provisional government' signs 20-year treaty of friendship with USSR (21 April); UK and USA withdraw their recognition of the Polish government in London (5 July); Potsdam Conference establishes the Oder–Neisse line as the western limit of Polish administration (July–August); Polish–Soviet frontier agreement (16 August)
- 1946 Decree for the nationalization of industrial enterprises (3 January); start of systematic deportation of

Chronology

- the German population from Poland (14 February); rigged referendum (30 June); anti-Jewish pogrom in Kielce (4 July); Polish armed forces in the West dissolved (3 September)
- 1947 Communists and their allies win rigged elections in Poland (19 January); elimination of anti-communist opposition; government in Warsaw declines participation in the Marshall Plan (9 July); Mikołajczyk flees to the West (21 October)
- 1948 Stalinist regime introduced; Polish Socialist Party unites with the communists to form the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) (15–21 December)
- 1949 Creation of a central economic planning office (10 February); pro-communist United Peasant Party created (27–29 November); start of collectivization of farms
- 1950 Launch of the Six-Year Plan for rapid industrialization (21 July)
- 1951 Gomułka arrested (2 August)
- 1952 First Polish-language broadcast from Munich by Radio Free Europe (3 May); introduction of the Stalinist constitution: proclamation of the Polish People's Republic (22 July)
- 1954 Józef Światło's revelations on Radio Free Europe (December)
- 1955 Central Committee of the PZPR condemns Stalinist repression (21–24 January); formation of the Warsaw Pact (14 May)
- 1956 Workers uprising in Poznań (28–29 June); Gomułka becomes leader of the PZPR (21 October); end of Stalinism in Poland; Cardinal Wyszyński released from detention (29 October)
- 1965 Polish–Soviet friendship treaty renewed for another 20 years (8 April); Polish bishops' letter of reconciliation to German Roman Catholic episcopate (18 November)
- 1966 Rival State–Church celebrations of the millennium of Polish statehood and of Poland's baptism (April and June)

Chronology

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| 1967 | Arab–Israeli war (June) leads to communist condemnation of ‘Zionists’ in Poland |
| 1968 | Student protests across Poland (March); anti-Semitic purge of the PZPR (March): forced emigration of intelligentsia of Jewish origin |
| 1970 | West Germany recognizes <i>de facto</i> the Oder–Neisse Line as the western border of Poland (7 December); strikes in Gdańsk and along the coast (14–19 December); Edward Gierek replaces Gomułka as communist leader (20 December) |
| 1971 | Strikes in Szczecin (22–24 January) |
| 1972 | Vatican recognizes the post-war Polish ecclesiastical administration in the ex-German territories (June) |
| 1975 | Helsinki Final Act signed (1 August): recognition of post-war borders and of human rights |
| 1976 | Workers’ demonstrations in Radom (25 June); creation of the Committee for Defence of Workers (KOR) (23 September) |
| 1978 | Cardinal Karol Wojtyła is elected Pope John Paul II (16 October) |
| 1979 | Pope John Paul II visits Poland (2–10 June) |
| 1980 | Strikes spread across Poland (July): the creation of Solidarity with Lech Wałęsa as leader (16 August); Miłosz’s Nobel Prize for literature (9 October) |
| 1981 | Rural Solidarity recognized by the authorities (12 May); General Jaruzelski replaces Kania as PZPR leader (18 October); Jaruzelski introduces martial law (12–13 December) |
| 1983 | Martial law formally suspended (22 July); Wałęsa receives the Nobel Peace Prize (5 October) |
| 1985 | Warsaw Pact renewed for further 20 years (26 April) |
| 1987 | President Reagan ends sanctions against Poland (19 February) |
| 1988 | End of jamming of Radio Free Europe (1 January) |
| 1989 | Round-table talks between the communist government and the opposition (6 February–5 April); semi-free elections (4 June); Gorbachev’s consent for Poland to determine its own political |

Chronology

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| | future (3 July); Tadeusz Mazowiecki becomes the first non-communist prime minister in the Soviet bloc (19 August); Poland ceases to be a so-called 'People's Republic' (29 December) |
| 1990 | Balcerowicz's economic reforms (January); PZPR dissolves itself (27–29 January) and is replaced by a social democratic party, labelled in 1991 as the Left Democratic Alliance (SLD); re-emergence of the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) (May); reunited Germany recognizes the Oder–Neisse frontier (14 November); Wałęsa succeeds Jaruzelski as president of the Third Republic (December) |
| 1991 | Polish–German treaty of friendship (17 June); dissolution of Comecon (June) and of the Warsaw Pact (July); first fully democratic elections since the Second World War (October); Poland recognizes the independence of Ukraine (December) |
| 1992 | Poland signs treaties of good neighbourliness and co-operation with Ukraine (18 May), Russia (22 May) and Belarus (23 June); Hanna Suchocka forms a centre-right government (July) |
| 1993 | Remaining Russian troops leave Poland (18 September); Waldemar Pawlak forms a centre-left government (October) |
| 1994 | Polish–Lithuanian treaty (April) |
| 1995 | Revaluation of the Polish <i>złoty</i> (January); centre-left administration under Józef Oleksy (March); Aleksander Kwaśniewski elected president (November) |
| 1996 | Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz becomes centre-left prime minister (7 February) |
| 1997 | New liberal constitution endorsed by popular referendum (25 May); centre-right coalition with Jerzy Buzek as prime minister (September) |
| 1998 | Sejm ratifies Concordat with the Vatican (February) |
| 1999 | Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic join NATO (12 March) |
| 2000 | Kwaśniewski re-elected as president (8 October) |

Chronology

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| 2001 | Parliamentary elections (September); implosion of Solidarity; centre-left government under Leszek Miller |
| 2003 | Poland joins the US-led invasion of Iraq (20 March); national referendum on joining the European Union (7 and 8 June) |
| 2004 | Poland formally joins the EU (1 May); Marek Belka forms a government of experts (June) |
| 2005 | Death of Pope John Paul II (2 April); swing to the right in parliamentary elections (September); Lech Kaczyński elected president (October); Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz appointed prime minister (November) |
| 2006 | Coalition between Law and Justice (PiS), Self-Defence, and the League of Polish Families (LPR) (April); Jarosław Kaczyński becomes prime minister (July) |
| 2007 | PiS–Self-Defence–LPR coalition disintegrates (August); Donald Tusk becomes prime minister and heads a coalition government including the Citizens Platform (PO) and the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) (October); Poland withdraws its troops from Iraq but maintains its contingent in Afghanistan; Poland joins Schengen (December) |
| 2009 | Poland avoids a recession during the world economic crisis |
| 2010 | President Lech Kaczyński with his party of officials, en route to Katyn commemorations, perish in an air crash near Smolensk (10 April); Bronisław Komorowski, the speaker of the Sejm, assumes functions of head of state; Komorowski elected president (July) |
| 2011 | PO–PSL returned to power for second term with Tusk as prime minister (October); Poland's six-month presidency of the European Council (July–December) |
| 2012 | European football championships held in Poland and Ukraine (June–July) |

Chronology

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| 2014 | Tusk moves to Brussels as President of the European Council and is succeeded by Ewa Kopacz as prime minister (September) |
| 2015 | Andrzej Duda elected president (May); PiS wins the parliamentary elections with an absolute majority in the Sejm (October); the left fails to win a single seat in the Sejm; Beata Szydło becomes prime minister. |
| 2017 | Mateusz Morawiecki replaces Szydło as prime minister (December) |
| 2018 | Centenary of Poland's independence (11 November) |