



*Your Path  
to the  
Pole's  
Card*



**Your Roots<sup>®</sup>  
in Poland**

**2025**

**An Ebook  
for participants  
preparing for  
the Pole's Card  
interview**



## Welcome to our course!

It's great that you are here and reaching for this e-book - developed as part of the Pole's Card Course. This means that an important decision has been made: not only to apply for the Pole's Card, but also to get to know the country with which you are connected by family roots.

This course was created for people who want to feel closer to Poland and understand its history, language, traditions and values. It is not just a tool to prepare for an interview with a consul. It is an invitation to discover stories about Poland: people, customs, holidays and everyday life that shape the identity of this country.

The e-book will help you organize the most important information from the course, return to it at any time, and learn at your own pace. It was created not only to impart knowledge, but also to inspire and accompany you on this unique journey - towards a better understanding of Poland and your relationship with it.

We are happy to guide you on this journey.

Behind the course you have just started, there are three women who have been brought together by their passion for genealogy, history and helping others discover their Polish roots. We are the Your Roots in Poland team - a company that has been supporting people around the world for over a decade in regaining their citizenship, obtaining the Pole's Card and building a deeper relationship with Poland.

**Kinga Urbańska** – genealogist, historian and archivist, certified genealogist for the state of New York. Co-founder of Your Roots in Poland and the Twoje Korzenie w Polsce association. She specializes in the history of Galicia, inheritance research and non-metrical sources. She speaks at international conferences and conducts workshops in Poland and abroad.

**Karolina Szlęzak** – genealogist, historian and archivist, co-founder of Your Roots in Poland and the Your Roots in Poland Association. Since 2011, she has been managing the company, conducting genealogical and inheritance research, creating educational publications and building relationships with clients around the world. In her work, she combines historical knowledge with modern educational tools.

**Helena Ushenko** – lawyer, researcher and specialist in legalization of stay in Poland. A Ukrainian of Polish descent with extensive experience in European Union migration law, genealogy and archival work. She helps in obtaining the Pole's Card, visas, permanent residence and citizenship, also conducting genealogical research in Eastern European archives.

Each of us brings something unique to the course: knowledge, experience, many years of practice and, most importantly, empathy. We know very well that discovering Polish roots is more than a formal process. It is a personal story that deserves attention and understanding.

**Kinga, Karolina, Helena**  
**Your Roots in Poland** team



## About the Pole's Card

**Let's discuss what the Pole's Card is, who can obtain it, and what rights it grants to those who possess it.**

## Introduction

The Pole's Card is a unique document that allows people of Polish descent to maintain strong ties with Poland, both culturally and nationally. For many, it is a symbol of pride in Polish heritage and a testament to belonging to the Polish Nation. It grants access to numerous privileges – from simplified immigration procedures and access to education and culture in Poland to financial support and consular assistance.

Thanks to the Pole's Card, many individuals have been able to start a new chapter in their lives, such as settling in Poland, advancing their careers, or deepening their connection with Polish culture and traditions. It is also a tool for gaining a deeper understanding of one's roots and preserving Polish heritage while living abroad.

Moreover, the Pole's Card serves as a response to the needs of the Polish diaspora, especially in countries where support for national minorities may be limited. For individuals from the former Eastern Borderlands, the Pole's Card provides an opportunity to reconnect with their ancestors' homeland, while for Poles in other parts of the world, it fosters a sense of belonging to a global Polish community.

## Legal Basis

The Pole's Card was introduced by the Act of March 29, 2008, with the aim of strengthening ties with the Polish diaspora and reinforcing national identity among those who identify with Polish culture and traditions.

The Act on the Pole's Card defines exactly who can apply for this document and what rights it grants. According to its provisions, the Pole's Card serves as confirmation of belonging to the Polish Nation for individuals who do not hold Polish citizenship or permanent residence rights in Poland. This document is not equivalent to a Polish passport but provides access to numerous benefits.

Initially, the Pole's Card was available only to citizens of the former USSR republics. However, an amendment in 2019 expanded its availability to citizens of all countries worldwide, provided they meet specific criteria, significantly increasing its popularity.

The Act specifies:

- Who can apply for the Pole's Card.
- The rights granted to cardholders.
- The required documents and application procedure.

**Excerpt from the Act (Article 2, Section 1):**

„The Pole's Card is granted to a person who, in a written statement before a Polish consul, confirms their belonging to the Polish Nation, has at least a basic knowledge of the Polish language, and demonstrates connections with Polish culture and traditions.”

**Excerpt from the Act (Article 3):**

„The granting of the Pole's Card does not equate to acquiring Polish citizenship or obtaining a permanent residence permit in the Republic of Poland but confirms belonging to the Polish Nation.”

## Eligibility Criteria

To obtain the Pole's Card, an applicant must:

- Submit a written declaration before a Polish consul confirming their belonging to the Polish Nation.
- Have at least a basic command of the Polish language and treat it as their native language.
- Possess knowledge of Polish history, culture, and traditions and demonstrate ties to Polish national identity.
- Prove their Polish ancestry by presenting documents showing that at least one parent, grandparent, or two great-grandparents were of Polish nationality. Alternatively, a certificate from a Polish diaspora organization confirming active involvement in promoting Polish culture for at least three years may also serve as a basis for obtaining the Pole's Card.

## Rights Granted by the Pole's Card

The Pole's Card offers a wide range of privileges, including:

- The right to obtain a free long-term national visa allowing multiple entries into Poland.
- The ability to work in Poland without the need for additional permits.
- Free education at public universities in Poland and access to scholarship programs.

- A 37% discount on railway transport in Poland and free admission to state museums.
- The right to use public healthcare services in emergency cases.
- Financial assistance for the first nine months of residence in Poland and the opportunity to apply for permanent residency and, later, Polish citizenship.

Additionally, Pole's Card holders may seek consular assistance in life-threatening or security-related situations.

## Popularity of the Pole's Card

From its introduction until 2019, the Pole's Card was most frequently issued to citizens of Ukraine and Belarus. According to statistics, about 91.4% of all issued cards went to residents of these two countries. This is due to historical ties – Poland had strong connections with these regions, and the local Polish communities maintained their cultural distinctiveness despite challenging political conditions.

It is worth noting that the expansion of the Pole's Card's availability to citizens of other countries has increased interest in the document among the global Polish diaspora, highlighting the worldwide significance of this initiative.

**Excerpts from the Main Act Article 6, Section 1:**

„The Consul of the Republic of Poland reviews applications for the Pole's Card, taking into account evidence confirming the applicant's Polish descent.”

**Article 9, Section 2:**

„A person granted the Pole's Card is entitled to benefits and rights specified in separate regulations.”

**Article 11:**

„A decision to grant the Pole's Card is subject to administrative review and may be revoked if irregularities in the granting process are discovered.”

## Summary

The Pole's Card is a document that acts as a bridge connecting people of Polish descent living abroad with their homeland – Poland.

Remember, the Pole's Card is not just a document but an opportunity to open doors to new possibilities – both personal and professional. Investing time in learning about Polish heritage and culture will enrich your life in many ways. With our help, you can become an ambassador of Polish identity in your community, and obtaining the Pole's Card will be just the beginning of an exciting journey. Enroll in a course today and start your path to discovering Poland and obtaining the Pole's Card!

## Additional Legal Information on the Pole's Card

As a document of significant importance to the Polish diaspora worldwide, the Pole's Card is regulated by several legal acts, including the main law and subsequent amendments. Below is a detailed description of the regulations and guidance on where to find the full texts of these documents.

## Primary Act on the Pole's Card

The main legal act governing the granting and use of the Pole's Card is: **The Act of September 7, 2007, on the Pole's Card** (Signed on March 29, 2008, Journal of Laws 2007 No. 180, item 1280).

## Amendments to the Pole's Card Act

**Amendment of June 13, 2019 (Journal of Laws 2019, item 1095):**

- Extended eligibility for the Pole's Card to people of Polish descent living in all countries, not just the former USSR republics.
- Introduced new regulations regarding the recognition of Polish ancestry based on documents.

**Amendment of December 19, 2022 (Journal of Laws 2023, item 45):**

- Adjusted regulations for submitting applications in exceptional situations, such as armed conflicts (particularly in response to the war in Ukraine).

## Implementing Regulations

**Regulation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of April 2, 2008**

**(Journal of Laws 2008 No. 61, item 378):**

- Specifies the design of the Pole's Card, including the placement of the photograph, name, and other data.

**Regulation of the Minister of Interior and Administration of January 10, 2020**

**(Journal of Laws 2020, item 55):**

- Introduced simplified procedures for applicants at consulates and defined detailed rules for verifying Polish ancestry.

## Where to Find the Full Texts of Legal Acts?

- **Sejm's Legal Acts Database:**

All laws and regulations related to the Pole's Card can be found in the online legal acts system on the website of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland: [isap.sejm.gov.pl](http://isap.sejm.gov.pl).

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs:**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides detailed information, forms, and updates on the Pole's Card in the relevant section of its website: [gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/karta-polaka](http://gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/karta-polaka).

- **Monitor Polski (Official Gazette of Poland):**

The Monitor Polski publishes announcements regarding amendments and regulations related to this document: [monitorpolski.gov.pl](http://monitorpolski.gov.pl).



## Lesson 1

# National Symbols of Poland

We will discuss what Poland's national symbols are and learn about their history.

Poland's national symbols are:

- I. the flag
- II. the coat of arms
- III. and the national anthem

The legal regulations regarding Polish national symbols were established by the *Act of January 31, 1980, on the Emblem, Colors, and Anthem of the Republic of Poland and on State Seals* (original title: *Act on the Emblem, Colors, and Anthem of the Polish People's Republic*).

## I. The Flag of Poland

The Polish flag is an important symbol of the restored state. It consists of two horizontal stripes: the top one is white, and the bottom one is red. The flag was officially recognized as a national symbol on May 3, 1792, marking the first anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of May 3, 1791.

Since 2004, May 2 has been celebrated as the Flag Day of the Republic of Poland, emphasizing the importance of this symbol in the nation's life.

It is worth noting that since 1955, Poland has officially recognized two types of state flags. In addition to the standard white and red flag, there is also a version featuring Poland's emblem on a white rectangle. This variant is known as the state flag with the emblem.

## II. The Coat of Arms (Emblem)

The Coat of Arms of the Republic of Poland depicts a white eagle on a red background, wearing a golden crown, with golden talons and a beak turned to the right. The eagle's image dates back to the reign of Polish King Bolesław Chrobry. The official Polish coat of arms began to be used in 1295 by King Przemysł II, who was the first to place a crowned eagle as the state symbol on the reverse of his royal seal.

During the communist era, Poland's coat of arms was deprived of its crown, which was seen as a symbol of the nation's loss of sovereignty. The eagle regained its crown in 1989, returning to the design from 1927.

## III. The Polish National Anthem - „Mazurek Dąbrowskiego”

„Mazurek Dąbrowskiego” is a patriotic song that has served as Poland's national anthem since 1927. Before that, the role of the national anthem was fulfilled by the song „Bogurodzica”, which likely originated between the 12th and 13th centuries.

The anthem was composed by Józef Wybicki in 1797 in Italy and was originally performed as „Song of the Polish Legions” in Italy. The anthem expresses the unwavering will to fight and the patriotism of Poles, motivating the nation during difficult times. The melody of „Mazurek Dąbrowskiego” is often played at major national ceremonies, evoking emotions and a sense of unity among Poles.

### **Anthem Lyrics:**

*Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła,  
Kiedy my żyjemy.  
Co nam obca przemoc wzięła,  
Szablą odbierzemy.*

### **Chorus:**

*Marsz, marsz, Dąbrowski,  
Z ziemi włoskiej do Polski.  
Za twoim przewodem  
Złączym się z narodem.  
Przejdziem Wisłę, przejdziem Wartę,  
Będziem Polakami.  
Dał nam przykład Bonaparte,  
Jak zwyciężać mamy.*

### **(Chorus)**

*Jak Czarniecki do Poznania  
Po szwedzkim zaborze,  
Dla ojczyzny ratowania  
Wrócim się przez morze.*

### **(Chorus)**

*Już tam ojciec do swej Basi  
Mówi zapłakany  
– Słuchaj jeno, pono nasi  
Biją w tarabany.*

### **(Chorus)**

- You can listen to „Mazurek Dąbrowskiego” by clicking on the recording presented on slide 11 of this lesson.



## I. Location and neighbors:

Poland is a Central European country with a total area of 322,575 km<sup>2</sup>, making it the ninth largest country in Europe. It borders several countries, giving it significant geopolitical importance in the region. Poland has a total of seven neighbors:

- To the west: **Germany**. Germany is one of Poland's most important economic partners within the European Union.
- To the south: **the Czech Republic** and **Slovakia**, which support regional integration and cooperation in the mountain tourism sector. These two countries are popular tourist destinations for many Poles.
- To the east: **Ukraine** and **Belarus**, which are significant both historically and politically.
- To the north: **Lithuania** and **Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast)**, which influence local political relations, particularly in the context of maritime transport and trade development in the Baltic region.

## II. Mountains:

Poland features diverse mountain landscapes, with three major mountain ranges: the Carpathians, the Sudetes, and the Świętokrzyskie Mountains.

- **The Carpathians** extend from the Polish Silesia through Ukraine to Romania. In Poland, they include the Beskids, the Tatra Mountains, the Pieniny, and the Bieszczady. The highest Polish peak, Rysy, has an altitude of 2,501 meters above sea level and is located on the border with Slovakia.
- **The Sudetes** are located in the Lower Silesia region, near the Czech border. These mountains are a popular tourist destination, and their highest peak, Śnieżka (1,603.3 m above sea level), attracts many hiking enthusiasts.
- **The Świętokrzyskie Mountains**, with Łysica (614 m above sea level) as their highest peak, are known not only for their picturesque landscapes but also for their rich history. On Łysa Góra, there is a monastery, and the mountains' name originates from the relics of the



## Lesson 2

### Geography of Poland

Let's talk about the basic geography of Poland. We will locate Poland on the world map, identify its neighbors, and present the most important mountain ranges, rivers, lakes, and national parks within its territory.

Holy Cross that were once kept there. This site holds religious significance and is an attractive destination for tourists who wish to experience nature.

### III. National parks:

There are 23 national parks in Poland, playing a key role in protecting unique ecosystems and biodiversity. Each park has its own distinctive features and attractions, drawing visitors from both Poland and abroad. Here are the most popular ones:

- **Białowieża National Park** is one of the oldest parks in Poland, established in 1932. In 1977, it was listed by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve and a natural World Heritage Site. One of the park's main attractions is the bison breeding program, as the bison is a symbol of the Białowieża Forest. The park also offers pristine forests and diverse wildlife and plant life.
- **Tatra National Park**, created in 1954, covers almost the entire Polish part of the Tatra Mountains and borders a Slovak national park. Among the most important attractions are the picturesque Morskie Oko lake and the popular town of Zakopane, known as Poland's „winter capital.” Tourists can take a cable car to Kasprowy Wierch, which offers breathtaking views. Another famous viewpoint is the panorama of the Tatra Mountains from Gubałówka.
- **Bieszczady National Park**, established in 1973, is located near Rzeszów, in a region historically inhabited by the Lemkos. The park is characterized by its rolling mountain meadows, known as „połoniny,” which cover the peaks of the Bieszczady. It is an excellent destination for hiking enthusiasts and those who want to experience unspoiled nature and admire stunning landscapes.

### IV. Rivers:

Poland also has an extensive network of rivers, the most important of which is **the Vistula**, which is also the longest Polish river, measuring 1,047 km in length. It flows through many major cities, such as Kraków, Sandomierz, Warsaw, and Toruń.

Another significant river is **the Warta**, which runs through Poznań, and **the Bug**, which serves as a natural border with Belarus. **The Oder** partially marks the border between Poland and Germany. Poland is often referred to as the land between the Oder and the Bug.

### V. Lakes:

In northeastern Poland lies the region of Warmia and Masuria, also known as the „Land of a Thousand Lakes.” Among the most important lakes, there are Śniardwy, which is the largest in Poland with an area of 114 km<sup>2</sup>, as well as Mamry, the second-largest at 104 km<sup>2</sup>, and Hańcza, which is the deepest, reaching a depth of 108 meters.

The longest lake in Poland is Jeziorak, with a length of 27.5 km. One of the most famous lakes in Poland is Morskie Oko, located in the High Tatras in the Rybi Potok Valley.





## Lesson 3

# Administrative Division of Poland

Let's discuss how Poland's administrative division is structured – we will look at the voivodeships and their capitals. We will also present and characterize historical-geographical regions as well as list and describe the country's main commercial ports.

## I. Voivodeships

- Counties
- Municipalities

Poland is divided into 16 voivodeships, which are further divided into 314 counties and approximately 2,500 municipalities. This administrative division system is designed to ensure efficient governance and organization of social and economic life in the country.

**A voivodeship** is the highest-level administrative unit, headed by a voivode. Each voivodeship has a main city, known as the voivodeship capital, which serves as the central administrative hub.

**Counties** are smaller administrative units managed by a county governor (starosta). They may include both urban and rural areas.

**Municipalities** (gminy) are the fundamental units of local government and come in three types:

- **Urban municipality** – covers urban areas with a population of 1 million or more. It is led by a city president (prezydent miasta), who is responsible for local policy and urban development.
- **Urban-rural municipality** – combines both urban and rural areas. It consists of a town and surrounding villages and is governed by a mayor (burmistrz), who manages affairs related to both types of areas.
- **Rural municipality** – focuses on rural areas, where village settlements dominate. It is led by a wójt, who addresses local challenges and the needs of the inhabitants.

## II. Voivodeship Capitals

It is important to remember the locations of Poland's voivodeships and their capitals on the map:

**Masovian Voivodeship** – Warsaw  
**Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship** – Olsztyn  
**Pomeranian Voivodeship** – Gdańsk  
**West Pomeranian Voivodeship** – Szczecin  
**Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship** – Bydgoszcz, Toruń  
**Podlaskie Voivodeship** – Białystok  
**Subcarpathian Voivodeship** – Rzeszów

**Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship** – Kielce  
**Łódź Voivodeship** – Łódź  
**Lublin Voivodeship** – Lublin  
**Lubusz Voivodeship**  
– Gorzów Wielkopolski, Zielona Góra  
**Greater Poland Voivodeship** – Poznań  
**Lesser Poland Voivodeship** – Kraków  
**Opole Voivodeship** – Opole  
**Lower Silesian Voivodeship** – Wrocław  
**Silesian Voivodeship** – Katowice

### III. Historical-Geographical Regions of Poland

Poland is a country rich in diverse historical-geographical regions, each characterized by unique features and culture:

**Greater Poland** is the region where Gniezno, considered Poland's first capital, is located. It is the birthplace of Polish statehood and traditions.

**Lesser Poland**, with Kraków as its capital, is a region with a rich history, known for its numerous monuments, including Wawel Castle, as well as picturesque landscapes. Kraków, the former capital of Poland, remains one of the most important scientific, tourist, and cultural centers in the country.

**Pomerania** is divided into Gdańsk Pomerania and Western Pomerania. Both regions are famous for their beautiful beaches, developed ports, and a rich history of maritime trade traditions. Gdańsk, one of the main cities of Gdańsk Pomerania, plays a key role in the region's culture and tourism. Along with Gdynia and Sopot, it forms the Tricity metropolitan area.

**Warmia and Mazury** are known for their numerous lakes and wild, picturesque landscapes. Olsztyn, the capital of the region, is a popular vacation spot, attracting tourists seeking peace and closeness to nature.

**Podlasie**, with Białystok as its capital, is distinguished by its rich cultural and natural diversity. The region is known for its beautiful forests and traditions, attracting nature lovers and folklore enthusiasts.

**Lublin Region**, with its capital in Lublin, is a significant academic and cultural center, known for its preserved historical architecture and strong traditions. It is also home to Roztocze, a unique geographical region with exceptional natural, cultural, and historical values.

**Silesia** is divided into Upper Silesia, with Katowice as its capital, and Lower Silesia, centered around Wrocław. Katowice is a major industrial and cultural hub, while Wrocław attracts tourists with its history and architecture.

**Masovia**, with Warsaw as its capital, is a region of key political and economic importance. As the capital of Poland, Warsaw serves as the country's administrative and cultural center, attracting residents from various parts of Poland and the world.

### IV. The Baltic Sea and Its Polish Ports

Poland's northern border is formed by the Baltic Sea, which gives the country strategic significance in trade and maritime transport. Along the Polish coast, there are several key commercial seaports, which play crucial roles in the national economy:

**Gdańsk** is Poland's largest seaport and one of the most important on the Baltic Sea. It handles bulk cargo, containers, and energy resources such as crude oil. The region was once under Prussian rule, which influenced its development and character. It was here, on September 1, 1939, that World War II began, with the defense of the Westerplatte Peninsula as one of its symbolic events. In August 1980, the Solidarity movement was founded in Gdańsk Shipyard, playing a crucial role in the fight for freedom and democracy in Poland. The movement's activities also contributed significantly to the fall of communism in Central Europe.

**Szczecin**, located on the western coast, is an important seaport with direct access to the Baltic Sea through the Szczecin Lagoon. The city plays a major role in Poland's maritime transport and has a significant impact on both the local and national economy.

**Kołobrzeg** is a port that serves both cargo and passenger traffic, making it one of the key economic centers on the western Polish coast. Thanks to its developed infrastructure, the port in Kołobrzeg supports international trade, especially with Scandinavian countries and Germany.

**Świnoujście** is one of the largest commercial ports in Poland, playing a key role in transporting energy resources such as coal and LNG gas. It is adapted to handle large ocean-going vessels and serves as a major ferry terminal, connecting Poland with Scandinavian countries, including Denmark and Sweden.

## I. The legend of Lech, Czech and Rus.

Legend has it that **three brothers, Lech, Czech and Rus**, travelled the world looking for a suitable place to settle. One day, they saw a hill topped by an old, spreading oak tree with an **eagle nesting in it**. Lech decided to found a settlement there, which he named **Gniezno**. His brothers, Czech and Rus, set off to find their own places. Czech headed south and Rus east.

## II. The legend of Lajkonik.

The legend of Lajkonik is connected to the 13th-century invasion of the Tatars on Kraków. According to the legend, during one of these expeditions, **the Tatars** camped outside the city, planning an attack. The residents of Zwierzyniec, surprising the invaders, attacked them at night, disguised in their costumes.

They managed to repel the enemy, capture their camp and prevent the invasion. After the victory, one of the participants, dressed in Tatar robes, triumphantly entered Kraków at the head of the procession, arousing the joy and laughter of the inhabitants.

In memory of this event, the **parade of Lajkonik** takes place every year – a horse rider in Tatar costume rides through the streets of Krakow, bringing luck and joy to the inhabitants. Lajkonik, also known as the **konik zwierzyniecki**, is one of the main **symbols of Kraków**.

## III. The legend of King Popiel.

In this legend, we learn that a long time ago, Kruszwica was ruled by the evil king Popiel, whose cruel deeds were inspired by his deceitful wife, Gerda. The council of elders tried to stop him, but the conflict escalated and the council threatened to remove him from the throne. Popiel and Gerda hatched a plot - they decided to kill the council by giving them poison.

After the murder of the Council, a violent storm raged over Kruszwica, and the whole city was overrun by mice. While fleeing to the tower on the island, Popiel and Gerda found themselves in the heart of the invasion. The mice ate the king and his wife - only the royal crown remained of them.



## Lesson 4

### | Polish legends

During this lesson, you will learn about the most important legends in Polish culture, which are an important tool for shaping and strengthening Polish national identity, conveying universal values in an attractive and accessible form.

## IV. The Legend of the Wawel Dragon.

The Wawel Dragon was a monster that lived in a cave under Wawel Hill. It terrorised the inhabitants of Krak until Skuba the Shoemaker came up with a solution. To defeat the dragon, Skuba stuffed a ram with sulphur and placed it in front of the monster's cave.

The dragon, hungry for prey, swallowed the lamb, but soon felt a terrible pain in his throat and thirsty. He drank so much Vistula water that he finally burst - the city was saved. In gratitude for the heroic deed, Krak gave Skuba his daughter Wanda in marriage. In other versions of the legend, the shoemaker was called Dratewka.

## V. Legend of Piast the Kołodziej (eng. Wheelwright).

Long ago in Kruszwica reigned the evil king Popiel. In a nearby village lived a humble kołodziej named Piast, who made wooden cartwheels every day to support his family. His eldest son was approaching the age of seven and his first haircut (the ritual cutting of a male child's hair) was about to take place.

Piast decided to invite many guests to this special celebration, including two unknown travellers. When the moment of the child's first haircut arrived, one of the guests approached Piast's son and baptised him, giving him the name Ziemowit (or Siemowit).

While Piast was entertaining his guests, he was worried about his modest food supplies. After checking the cellar, his wife discovered that the food was not only not decreasing, but was actually increasing. Surprised by the situation, they continued to celebrate this extraordinary day.

The next day, rumours began to spread in Kruszwica that the inhabitants wanted to elect a new ruler. To everyone's surprise, the poor Piast Kołodziej was elected the new ruler of Kruszwica, which marked the beginning of a new chapter in the town's history.



## I. Gniezno

Gniezno was **Poland's first capital**, holding this role from around 966 to 1041. The city played a crucial role in Polish history. According to legend, its name derives from the word *gniazdo* („nest”) and *gnieździć się* („to nest”), and it is linked to the story of Poland's founding. It is believed that the founder of the Polish state, **Lech**, settled here. He established the first settlement on a hill with old oak trees, where an eagle nested—this eagle later became the symbol of Poland.

The first historical ruler of Poland (but not yet a king!) was **Mieszko I**, who adopted Christianity in 966, which was a fundamental step in integrating Poland with Christian Europe. He married Dobrawa, the daughter of the Czech king, further strengthening his rule. Gniezno is home to a cathedral, an important historical and religious site.

In 1000, the Congress of Gniezno took place with the participation of Mieszko and Dobrawa's son, **Bolesław I Chrobry**. This event led to the establishment of an archbishopric in Gniezno. In 1025, Bolesław I Chrobry was crowned the first King of Poland, reinforcing Gniezno's role as the center of power. Unfortunately, in 1038, a fire destroyed the city, leading to the capital's relocation to Kraków in 1041. Nevertheless, Gniezno remained a key symbol of Polish identity.

## II. Kraków

Kraków became Poland's **second capital**, serving in this role from 1041 until the royal court was moved to Warsaw in 1596, and officially until 1795. One of Kraków's most famous legends is about the Wawel Dragon (*Smok Wawelski*).

Kraków officially received city rights in **1257**. During the Middle Ages, many Polish cities, including Kraków, were founded under Magdeburg law, which structured urban development. These regulations introduced modern urban planning, with a central market square (*Rynek*) surrounded by a town hall and trade stalls.

The city is closely associated with Poland's royal dynasties, from the Piasts to the Jagiellonians, and remained the center of political, cultural, and religious life for centuries. One of its well-known symbols is the **Lajkonik**, a traditional figure seen during local festivals.



## Lesson 5

### Polish Capitals and Major Landmarks

We will introduce you to Poland's capitals—both historical and present—as well as the most important (selected) landmarks and UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Poland.

Unlike many other places, Kraków survived World War II relatively intact, preserving its architectural and historical heritage. Some of its most important landmarks include:

- **Wawel Royal Castle** – a symbol of Polish monarchy and former center of power.
- **Main Market Square** – the largest and one of the most beautiful squares in Europe, at the heart of the Old Town, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978.
- **Sukiennice (Cloth Hall)** – a Renaissance building famous for trading local handicrafts.
- **Jagiellonian University** – Poland's oldest university, founded in 1364, known for its significant contributions to science and culture.

### III. Warsaw

Warsaw became the main royal residence under King Sigismund III of the Swedish Vasa dynasty. The royal court was moved from Kraków to Warsaw in March 1596. Sigismund, who was also set to become King of Sweden, needed a residence further north. Additionally, a fire in the royal apartments at Wawel Castle in 1595 contributed to the decision. Thus, Warsaw became Poland's third capital. Although the move was never officially confirmed by a legal act, it gradually became widely accepted.

The historical center of Warsaw is concentrated in the Old Town (Stare Miasto), where the Market Square serves as its heart. Warsaw's Old Town, often referred to simply as **Starówka** by locals, was almost completely destroyed during World War II, especially during the **Warsaw Uprising (1944)**. However, after the war, it was meticulously rebuilt, with major restoration efforts completed by 1955, including the Royal Castle, a symbol of the capital's rebirth.

Warsaw's emblem is the **Mermaid (Syrenka)**, depicted wearing a royal crown. The city is also home to key national institutions such as the Parliament (Sejm and Senat), the Government of Poland, and the Presidential Palace. The country's largest airport, **Warsaw Chopin Airport**, serves as an important domestic and international transport hub. With its rich history and dynamic development, Warsaw blends its past with modernity, serving as the heart of contemporary Poland.

## IV. Selected UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Poland

- **Malbork Castle**  
The Malbork Castle is one of Poland's most significant medieval structures. It is an outstanding example of **Gothic architecture** and was once the headquarters of the Teutonic Order's Grand Master. Malbork Castle is the largest brick building in the world, showcasing the power of the Teutonic Order and the historical importance of the region.
- **Wawel Castle**  
Located in Kraków, Wawel Castle was **the residence of Polish kings** and the center of political and cultural life. The crypts at Wawel contain the tombs of 17 Polish kings, including Stefan Batory and Jan III Sobieski. Also buried here are national heroes like Tadeusz Kościuszko and Józef Poniatowski, as well as the poet Adam Mickiewicz. In 2016, former Polish president Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria were also interred at Wawel.
- **Historic Center of Warsaw (Old Town)**  
Warsaw's Old Town was nearly completely destroyed during World War II but was carefully reconstructed using historical documents, paintings, and photographs. It is **an exceptional example of historical restoration** on a global scale. This remarkable reconstruction was officially recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980.
- **Historic Center of Kraków (Old Town)**  
The Old Town of Kraków has retained its medieval layout almost unchanged. At its center is the Main Market Square—**Europe's largest town square**—surrounded by historic townhouses, **Sukiennice**, and **St. Mary's Basilica**, home to Wit Stwosz's famous altarpiece. The Old Town is surrounded by the Planty Park, which replaced the city's former medieval walls. Kraków's Old Town was one of the first sites inscribed on the UNESCO list in 1978.
- **Białowieża Forest and Białowieża National Park**  
One of the last and largest remaining primeval forests in Europe, Białowieża Forest is **home to the European bison (Polish żubr)**, the continent's largest land mammal. The park protects a rich ecosystem with unique habitats and natural processes, preserved with minimal human intervention. It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.

- **Wieliczka Salt Mine**

One of **the world's oldest operating salt mines**, dating back to the 13th century. The mine consists of underground tunnels, chambers, and chapels, including the **Chapel of St. Kinga**, decorated with salt sculptures and chandeliers. Wieliczka is not only a testament to mining technology but also an artistic and historical landmark. It was inscribed on the UNESCO list in 1978.

- **Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum - the former Nazi concentration and extermination camp in Oświęcim** is one of the most important sites commemorating the tragedy of World War II. Established in 1940, Auschwitz-Birkenau became the **symbol of the Holocaust and genocide**. Over 1.1 million people perished here, primarily Jews, but also Poles, Roma, and others. Today, the museum, established in 1947, serves as a memorial and a center for education about the dangers of hatred and intolerance. Auschwitz-Birkenau was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.



# Baptism of Poland – the beginning of statehood

In 966, Mieszko I was baptised in the Western rite, which is considered a symbolic event that marked the beginning of the Polish state. The symbolic date of the baptism of Poland is considered to be **Holy Saturday, 14 April 966**. This decision was not accidental - it was both a political strategy and a religious act. Through his marriage to **the Czech princess Dobrawa**, Mieszko incorporated his country into the Latin cultural sphere, which enabled contacts with Western Europe and ensured Poland's protection from the expansion of pagan neighbours and forcible Christianisation by the German Empire.

The baptism of Poland also meant the adoption of a new religion – Catholicism – as the official state religion. This event had far-reaching consequences, not only religious, but also political and social. Poland became part of Christian Europe, which enabled the development of culture, science and administration in line with European standards.

## Mieszko I – the first historically documented ruler of Poland (approx. 922–25 May 992)

Mieszko I, born around 922, is the first ruler of Poland whose existence has been confirmed by historical sources. **He was the son of Siemomysł and a member of the Piast dynasty**. Although he was not a king, he managed to lay the foundations of the Polish state by uniting the lands of West Slavic tribes under one rule. Historical sources such as the chronicle of Thietmar describe Mieszko as a skilful politician and strategist who skilfully balanced between powerful neighbours – the German Empire and pagan tribes.

The baptism was a crucial step in the development of a modern state. It allowed Mieszko to gain the support of the Pope and the Emperor, which strengthened his position internationally. **Gniezno, which Mieszko made his capital, became the religious and political centre of the newly founded state.**

Mieszko died on 25 May 992, leaving Poland as a well-organised and stable state.



## Lesson 6

### The establishment of the Polish state

In this part of the e-book, we will expand our knowledge about the establishment of the Polish state. We will discuss the key figures, events and symbols that defined the beginnings of our statehood. We will focus on Mieszko I, the first historically confirmed ruler of Poland, the baptism of Poland in 966, the Congress of Gniezno in 1000 and the role of royal dynasties and Polish coronation regalia.

# Gniezno Congress – Św. Wojciech (eng. St Adalbert) – Apostle of the Slavs and patron saint of Poland

**Saint Wojciech** is one of the most important figures in the history of early Christianity in Poland. His missionary activities, martyrdom and canonisation contributed to the establishment of Christianity in Poland and strengthened its position internationally. Saint Wojciech, also known as Adalbert, is considered one of the main patron saints of Poland.

## Life and work of St Adalbert

Wojciech was born around 956 in Libice, in what is now the Czech Republic, into the influential Sławnik family. From an early age, he showed a love of religion and learning. He studied in Magdeburg under Archbishop Wojciech, from whom he took his middle name. After completing his education, he became Bishop of Prague in 982.

His activities in Bohemia met with strong resistance from the local aristocracy, who opposed his religious reforms and his efforts to Christianise society. Weary of the conflicts, Wojciech left Prague and travelled to Rome, where he joined the Benedictine order on the Aventine Hill.

## Mission in Poland

In 996, Wojciech travelled to Poland at the invitation of Bolesław I Chrobry. His aim was to convert the pagan tribes living in the north-eastern part of the country, especially the Prussians, to Christianity. This was an extremely difficult and dangerous mission because the Prussians considered Christianity to be a foreign and hostile religion.

**In 997, Wojciech travelled to Prussia with several fellow monks.** He preached the gospel and tried to convert the local tribes to Christianity. However, the mission ended in tragedy.

## Martyrdom

**Saint Wojciech was martyred on 23 April 997.** According to the account of the chronicler Bruno of Querfurt, Wojciech was surrounded by the pagan Prussians while celebrating mass, as they considered his activities to be a violation of their beliefs and customs.

He was captured and brutally murdered – his heart was pierced with a spear and his body was cut off at the head. Wojciech's death took place in the vicinity of today's village of Święty Gaj in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.

His martyrdom quickly spread throughout Christian Europe. **Bolesław I Chrobry, who valued Wojciech for his devotion to Christianity, bought his body from the Prussians for a weight of gold equal to his own weight.** He then brought Wojciech's remains to Gniezno, where they were buried in the cathedral.

## Canonisation and significance of St. Wojciech

Shortly after Wojciech's death, the German emperor Otto III, moved by his martyrdom, sent a letter to Pope Sylvester II asking for his canonisation. Wojciech was declared a saint before 999, making him one of the first saints in the history of the Catholic Church.

The cult of Wojciech spread quickly and his feast day is celebrated on 23 April. The relics of Saint Wojciech have become a pilgrimage site and a symbol of Poland's Christian identity.

## Congress of Gniezno

**In the year 1000, the German Emperor Otto III made a pilgrimage to the grave of St Wojciech in Gniezno, where he met Bolesław I Chrobry.** During the congress, the emperor announced the creation of the Metropolis of Gniezno, which was of great importance for the Polish Church and state. Otto III took a relic with him when he left Poland: the arm of St Wojciech, which became a symbol of the bond between Poland and the empire.

# The legacy of St Wojciech

Saint Wojciech has gone down in Polish history as a symbol of faith, courage and devotion. His martyrdom contributed to the strengthening of Christianity in Poland and raised the prestige of Poland on the international arena.

Today, St Wojciech's relics are kept in the Gniezno Cathedral, where they are venerated as a national treasure. St Wojciech is also the patron saint of Gniezno, Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as one of the main patron saints of Europe.

## Bolesław Chrobry – the first king of Poland

**Bolesław I Chrobry (967–1025), son of Mieszko I and Dobrawa, was the first king of Poland and one of the most important rulers of the early Middle Ages.** His reign, which lasted from 992 to 1025, was marked by a period of intensive territorial expansion, the construction of state structures and the strengthening of Poland's position on the international arena.

After his father's death, Bolesław took power and eliminated his political opponents, including his stepmother Oda and her sons, which demonstrated his determination and political maturity. Following in his father's footsteps, he continued the Christianisation of the Polish lands and developed the state administration. However, unlike Mieszko I, Bolesław had much more ambitious plans, striving to make Poland independent of external influences and build a strong kingdom.

One of the key events of his reign was the Congress of Gniezno in 1000, when Emperor Otto III, on a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Wojciech, recognised Bolesław as an equal partner and ruler. This meeting was of great importance for the strengthening of Poland's international position. The founding of the Gniezno Metropolis made the Polish Church independent of the German archbishoprics, and the fact that Otto handed over insignia such as St. Maurice's spear symbolised Bolesław's prestige.

Bolesław's reign was a period of intense warfare. He fought long battles with the Germans, which ended with the Treaty of Budziszyn in 1018, securing the Polish territories of Lusatia and Milsko. In the same year, Bolesław led a victorious expedition to Kiev, supporting Prince Sviatopolk in his

struggle for the throne. After conquering the city, he incorporated the Cherven Towns into Poland, which significantly expanded the country's eastern borders. Legend has it that during this expedition he struck the Golden Gate of Kiev with his sword, symbolising his triumph.

Bolesław Chrobry also became famous as a state builder. He promoted the development of administration, supported Christianisation and founded churches, which contributed to the consolidation of royal power. His policies were aimed at strengthening the internal structures of the state and ensuring its sustainability.

**In 1025, shortly before his death, Bolesław was crowned king of Poland.** The coronation was the crowning glory of his achievements and a symbol of Poland's independence. Bolesław died on 17 June of the same year, leaving behind a strong, well-organised state.

To this day, he is admired as a symbol of strength and ambition. He was not only a great warrior but also a wise ruler who knew how to combine politics, religion and culture in order to build a solid foundation for Polish statehood.

## Royal dynasties of Poland

Poland was ruled by seven dynasties, each of which had a significant impact on the history of the country:

- **The Piast dynasty** – from Bolesław I Chrobry (1025) to Kazimierz III the Great (1370). The Piasts laid the foundations of the Polish state.
- **The Jagiellon dynasty** – ruled Poland from 1386 to 1572, creating a strong union with Lithuania and achieving great success in international politics.
- **Other dynasties** – the Anjou, Vasa, Wettin and Valois – ushered in a period of free elections and struggles with neighbouring powers.

## Polish coronation regalia

The coronation insignia were symbols of royal power in Poland. They were used during the coronation of rulers, which usually took place in the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow. These insignia included, among others:

- **The Crown of Chrobry** - a symbol of royal dignity, which according to tradition was to be made for the coronation of Bolesław I Chrobry.

- **Szczerbiec** – the coronation sword of Polish kings.
- **Sceptre** – symbolising the power and strength of the monarch.
- **Royal orb** – symbolising power over the state and its people.

The Polish coronation regalia were not only symbols of royal power, but also a testimony to the independence and sovereignty of the state. Their fate is inextricably linked to the turbulent history of Poland, which repeatedly lost its independence, but always regained it. After the Third Partition of Poland in 1795, most of these symbols were taken to Prussia. In 1811, on the orders of the Prussian King Frederick William III, the royal crown, sceptre and orb were melted down and turned into gold coins. It was then recognised that Poland as a state had ceased to exist and its coronation insignia had lost their significance.

**The Szczerbiec sword** was the only coronation insignia to survive and not be destroyed. It was kept by various institutions and private individuals until it finally returned to Poland. Today, it is one of the most valuable artefacts in Polish history. This sword was used during the coronation of Polish kings from Władysław I the Łokietek (1320) until the last coronation of Stanisław August Poniatowski in 1764.

The Szczerbiec sword is richly decorated and full of Christian symbolism. On the blade, there are inscriptions in Latin referring to God's power and royal justice. On the hilt, there are Paschal symbols and Christian carvings, emphasising the sacred nature of royal power.

Legend has it that the sword was chipped by Bolesław I the Chrobry when he struck the Golden Gate of Kiev during his expedition to Ruthenia in 1018. Although this legend has no confirmation in historical sources, it stuck to the sword, giving it additional meaning in Polish national tradition. During the partitions of Poland, the Szczerbiec sword did not share the fate of other coronation regalia. It was hidden and survived years of captivity. In the 19th century, it was in the hands of private collectors. During World War II, it was taken away by the Germans, but returned to Poland after the war.

Today, the Szczerbiec sword is kept in the **Crown Treasury at Wawel Castle in Krakow**. It is part of the exhibition at Wawel Royal Castle. The fact that Szczerbiec is kept at Wawel Castle has a deeply symbolic meaning. As the former royal residence and the place where Polish monarchs were crowned, Wawel Castle is the most important place of national remembrance.

The Szczerbiec sword, a unique monument and symbol of Polish statehood, is particularly protected and maintained. Its presence at Wawel is a reminder of Poland's rich history and the royal tradition that has united the country for centuries.

## Summary

The beginnings of the Polish state are a period in which the foundations of Polish national, religious and political identity were formed. The baptism of Mieszko I in 966 and his strategic actions laid the foundations for a state that developed over the centuries, gaining increasing importance in Europe.

Learning about the history of the founding of the Polish state is not only a fascinating journey into the past, but also a key element in preparing for an interview with a consul. With this knowledge, we can better understand where we come from and what values have shaped our national identity. **We encourage you to explore the history of Poland, which is an integral part of our culture and tradition. Our course will help you to master this knowledge in a clear and structured way.**

## Mieszko I: Founder of the Polish state

The first historically confirmed ruler of Poland was Mieszko I, who took power around 960. He was the ruler of the Polans, a tribe inhabiting the Greater Poland region. During his reign, Mieszko took action to unite the Slavic tribes under a common rule. The high point of his reign was his baptism in 966. This event had great political and cultural significance: it secured Poland's place in Christian Europe, reduced the risk of German intervention under the pretext of Christianisation and enabled closer relations with the German Empire.

Mieszko also strove for territorial expansion. He annexed Silesia, Lesser Poland and Pomerelia, which laid the foundation for the future Kingdom of Poland.

## Boleslaw I Chrobry: The first king of Poland

### Foreign policy and wars

Mieszko I's son, Boleslaw Chrobry, continued his father's work. He was an ambitious and effective ruler who expanded Poland's territory and significantly raised its status in Europe. An important event was the organisation of the Congress of Gniezno in 1000, during which the German emperor Otto III recognised Poland's independence and its place in the structures of Christian Europe.

Bolesław's wars, especially with Germany and Kievan Rus, were part of his strategy to strengthen his power. Although these conflicts brought both successes and losses, Bolesław managed to maintain Poland's position as an important player in the region.

### Coronation as the first king of Poland

In 1025, Bolesław was crowned the first king of Poland. This was a symbolic event that confirmed the sovereignty of the Polish state and its equality with other kingdoms in Christian Europe.



## Lesson 7

### The Piast Dynasty – The Foundations of Polish Statehood.

**In this chapter, we will learn about the history of the Piast dynasty, which was the first royal dynasty in Poland, and its origins are associated with the legendary figure of Piast the Kołodziej. The Piast dynasty ruled from around 960, starting with Mieszko I, until the death of Kazimierz Wielki in 1370. As you already know, the rulers of this dynasty played a key role in the creation of the Polish state, economic development and integration with the Christian culture of Western Europe.**

# The Last Will and Testament of Bolesław Krzywousty and the fragmentation of Poland into provinces

Bolesław Krzywousty, who ruled Poland from 1107 to 1138, was one of the most prominent princes of the Piast dynasty. During his reign, he fought numerous wars, both defensive and expansionist, aimed at strengthening the country's borders and maintaining its integrity. However, the experience of dynastic conflicts in his family prompted Bolesław to secure the future of his country.

Aware of the risk of power struggles between his sons, Wrymouth wrote a will in 1138, known as the Statute of Succession, which was intended to prevent divisions and dynastic conflicts. This will introduced the principle of power sharing among the descendants, which on the one hand allowed each of the sons to assume power, but on the other hand undermined the unity of the state.

## Division of the state

According to the will, Poland was divided into districts to be ruled by individual sons of Bolesław:

- **Władysław II Wygnaniec:** He became senior and took over the senior district, including Małopolska with Kraków, the Sieradz and Łęczyca lands, and Pomerelia.
- **Bolesław IV Kędzierzawy:** He received Mazovia with Kujawy.
- **Mieszko III Stary:** He received Wielkopolska.
- **Henryk Sandomierski:** Received the Sandomierz region.

In addition, Bolesław's widow, Salomea, was to administer the Łęczyca region as a life estate.

## Division into fiefdoms

The division of the country was supposed to be a temporary solution, but in reality it ushered in a period of almost 200 years of fragmentation. The power of the senior prince was weak, and the ambitions of individual princes led to rivalry and conflict.

The territorial division weakened Poland both internally and externally. Due to the political fragmenta-

tion, the country became an easy target for neighbouring states such as Bohemia, Germany and the Teutonic Order. The period of fragmentation did not end until 1320, when Władysław I Łokietek was crowned King of Poland, symbolically unifying the country.

## Key events during the fragmentation period:

### Decision of Konrad Mazowiecki - Bringing the Teutonic Knights to Poland.

In 1226, Duke Konrad Mazowiecki, ruler of Mazovia, decided to bring the Teutonic Order to Poland - a knightly congregation whose aim was to Christianise the pagan peoples of Eastern Europe. Konrad hoped that the Teutonic Knights would help him in his fight against the Prussians, a pagan tribe that often raided the lands of Mazovia.

Konrad gave the Teutonic Knights the Chełmno Land as a base for their Christianisation mission. In return, the Teutonic Knights promised to protect the Mazovian lands from the Prussians. However, this decision had far-reaching consequences that proved disastrous for Poland in the long run.

The Teutonic Knights quickly began to conquer Prussian lands, but they did not stop there. Using their military advantage, they took over Pomerelia and other territories belonging to Poland. Their actions led to conflicts with Polish princes that lasted for the next few centuries, until the great war with the Teutonic Order in the 15th century.

### Tatar invasions and the Battle of Legnica.

The Tatar invasions, also known as the Mongol invasions, were one of the most tragic events in the medieval history of Central and Eastern Europe. In the 13th century, the Mongol Empire, led by Genghis Khan and his successors, expanded its borders to the west, subjugating numerous countries in Asia and Eastern Europe. In 1237, the great western campaign began, led by Batu Khan, Genghis Khan's grandson, which aimed at the territories of present-day Russia, Poland, Hungary and further west.

Poland, which was divided into duchies during the period of fragmentation, was politically and militarily weakened, making it an easy target for invaders. The first major Mongol invasion of Poland took place in 1241. Tatar troops under the command of Orda and Baydar moved rapidly through southern and central Poland, destroying cities and villages and wreaking havoc.

## Battle of Legnica on 9 April 1241

The Battle of Legnica was a direct result of the Mongol invasion of Europe. The Tartars, divided into several groups, were to weaken and isolate the western countries before concentrating their forces on key targets such as Hungary. In Poland, they intended to weaken the local princes and prevent the unification of European forces.

Henry II the Pobożny, Duke of Silesia and Kraków, assembled a Christian army made up of Polish and German knights, as well as reinforcements from Bohemia and the Teutonic Order (including the Knights Templar). Despite their great determination, the Christian forces were outnumbered by the well-organised Tatar army.

The battle took place on 9 April 1241 on the fields near Legnica. The battle began with an attack by Polish knights, who initially achieved some success by breaking through the first Tatar lines. However, the Tartars, known for their tactics of deception, used a strategy of feigned retreat, luring the Christian army into an ambush.

The Mongol troops, armed with reflective bows and with excellent mobility, inflicted heavy losses on the Poles and their allies. The key moment was when the Tatars took advantage of the fear and chaos – probably using psychological tactics such as fire or noise – to break the Christian army. Henry II the Pobożny was surrounded and beheaded in the battle.

### Significance of the battle

The Battle of Legnica was a tragic moment in the history of Poland and Central Europe, but it also had significant consequences for the further course of the Mongol invasions. Despite their victory, the Tatars did not advance further west. One of the reasons for their retreat was the death of the great Khan Ugedei in Mongolia, which required Batu Khan and other commanders to return east to settle the succession.

The Battle of Legnica became a symbol of the heroic resistance of Christian Europe against the Mongol invasion. Although the defeat was severe, the Poles and their allies showed that they were willing to fight for their independence. The Tatar invasions, although devastating, did not break the national spirit and strengthened the aspirations for the unification of Poland in later years.

The memory of the Battle of Legnica has survived for centuries, and Henry II the Pobożny has become one of the symbols of chivalrous sacrifice. Today, the battle is a reminder of the importance of unity in the face of external threats and of the difficult moments in history that have shaped Poland's national identity. There are many places in Legnica commemorating these events, including monuments and a museum dedicated to the battle.

## Władysław I Łokietek - life and reign

Władysław I Łokietek, born around 1260, was the son of Duke Kazimierz I of Kuyavia and Eufrozyna of Opole. His father ruled Kuyavia and after his death in 1267, Władysław inherited some of the family's land. From his youth, Łokietek witnessed the difficult times of the fragmentation of the country, which had a significant impact on his later pursuit of Polish unification.

After his father's death, Władysław took over a small part of his inheritance, and in 1275 he assumed power in Brześć Kujawski. He soon became known as an ambitious and persistent ruler, although the beginning of his career was full of difficulties. After the death of Leszek the Black in 1288, Łokietek competed for the throne of Kraków, but lost to Henry IV Probus.

In the following years, Łokietek fought for Malopolska and Kraków, although his position was unstable. In 1296, after the murder of Przemysł II, Łokietek took control of Wielkopolska, but lost it to the King of Bohemia, Wenceslas II. For a while, he had to leave Poland and seek support abroad, particularly in Hungary.

## Reunification of the Polish lands

After the death of Wenceslaus II in 1305, Łokietek returned to Poland, where he began to rebuild his power. In 1306, he took control of Kraków and Malopolska, and then Gdańsk and Gdańsk Pomerania. **In 1320, after many years of struggle, Władysław I Łokietek was crowned king of Poland.** It was the first royal coronation in the Wawel Cathedral, which symbolically emphasised the unity of the Polish state.

Łokietek faced many difficulties. **In 1320, Poland started a conflict with the Teutonic Order**, which had illegally occupied Pomerelia. This dispute was the beginning of Poland's centuries-long struggle with the Order.

One of the key moments of Łokietek's reign was the battle of Płowce in 1331, in which the Polish army defeated the Teutonic Knights. Although the battle did not end the conflict, it strengthened Poland's position and showed that the Teutonic Knights had to reckon with Polish resistance.

## Character and heritage

Władysław I Łokietek went down in history as the ruler who united Poland after almost 200 years of fragmentation. He was a persistent, unyielding and decisive man. His reign laid the foundations for the further development of the Polish state under Kazimierz Wielki, his son and successor.

Łokietek died on 2 March 1333 in Kraków. His legacy included not only a unified territory, but also the idea of a strong monarchy, which became the basis for the future success of the Kingdom of Poland.

## Kazimierz III Great: The last Piast on the throne

**Kazimierz III Wielki (1310–1370)** was one of the most outstanding rulers in the history of Poland. His long reign of 37 years (1333–1370) brought economic, administrative and cultural prosperity to the Polish state. He was the son of Władysław I Łokietek and Jadwiga Kaliska, daughter of Bolesław Pobożny. Crowned in 1333, Kazimierz became famous as a wise, far-sighted and pragmatic ruler who reformed the state and strengthened its position on the international arena.

Kazimierz was born on 30 April 1310 in Kowal. From an early age, he was groomed for leadership. In 1325, at the age of just 15, he married Aldona Anna, daughter of Gediminas, Grand Duke of Lithuania. The marriage was a political alliance aimed at bringing Poland and Lithuania closer together in the face of a common threat from the Teutonic Order.

Kazimierz was crowned on 25 April 1333 in the Wawel Cathedral, just a few weeks after his father's death. The king took power at a difficult time: Poland was weakened after a period of fragmentation, and its territory was mainly limited to Lesser Poland, Greater Poland and the Sieradz-Łęczyca region.

## Foreign policy

Kazimierz III Wielki pursued an extremely successful and peaceful foreign policy. Unlike his father, who often chose military solutions, Kazimierz preferred diplomacy. One of the first challenges was to end the conflict with the Teutonic Order. In 1335, Kazimierz renounced his claims to Pomerelia at the Congress of Visegrád, but regained Kuyavia and the Dobrzyń Land.

An important success for Kazimierz was also the coronation of Louis I of Hungary as King of Hungary in 1342, which strengthened Polish-Hungarian relations. In 1340, Kazimierz took control of Halychyna, which significantly expanded Poland's territory and opened up new trade routes.

## Internal reforms

Kazimierz III Wielki became famous as a reformer. His reforms were aimed at strengthening the administration, economy and defence of the state.

### Law and administration:

Kazimierz organised the legal system by issuing the Statutes of Wiślica and Piotrków, which were the first written collections of laws in Poland. The king also reformed the judiciary by introducing more uniform rules, which significantly facilitated the functioning of the state.

### Economy:

Kazimierz introduced many economic changes that contributed to the development of trade and crafts. He issued privileges for cities, supported the development of craft guilds and international trade. During his reign, numerous roads, bridges and new cities were established under Magdeburg law.

### Defence:

Kazimierz Wielki significantly expanded the country's defence system. On his initiative, around 50 stronghold castles were built or strengthened. He also took care of the fortifications of cities, transforming many of them from wooden to brick, which gave rise to the saying: *'He found Poland wooden, and he left it brick'*.

## Foundation of the Kraków Academy

One of Kazimierz Wielki's greatest achievements was the founding of the Kraków Academy in 1364, the first university in Poland. The academy was to educate future officials and clergymen who could meet the requirements of the reformed state. It was the first step towards the development of higher education in Poland, although after Kazimierz's death the university's activities were suspended for a time due to a lack of financial support.

## Succession

Despite numerous marriages and relationships, Kazimierz Wielki did not have a legitimate male heir. His daughters could not inherit the throne, which is why as early as 1339, at a congress in Visegrád, it was agreed that after Kazimierz's death, the Polish throne would pass to the House of Anjou, represented by Louis I of Hungary.

## Death and inheritance

Kazimierz III Wielki died on 5 November 1370 in Kraków. He was the last king of Poland from the Piast dynasty, and his death ended the dynasty's rule, which had lasted for over four hundred years. His achievements in the fields of politics, the economy and culture made Poland a strong and modern state.

Kazimierz Wielki left behind a country twice as large in size, better managed and more integrated than the one he had inherited. His peaceful policies, internal reforms and attention to the development of culture and science made him one of the most outstanding rulers in the history of Poland. The saying about Kazimierz, 'He found Poland as a wooden structure and left it as a brick one,' has been known in Poland for generations.

## Summary:

### The Piast dynasty – the foundation of Polish statehood

The Piast dynasty, which ruled Poland from around 960 to 1370, laid the foundations of Polish statehood. **From Mieszko I, who put Poland on the map of Europe by accepting baptism, to Kazimierz Wielki, who left the country reformed, economically strong and united after a long period of fragmentation, the rule of the Piasts was a key period in the history of our country.** Their achievements became the foundation for subsequent dynasties, including the Jagiellonians, who continued the work of their predecessors, developing Poland as a multicultural and powerful state in Europe.

**The Piast dynasty not only shaped the history of Poland, but also inspired later generations of Poles to fight for independence and development. Its influence can be seen in our culture, traditions and national identity, which remain inextricably linked to the beginnings of Polish statehood.**

# The Jagiellon dynasty - the beginnings

After the death of the last king of the Piast dynasty, Kazimierz Wielki, the throne of Poland passed to the Anjou dynasty. **It was Queen Jadwiga of Anjou, crowned in 1384, who initiated great changes in the history of Poland.** Her marriage to Władysław Jagiełło, Grand Duke of Lithuania, laid the foundation for the Jagiellon dynasty.

## Queen Jadwiga of Anjou

Queen Jadwiga was born on 18 February 1374 in Buda, the capital of the Kingdom of Hungary. She was the daughter of Louis I of Hungary, a member of the House of Anjou, and Elizabeth of Bosnia. Her father Louis was King of Hungary and Poland, which paved the way for Jadwiga to become Queen of Poland. After his death in 1382, the power in Poland was transferred to Jadwiga, even though she was still a child. In 1384, at the age of only ten, she was crowned the king of Poland, which emphasised her full rights to rule.

Jadwiga's marriage to Władysław Jagiełło was a political decision. The conclusion of the Union of Krewo in 1385 obliged Jagiełło to be baptised and to marry Jadwiga, which was supposed to ensure military and political support for Poland from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Jagiełło was baptised in 1386, taking the name Władysław, and was crowned king of Poland shortly afterwards. Thanks to Jadwiga, Poland became the centre of one of the greatest alliances in medieval Europe.

Jadwiga was not only a king, but also a benefactor and patron of science. **Thanks to her efforts, the Academy of Kraków was restored in 1400, which was crucial for the development of Polish education.** The queen died in 1399, leaving behind a memory of exceptional piety and devotion to state affairs. In 1997, she was canonised by Polish Pope John Paul II.

## Władysław Jagiełło – creator of the dynasty's power

Władysław Jagiełło, or Jogaila to give him his full name, was born around 1352 as the son of Olgierd, Grand Duke of Lithuania, and Julianna Twerska. His reign over Lithuania from 1377 was char-



## Lesson 8

### The Jagiellon Dynasty. The Golden Age in Polish history.

In this lesson, you will learn about one of the most important dynasties in Polish history: the Jagiellon dynasty. Understanding its role will help you not only learn about Polish history, but also better understand its impact on the culture, politics and traditions of our country. In this lesson, you will learn about Queen Jadwiga, Władysław Jagiełło and their successors, such as Zygmunt Stary and Bona Sforza. We will trace key events such as the Battle of Grunwald and the Prussian Tribute, and learn about the significance of the Union of Lublin.

acterised by the struggle to maintain the unity of the country in the face of threats from the Teutonic Order.

After ascending to the Polish throne in 1386, Jagiełło focused on strengthening the Polish-Lithuanian alliance. **One of his greatest achievements was the victory at the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, where he defeated the Teutonic Order while commanding the Polish-Lithuanian forces.** This event broke the power of the Teutonic Order for many years and strengthened the position of Poland in Europe.

Jagiełło reigned for 48 years, making him one of the longest-reigning monarchs in Polish history. His death in 1434 ended a certain stage in the history of the dynasty, but its power grew thanks to subsequent rulers.

## The Battle of Grunwald – a clash of two powers

**The Battle of Grunwald, fought on 15 July 1410, was one of the largest and most important clashes in medieval Europe.** It took place between the Teutonic Order and the combined forces of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, led by King Władysław II Jagiełło and the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Witold.

The Teutonic Order, originally founded to protect pilgrims in the Holy Land, became a powerful state in northern Europe, seeking to expand into Polish and Lithuanian territory. The growing conflicts over land, trade and influence led to the outbreak of the Great War with the Order (1409–1411). The Battle of Grunwald became its climax.

### The course of the battle

The Polish-Lithuanian army had about 29,000 to 39,000 soldiers, including Polish, Lithuanian and Ruthenian knights, as well as Tatar and Czech contingents. The Teutonic Order fielded about 21,000 soldiers, including elite knightly troops from Western Europe. The Teutonic Knights were well-armed and hoped to gain a technological and strategic advantage.

The battle began in the morning. The Teutonic Knights, led by **Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen**, attacked the Lithuanian forces, who simulated a retreat, thus luring their enemy into a trap. At the crucial moment, the Polish forces, led by Jagiełło, counterattacked, breaking up the Teutonic formations.

The death of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Ulrich von Jungingen, was a symbolic moment in the battle, causing chaos in the ranks of the Teutonic Knights. The Polish-Lithuanian victory was decisive and ended with the defeat of the Teutonic army.

### Significance of the battle

The Battle of Grunwald had great political and military significance. It demonstrated the power of the alliance between Poland and Lithuania and halted the expansion of the Teutonic Order. It was also a demonstration of unity and cooperation between the diverse nations and cultures of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Despite the spectacular victory, the battle did not result in the complete destruction of the Order. The war ended with the signing of the **Peace of Thorn in 1411**, which was favourable for Poland and Lithuania, but did not resolve all conflicts with the Teutonic Order.

In later years, the Battle of Grunwald became a symbol of national pride and unity. Its memory was cultivated in both literature and art - to this day it is considered one of the most important moments in the history of Poland and Lithuania.

## Władysław III Warneńczyk – tragic king and hero

Władysław III was born on 31 October 1424 as the eldest son of Władysław Jagiełło and Zofia Holszańska. In 1434, after the death of his father, he was crowned king of Poland, and three years later he took the throne of Hungary.

His reign was short but full of dramatic events. The most important challenge was the threat from the Ottoman Empire. Władysław led a crusade to stop Turkish expansion. **Unfortunately, he was defeated in the Battle of Varna in 1444 and died in battle himself, which earned him the nickname 'Warneńczyk'.** His death was a huge blow to the Jagiellon dynasty and Poland.

## Kazimierz IV Jagiellończyk – empire builder

Kazimierz IV Jagiellończyk was born on 30 November 1427 as the third son of Władysław Jagiełło. He became Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1440 and

four years later he became King of Poland. He was one of the most prominent rulers of the dynasty who successfully developed the Polish-Lithuanian union.

His reign was characterised by the Thirteen Years' War with the Teutonic Order, which ended with the Treaty of Toruń in 1466. **As a result of this conflict, Poland regained Pomerelia, Chełmno Land and the Duchy of Michałowo, and gained control over Royal Prussia.** Kazimierz also had many children, who took over many European thrones, thus ensuring Poland a significant role in international politics.

## Zygmunt I Stary (Sigismund I the Old) – Golden Age

Zygmunt Stary was born on 1 January 1467 as one of the sons of Kazimierz IV Jagiellończyk and Elisabeth of Habsburg. He ascended the Polish throne in 1506 after the death of his brother, Alexander Jagiellończyk. His reign was characterised by his efforts to maintain peace and stability in Central and Eastern Europe.

**During his reign, the Polish state experienced a cultural and economic boom, known as the 'Golden Age'.** His wife, Bona Sforza, played an important role. The ruler carried out a tax reform, introducing a permanent tax on noble property called the 'quartern'. Zygmunt Stary was also responsible for the modernisation of the Wawel Castle in the Renaissance style.

The most important political event of his reign was **the Prussian Homage, paid by Albrecht Hohenzollern in 1525**, which ended the conflict with the Teutonic Order and established Ducal Prussia as a fief of Poland.

## The Prussian Homage – a triumph of Polish diplomacy

The Prussian Homage took place on 10 April 1525 on the market square in Kraków. Albrecht Hohenzollern, the last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, swore an oath of allegiance to King Zygmunt Stary, recognising himself as a vassal of the Kingdom of Poland.

This event was of great political and symbolic significance. Duchy of Prussia became a secular state dependent on Poland, which ended centuries of conflict with the Teutonic Order. The homage was immortalised by Jan Matejko in his famous painting 'The Prussian Homage', which to this day reminds us of the power of the Jagiellon dynasty.

## Queen Bona Sforza – Italian princess on the Polish throne

**Bona Sforza d'Aragona (1494–1557) was one of the most influential queens in Polish history, known for her energetic political, economic and cultural activities.** She was born on 2 February 1494 in Vigevano in northern Italy as the daughter of Gian Galeazzo Sforza, Duke of Milan, and Isabella of Aragon from the Neapolitan dynasty. Raised at the court in Bari, Bona received a comprehensive education, typical of the Italian Renaissance. She was familiar with literature, art, history, as well as politics and management.

### Marriage to Zygmunt Stary

In 1518, at the age of 24, she married the Polish king Zygmunt I Stary, who was 27 years older than her. The marriage was intended to strengthen Poland's relations with the Italian states and the Sforza dynasty, bringing political and economic benefits. Bona brought a breath of Renaissance culture to Poland, but also her own political ambitions.

### Political activity

Queen Bona was extremely active in politics. After her arrival in Poland, she quickly became one of the closest advisors to Zygmunt Stary. She looked after the interests of the Jagiellon dynasty, especially promoting the hereditary rights of her son, Zygmunt August, to the throne. She also supported the strengthening of royal power at a time when the nobility increasingly sought to limit the prerogatives of the monarch.

Bona was an advocate of a union with Lithuania and close cooperation with Poland's western neighbours. She was pragmatic and decisive in her foreign policy, which earned her both admiration and criticism. One of her goals was to reclaim the fiefdoms, known as 'królewszczyzna', which had been pledged as collateral to the magnates.

The queen became famous as the initiator of many economic reforms. She introduced inno-

vative methods of land cultivation and increased the efficiency of royal farms, utilising the experience of Italian agriculture. Thanks to her, vegetables such as tomatoes, cauliflowers and lettuce found their way to Poland, permanently changing the Polish menu – people even talked about ‘włoszczyzna’ (a mixture of different vegetables). Bona was also the owner of extensive estates, which she managed with great care, increasing her private income.

Although Bona had many supporters, her strong position and uncompromising nature caused conflicts, especially among the Polish nobility, who often saw her as a threat to their interests. She was criticised for pursuing her own policies independently of the Sejm and for accumulating wealth.

### **Bona’s legacy**

Bona had a great influence on her son, Zygmunt August, trying to secure his future as king. She strove to strengthen his power, but their relationship became increasingly strained in the later years of her life. Zygmunt August, wanting to become independent of his mother, often opposed her decisions.

After the death of Zygmunt Stary in 1548, Bona’s position at court weakened. In 1556, she decided to return to her hometown of Bari, taking some of her accumulated wealth with her. There, in 1557, she was poisoned by her trusted associate on the orders of the Habsburgs, who wanted to take over her property.

Bona Sforza left a lasting mark on Polish history. Her energetic efforts to modernise the economy, promote Renaissance culture and strengthen royal power make her one of the most intriguing figures of the Jagiellon era. Although she was seen by many as controversial, her contribution to the development of Poland is invaluable.

## **Zygmunt II August – the last of the Jagiellonians**

Zygmunt II August, son of Zygmunt Stary and Bona Sforza, was born on 1 August 1520 in Kraków. He was the first Polish monarch to be crowned during his father’s lifetime (in 1530), which was intended to avoid dynastic disputes.

His reign was a time of political reform and great change. In 1569, he led the signing of the Union of Lublin, which united Poland and Lithuania into

**one state – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.** Zygmunt II August died in 1572, ending the Jagiellon dynasty. He left no descendants, which ushered in an era of free elections.

### **Union of Lublin – the birth of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth**

The Union of Lublin, signed on 1 July 1569 in Lublin, was a key event in the history of Poland and Lithuania. This event was the result of many years of efforts to strengthen the ties between the two countries, which had been united under a common ruler since the personal union in 1385. In the face of new external threats, such as Moscow’s expansion and the need to strengthen their common forces, it was decided to bind the destinies of the two nations more closely.

The union created a single state – **the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth** – in which both countries had a common parliament, currency, foreign policy and ruler, but retained separate laws, languages and armies. Lublin became the place where difficult negotiations were held between representatives of the Polish and Lithuanian nobility. After long discussions, a compromise was reached that is still considered a symbol of successful cooperation between nations.

The Union of Lublin was also an expression of multiculturalism, as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth included various ethnic and religious groups such as Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Jews, Tatars and Germans. The signing of the union opened a new chapter in the history of Central and Eastern Europe, creating one of the largest and most powerful political organisations on the continent.

### **The Union of Brest – uniting churches in the face of division**

The Union of Brest, concluded in 1596 in Brest-Litovsk, was an attempt to unite Eastern Orthodox Christians with the Catholic Church. This event took place in the context of ongoing religious divisions in Europe, caused by the Reformation and reinforced by the rivalry between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

As a result of the union, some Orthodox bishops agreed to recognise the Pope’s supremacy while retaining their own rite, liturgical language (Old Church Slavonic) and many traditional elements of Eastern Christianity. This is how the Greek Catholic Church was created, combining the traditions of the East and the West.

The union had both supporters and opponents. For some, it was an opportunity for religious reconciliation and stability in the multi-denominational Republic of Poland, for others it was a betrayal of the Orthodox tradition. Conflicts over the union contributed to social and political tensions, especially in Ruthenian lands, where Orthodoxy was the dominant religion.

The Union of Brest was a turning point that led to the creation of the Uniate Church, which was to play a significant role in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in Polish-Ukrainian relations for centuries to come.

## Summary

The chapter on the Jagiellonians covers one of the most glorious periods in the history of Poland and Lithuania, from 1386 to 1572. The Jagiellonian dynasty, founded by Władysław Jagiełło, created a multinational and multidenominational state that played a key role in the history of Central and Eastern Europe. It was a time of political, economic and cultural splendour, but also of numerous challenges.

**Władysław Jagiełło**, the founder of the dynasty, initiated the tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian union, symbolised by the victorious **battle of Grunwald** in 1410, one of the greatest military triumphs in medieval history. Thanks to his efforts, Poland and Lithuania strengthened their cooperation, and the Christianisation of Lithuania strengthened the dynasty's position.

Jagiełło's successors, including **Władysław Warneńczyk** and **Kazimierz Jagiellończyk**, continued the dynasty's tradition of development and expansion. Kazimierz Jagiellończyk, the father of thirteen children, was one of the most powerful rulers of his era. During his reign, Poland regained Pomerelia, which contributed to the development of the maritime economy.

The reigns of **Zygmunt Stary** and **Zygmunt August** symbolise the golden age of the Polish Renaissance. **Queen Bona**, the wife of Zygmunt Stary, introduced Renaissance ideas to Poland and significantly influenced the development of the economy. Zygmunt August, the last Jagiellon on the throne, initiated the **Union of Lublin** in 1569, which transformed the personal union of Poland and Lithuania into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a unique federative state.

This period was characterised by great events such as **the Prussian Homage in 1525**, which symbolised the triumph of the Jagiellon dynasty's politics, and the **feast of Wierzynek**, which emphasised Poland's international significance. **The Union of Brest** in 1596, although formally taking place after the end of the Jagiellon dynasty, was the result of earlier political actions aimed at strengthening religious cooperation between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

## Free Election - a new way of electing a ruler

After the expiration of the Jagiellonian dynasty in 1572 and the death of Zygmunt II August, Poland introduced an innovative system of choosing a monarch - free election. Any king coming from this system was to be elected by the nobility, which gave them enormous influence over state policy. Over the following years, both foreign and native monarchs passed through the throne of the Republic. This chapter details selected rulers until the death of Jan III Sobieski in 1696.

### Henry the Valois (1573-1574)

The first elected king was **Henry** Valois, a French prince from the Valois dynasty. Elected in 1573, he left Poland just a year later to take the French throne as Henry III. His short reign did not bring significant changes to the country, but he left a legacy in the form of **the Articles of Henry** and **the Pacts of the Conventions** - documents regulating relations between the king and the nobility.

### Stefan Batory (1576-1586)

After a turbulent period of interregnum, Stefan Batory, Duke of Transylvania, became the next ruler. His reign was a period of reform and military success. Major achievements:

**The victorious war with Moscow** (1579-1582) that ended with the Peace of Jama Zapolski, which restored the Inflants to Poland.

**Reform of the army**, including the creation of the Chosen Infantry.

Batory was known for his vision of a just state and his cooperation with Chancellor Jan Zamoyski.

### Waza dynasty (1587-1668)

The Wazas, a Swedish royal dynasty, ruled the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1587 to 1668, a turbulent time for both Poland and Europe. The reign of this dynasty spanned three consecutive reigns: Sigismund III Waza (1587-



## Lesson 9

### Kings of the Free Election (1573–1696). The Vasa kings and Jan III Sobieski.

In this section you will learn about important events that had a key impact on the fate of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th century. We will take a closer look at the profiles of kings coming from the free election, such as Zygmunt III Waza, Władysław IV Waza, Jan Kazimierz Waza and Jan III Sobieski. You will discover their achievements, the challenges they faced, and their impact on Polish history.

1632), Ladislaus IV Waza (1632-1648) and Jan II Kazimierz Waza (1648-1668). This was a period characterized by both significant successes and profound crises that affected the further fate of the state.

## Zygmunt III Waza

Zygmunt III Waza (1566-1632) was one of the longest-reigning monarchs in Polish history, ruling from 1587 until his death in 1632. He was born on June 20, 1566 in Gripsholm, Sweden, as the son of Jan III Waza, King of Sweden, and Katarzyna Jagiellonka, daughter of Zygmunt I Stary. Zygmunt thus combined Polish and Swedish royal heritage, which had a significant impact on his reign.

### Road to the throne

Zygmunt was elected king of Poland through a free election in 1587, which followed the heirless deaths of Zygmunt II August and Stefan Batory. His election was intended to strengthen ties between Poland and Sweden, but dynastic disputes and religious differences (Zygmunt was a devout Catholic in Protestant Sweden) hampered these plans.

Zygmunt also crowned himself king of Sweden in 1594, but was dethroned as early as 1599 by his uncle, Karol IX, who proclaimed himself king of Sweden. Thus Zygmunt permanently settled in Poland, focused on the affairs of the Republic.

### Moving the capital to Warszawa

One of the key events of his reign was the transfer of the capital from Kraków to Warszawa. This decision, made in 1596, was both practical and political. Warszawa was located in the central part of the country, which made it easier to manage the vast state. It was also conveniently located on the route connecting the Crown of the Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which facilitated better communication between the two parts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Warszawa quickly gained in importance and became a center of political and cultural life. Zygmunt III Waza commissioned the construction of the Royal Castle in Warszawa, which became his main residence. Although Kraków remained the site of the coronation of Poland's kings, Warszawa began to serve as an informal capital from that point on.

### Reign and conflicts

The reign of Zygmunt III Waza was marked by many conflicts, both internal and external. His at-

tempts to centralize power and promote Catholicism were met with resistance from the nobility, leading to rebellions and tensions. In foreign policy, he waged numerous wars with Russia, Sweden and Turkey, which devastated the Republic, but also brought temporary successes, such as the capture of Moscow in 1610.

### Death and legacy

Zygmunt III Waza died on April 30, 1632 in Warszawa. His reign, though long and full of important events, evokes mixed assessments from historians. His strong involvement in religious issues and conflict with Protestants contributed to deepening divisions in the Republic, while constant wars weakened the country economically and politically. Nevertheless, his decision to move the capital to Warszawa had a lasting impact on Polish history and shaped its modern political landscape.

## Władysław IV Waza (1595-1648)

Władysław IV Waza, born June 9, 1595 in Łobzów near Kraków, was the son of Zygmunt III Waza and Anna Habsburg. From childhood he was prepared for his role as monarch. In 1610 he was elected Tsar of Russia by Russian boyars during the Polish-Russian War, but never took actual power in Moscow due to changing political conditions. Nevertheless, the title of Tsar of Russia was part of his official title for some time.

After his father's death in 1632, Władysław IV was elected King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania. His reign coincided with a time of relative calm in the country, although there were ongoing battles with Moscow in the east. **The conclusion of the Peace of Polanov in 1634** ended these conflicts, and Władysław officially renounced his claim to the Moscow throne.

Władysław IV was a proponent of strengthening royal power and modernizing the military. He succeeded in creating **a Baltic fleet** and significantly developed the artillery. He also planned a major war against the Ottoman Empire, but his ambitions were stymied by the nobility, which did not want additional tax burdens.

The king was also a patron of culture and the arts. During his reign, many new buildings were erected and numerous works of art were created. Władysław IV supported the development of opera, which became a permanent fixture at the Polish court.

Władysław IV died on May 20, 1648 in Merez (now Lithuania). His death coincided with the outbreak of the Chmielnicki Uprising, which began a difficult period in the history of the Republic.

## Jan II Kazimierz Waza (1609-1672)

John II Kazimierz Waza, younger brother of Władysław IV Waza, was born on March 22, 1609 in Kraków. He was the son of Zygmunt III Waza and Constance of Habsburg. From his youth he was characterized by impulsiveness and ambition, which led him to seek his own path in life outside Poland. In 1638 he joined the Jesuit order, but quickly gave up clerical life.

In 1648, after the death of his brother, he was elected king of Poland. His reign fell during one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Republic. **The Chmielnicki Uprising**, which broke out while he was still in the reign of Władysław IV, turned into a years-long war with the Cossacks and the Tatars. Jan Kazimierz also had to face **the Swedish Deluge (1655-1660)**, i.e. the invasion of Poland by Sweden, and interventions by Russia and Transylvania.

The king became famous for his dramatic decisions and struggle to save the country. It was during his reign that events such as **the heroic defense of Jasna Góra**, which became a symbol of resistance to invaders, took place. Jan Kazimierz also supported the development of the cult of Our Lady of Częstochowa, who was proclaimed Queen of Poland.

Despite victories in wars, the country's internal situation was dire. Toward the end of Jan Kazimierz's reign, magnate conflicts and economic crises grew. The king resigned from the throne in 1668 and went to France, where he spent the rest of his life. He died on December 16, 1672 in Nevers.

Jan Kazimierz is remembered as a monarch of complex character - full of energy and ambition, but often overwhelmed by the difficulties he faced.

## The Chmielnicki Uprising (1648-1657)

The Chmielnicki Uprising was one of the most important events in the history of Ukraine and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It constituted an armed rebellion of Zaporizhzhian Cossacks and Ukrainian peasants against the Polish-Lithuanian nobility and magnates. The cause was the growing social, religious and nationality conflicts that exacerbated inequalities and tensions in the multi-ethnic Republic.

### ● Causes of the uprising:

#### **Social and economic:**

Ukrainian peasants suffered from heavy feudal burdens, forced serfdom and repression of their culture. The magnates, taking advantage of the privileges of the nobility, treated the Ukrainian population as cheap labor, which aroused discontent.

#### **Religious:**

Growing tensions between the Orthodox and Catholic populations were compounded by the politics of the Union of Brest (1596). Orthodoxy, deeply rooted in Ukraine, was relegated to the position of a tolerated religion, which aroused resistance from the faithful and clergy.

#### **Political:**

The Zaporizhzhian Cossacks, a military-social group originating in Ukraine, demanded an increase in the Cossack register (the number of Cossacks in the military service of the Republic). However, their demands were ignored by Polish leaders, leading to tensions.

#### **Personal:**

The leader of the uprising, Bohdan Chmielnicki, had a personal reason to revolt. The authorities of the Republic failed to punish the nobleman Czaplinski, who seized Khmelnitsky's property, leading to the death of his wife and the ruin of his family. This event motivated Khmelnitsky to act.

### ● Course of the uprising:

#### **The beginning of the revolt:**

In 1648, Bohdan Chmielnicki, after receiving support from the Crimean Tatars, sparked an uprising in Zaporizhia. In the very first clashes, the Cossacks won victories at Yellow Waters (May 1648) and Korsun (May 1648), which compromised the troops of the Republic.

### **Spread of the uprising:**

The uprising quickly spread to other regions of Ukraine. The Cossacks won huge support from the peasantry, which joined the rebellion en masse. In many places there was brutal violence against the nobility and Jewish population, who were seen as part of the oppressive feudal system.

### **Great battles:**

- Battle of Piławce (September 1648): The Polish army suffered defeat, which opened the way for the insurgents to reach Lviv and Zamość.
- Zborov Settlement (1649): After several more clashes, the Zborov Settlement was concluded in 1649, which recognized the broad autonomy of the Cossacks in Ukraine.

### **Russian intervention:**

In 1654, Khmelnytsky signed the Pereyaslav treaty with Moscow, which meant the subordination of Ukraine to the Russian Tsar. This event changed the geopolitical balance of power in Eastern Europe and deepened the conflict between the Republic and Moscow.

### ● **Effects of the uprising:**

#### **Destruction and population losses:**

The uprising led to the ruin of Ukraine and the destruction of many towns and villages. Numerous pogroms, especially of the Jewish and Polish populations, were among the most tragic aspects of the conflict.

#### **Weakening of the Republic:**

The conflict with the Cossacks, combined with the subsequent wars with Sweden and Moscow, greatly weakened the military and economic potential of the Republic, initiating its gradual decline.

#### **Partition of Ukraine:**

The Andruszów settlement (1667), which ended the Polish-Russian war, divided Ukraine between the Republic and Russia. Left-bank Ukraine came under Moscow's control, with long-lasting consequences for the fate of the region.

### ● **Historical significance:**

The Chmielnicki Uprising was a turning point in the history of Eastern Europe. It contributed to the emergence of a new Ukrainian identity, but at the same time set in motion processes that weakened the Republic and enabled the rise of Russian power. The conflict remains one of the key elements in the history of Polish-Ukrainian relations to this day.

## **The Swedish Deluge (1655–1660) – invasion, struggle and salvation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth**

In 1655, the Swedes invaded Poland, using the dispute over the Swedish crown with Jan II Kazimierz as a pretext. Their forces were well organized and equipped with modern weapons, while the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was devastated by previous conflicts. The campaign began rapidly – in the summer of 1655, the army of Field Marshal Arvid Wittenberg entered Greater Poland. The Polish troops, led by the Crown Field Hetman Stanisław Potocki and the Voivode of Poznań Krzysztof Opaliński, did not put up significant resistance. Near Ujście (July 25, 1655), the nobility of Greater Poland surrendered almost without a fight, switching sides to Charles X Gustav.

### **Radziwiłłs' betrayal**

Meanwhile, another Swedish army, led by Karol X Gustav himself, entered Lithuania. The Grand Duke of Lithuania, Janusz Radziwiłł, fearing Moscow, decided to take a shameful step – on October 20, 1655, he signed the Kiejdany Agreement, placing Lithuania under Swedish protection. It was a betrayal that shook the country, but it was not the only one. Under the pressure of the Swedish army, more cities opened their gates, including Warsaw (September 8, 1655) and in Kraków (October 19, 1655), and King Jan II Kazimierz had to flee to Silesia. It seemed that Poland had fallen without a fight and the Swedes were celebrating.

### **The miraculous defense of Jasna Góra – a turning point in the war**

However, not everyone was ready to capitulate. In the small Jasna Góra monastery, a handful of Pauline monks and several hundred defenders, led by Prior Augustyn Kordecki, refused to surrender the fortress. On November 18, 1655, the Swedes, who had a significant numerical and artillery advantage, began the siege of Częstochowa. For over a month, the order and its defenders repelled the attacks using fortifications and clever tactics.

Finally, on December 27, 1655, the Swedes withdrew from the siege. It was a symbolic event that showed that the Republic of Poland still had the strength to fight. The defense of Jasna Góra boosted the morale of the nation and contributed to the legend of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa as the protector of Poland.

### **The return of the king and guerrilla warfare**

After the defeat at Jasna Góra, uprisings against the Swedes began to break out in the country. Stefan Czarniecki, one of the most outstanding Polish army commanders, led the fight. His troops, using the tactics of guerrilla warfare, successfully harassed the enemy, striking by surprise and avoiding open battles.

In January 1656, Jan II Kazimierz returned to the country and on April 1, 1656, he made the famous Vows of Lwów in the Lwów Cathedral, entrusting the Republic of Poland to the protection of the Virgin Mary. Soon after, on May 3, 1656, the Poles won a decisive victory at the Battle of Warka and then recaptured Warszawa on July 7.

### **Coalition against Sweden and end of the war**

Seeing the growing power of the Republic of Poland, other countries took sides against Sweden. The Russian Tsar Alexei I and Emperor Leopold I began to support Poland, and in 1657, the Elector Frederick William of Brandenburg also turned against Karol X Gustav. As a result, the Swedes were forced to withdraw from the Republic of Poland, and the war shifted to Denmark.

**A final peace treaty was signed in Oliwa on May 3, 1660. Poland regained its lost territories and Jan II Kazimierz renounced his claim to the Swedish throne.** Although the Republic of Poland survived, the war left the country in ruins and the destruction and loss of life were catastrophic. The Swedish Deluge became one of the most tragic episodes in Polish history, but at the same time a symbol of national determination and spiritual strength.

## **Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (1669-1673)**

Elected thanks to the support of the nobility, Michał Korybut was the son of the famous Jeremi Wiśniowiecki. His reign came at a difficult time of internal disputes and external threats. The lack of military and political successes weakened the authority of the Republic.

## **Jan III Sobieski (1629-1696)**

Jan III Sobieski (1629-1696) was one of Poland's most prominent rulers, known primarily as the victor from under Vienna and defender of Christian

Europe against the Ottoman invasion. He was born on August 17, 1629 in Olesko in Volhynia. He came from the influential Sobieski magnate family, which enabled him to receive a well-rounded education, including travels in Western Europe that enriched his knowledge of the world and politics.

### **Marriage to Maria Kazimiera**

Jan III Sobieski married Maria Kazimiera d'Arquien in 1665. Maria Kazimiera, known as "Marysieńka," was descended from French nobility. Their marriage was unusual in that it combined strong affection with political pragmatism. John was deeply in love with his wife, as can be seen in the numerous love letters he wrote to her. These letters, known as "Letters from Sobieski to Marysieńka," bear witness to their unique relationship, full of tenderness and mutual support.

Despite having political ambitions and influencing her husband's decisions, Marysieńka was sometimes criticized for her actions. Some historians accuse her of not always acting in the interest of the state, but more driven by personal interests. Nevertheless, she was a loyal partner of Jan and supported him in difficult moments, especially during his military campaigns.

### **Jan III Sobieski as king**

Sobieski became King of Poland in 1674 after a spectacular victory at the Battle of Chocim (1673). He was an excellent strategist and military commander, which earned him respect both at home and abroad. His reign coincided with a difficult period in Polish history, when the country struggled against external threats, mainly from the Ottoman Empire.

### **The Battle of Vienna relief (1683)**

The relief of Vienna was a key event in Sobieski's life and one of the most important moments in European history. In 1683, the Ottoman Empire, led by Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa, laid siege to Vienna, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. The success of the Turks could open the way for further expansion of Islam in Europe.

Jan III Sobieski, as an ally of Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg, answered the call for help. At the head of some 27,000 Polish soldiers (including the famous hussars), Sobieski headed south to support besieged Vienna. Together with the imperial army and other allied troops, he formed a coalition of some 70,000 soldiers.

# Battle of Vienna

The decisive battle took place on September 12, 1683 on the Kahlenberg hills near Vienna. Sobieski personally commanded the allied forces and planned the attack, which began with infantry and artillery actions. The key moment was the charge of the Polish hussars - one of the largest in history, involving some 20,000 horsemen. The charge broke the Turkish array, forcing the Ottoman army to flee.

Sobieski, sending news of the victory to Pope Innocent XI, wrote the famous words: "Venimus, vidimus, Deus vicit" ("We came, we saw, God won").

## ● Significance of the Siege of Vienna

### For Europe:

- The victory at Vienna halted the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into Central Europe, allowing the region to stabilize.
- Sobieski was hailed as the defender of Christianity, and his prestige in the international arena reached its peak.
- The battle initiated the gradual decline of Ottoman power in Europe.

### For Poland:

- Sobieski's success at Vienna was a source of national pride, but it did not bring Poland lasting political or territorial advantages.
- The Vienna campaign weakened the Polish economy and armed forces, which in the long run contributed to the deterioration of the country's internal situation.

Jan III Sobieski died on June 17, 1696 in Wilanow. Although he was an outstanding military commander and won one of the most important victories in European history, his successes did not translate into a long-term strengthening of Poland. His life and deeds, however, remain a symbol of courage and dedication to the defense of Christian Europe.

Maria Kazimiera outlived her husband by 17 years and died in 1714 in Rome, where she settled after John's death.

# Summary

Kings elected by free election were characterized by diverse personalities, ambitions and talents. Many of them left a lasting mark on Polish culture, politics and the military, but at the same time their reign exposed the Republic's political weaknesses, including the ineffective electoral system and the excessive influence of the magnates. This era prepared the ground for later events that led to the collapse of the state in the 18th century.

## Reign of the Wettin dynasty (1697-1763)

### August II the Mocny (1697-1733)

August II Mocny (the Strong), known for his physical strength and political ambition, became the first king of the Republic from the Saxon dynasty. He took the throne as a result of a complicated election, defeating a pretender - the French Prince of Conti. His reign was characterized by attempts to centralize power, which met with resistance from the magnates and nobility.

August II Mocny involved the Republic in the Northern Wars (1700-1721), which had disastrous economic and social consequences. One of the biggest crises was the Warsaw Confederation (1704), which led to the dethronement of the August and the deposition of Stanisław Leszczyński as king. After the end of the Northern War, August II returned to the throne, but his position was weak.

### August III Saxon (1733-1763)

August II was succeeded by his son, August III Saxon. The period of his reign was a time of relaxation of royal power and domination by the magnates, which is referred to in history as "golden freedom." In practice, this meant political stagnation. The king's power was mainly limited to a representative role, and real power was exercised by magnate families such as the Czartoryskis and the Potockis.

### Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Stanisław August Poniatowski was born on January 17, 1732 in Volchin in Polesia. He came from the Poniatowski magnate family, which had a long political and military tradition. His father was Stanisław Poniatowski, castellan of Kraków, and his mother was Konstancja née Czartoryska, which gave him access to the influential circle of the



## Lesson 10

### The Saxon times, Stanisław August Poniatowski and the May 3 Constitution.

Welcome to the chapter devoted to a turbulent period in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – the reign of the kings of the Wettin dynasty and the last king of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski. In this chapter, we will expand on the knowledge gained in Lesson 10, delving into the events that shaped this difficult but extremely interesting period of our history. We will pay special attention to the Sejm the Great and the adoption of the May 3 Constitution – a milestone in the quest to modernize the Republic.

so-called Czartoryski Familia - a magnate grouping with liberal and reformist views.

### Education and youth

Stanisław August received a comprehensive education, studying at Jesuit colleges in Warszawa and Dresden. His education included literature, philosophy, foreign languages and sciences, which shaped him into one of the best-educated Polish rulers. He traveled throughout Western Europe, visiting such countries as France, Great Britain and Italy, where he became familiar with Enlightenment ideas and gained extensive political and social contacts.

In 1755-1756 he stayed in St. Petersburg, where he became a favorite of the future Tsarina Catherine II. It was her support that largely enabled him to ascend to the Polish throne in 1764.

### Ascension to the throne

Stanisław August was elected king of Poland on September 7, 1764, with overwhelming support from Russia. His coronation took place on November 25 of the same year in Warsaw. He was the last elected king, and his reign fell during one of the most turbulent periods in Polish history. His reign began with reform attempts to rebuild the weakened state, but they were often torpedoed by interference from neighboring powers.

### Patronage of culture and the arts

Stanisław August was one of the most prominent patrons of art and culture in Polish history. His court at the Royal Baths Park in Warsaw became an intellectual and artistic center, hosting personalities from all over Europe. The king initiated many activities, such as:

- Thursday Dinners - intellectual meetings where literature, philosophy and politics were discussed.
- Establishment in 1773 of the Commission of National Education (KEN) - the world's first ministry of education.
- Patronage of the work of artists such as Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto), who documented the architecture of Warsaw.

### Politics and reforms

Stanisław August, realizing the weakness of the state, tried to carry out political and social reforms. The establishment of the May 3 Constitution was the culmination of his efforts to renew the state. However, his dependence on Russia and lack of a strong political base prevented him from effectively opposing the partitioners.

During Stanisław August's reign, there were three partitions of Poland: in 1772, 1793 and 1795. After the third partition, the king abdicated on November 25, 1795 in favor of Tsarina Catherine II. He was forced to leave Poland and settled in St. Petersburg, where he spent the last years of his life. Stanisław August died on February 12, 1798 in St. Petersburg. He was buried in St. Catherine's Church, and his remains were later moved to Wawel Castle. Despite his controversial role in Polish history, in modern times he is seen as a ruler who tried to save the country under extremely difficult circumstances.

Stanisław August Poniatowski left a legacy of reform and cultural patronage. Although he failed to save Poland from partition, his cultural activities and efforts to modernize the country left a lasting mark on the history of the Republic. He became a symbol of attempts to save the failing state in the face of external and internal adversity.

## The First Partition of Poland (1772)

The First Partition of the Republic was the result of the long-term weakening of the state, both internally and internationally. This event took place as a result of the rivalry between three powerful neighbors: Russia, Prussia and Austria, which decided to take advantage of the chaos in Poland to advance their territorial interests.

### Causes of partition:

- The political and economic crisis of the Republic: The fragmentation of the magnates' power and the anarchic liberum veto system meant that the Sejm was unable to make effective decisions.
- Interventions by neighboring states: Russia interfered in Poland's internal affairs under the pretext of protecting the rights of religious dissidents. Prussia and Austria, fearing the growth of Russian influence, joined the partition negotiations.
- Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774): This conflict diverted Turkey's attention from the Republic, allowing Russia to focus on Polish affairs.

### Course of partition:

The Partition Treaties were signed in St. Petersburg on August 5, 1772, and the territories of the Republic were divided among the three powers:

- Russia seized the eastern lands of the Republic, including much of Inflants and Belarus.

- Prussia obtained Danzig Pomerania (without Danzig) and Warmia, which strengthened the connection between East Prussia and Brandenburg.
- Austria seized the southern territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, including part of Malopolska and Halich Ruthenia.

### **Consequences of the first partition of Poland**

The partition meant the loss of about 30% of the territory and one-third of the population of the Republic. In addition, the partition revealed the state's inability to defend itself and reform, which led to further weakening of the Republic in the following years.

## **May 3 Constitution of 1791**

The May 3 Constitution was a response to the need for extensive political reforms to save the state from further disintegration. It was the first constitution in Europe and the second in the world after the American Constitution of 1787.

### **Preparations for the adoption of the constitution**

Work on the Basic Law began during the Great Sejm (1788-1792). The creators of the Constitution were inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the experience of other countries, such as the United States and France. The main authors of the document were King Stanisław August Poniatowski, Ignacy Potocki and Hugo Kołłątaj.

### ● **Provisions of the Constitution**

#### **Tripartition of power:**

- Legislative power belonged to the bicameral Sejm.
- Executive power rested in the hands of the Guard of Laws, composed of the king and five ministers.
- Judicial power was independent of the others.

#### **Abolition of the liberum veto:**

The Constitution introduced the principles of majority voting in the Diet, eliminating the possibility of legislative paralysis.

#### **Social reforms:**

- Peasants came under the protection of the state, paving the way for the abolition of serfdom.
- The bourgeoisie gained the right to acquire land and the ability to hold state offices.

### **Political changes:**

Poland became a constitutional monarchy with a hereditary throne. Free elections were abolished to prevent political chaos.

### ● **Significance of the Constitution**

The May 3 Constitution was an extremely progressive piece of legislation that inspired other nations struggling for modernization and independence. Although its provisions were overturned by Russian intervention and the Targowicz Confederation (1792), the memory of the Constitution became a symbol of the struggle for freedom and sovereignty.

### **The collapse of the reforms**

Reform efforts were interrupted by the war to defend the Constitution, which ended in the defeat of the Republic. The Second Partition of Poland (1793) and the abdication of Stanisław August Poniatowski in 1795 sealed the collapse of the state.

# Targowitz Confederation - a national betrayal

After the adoption of **the May 3 Constitution** in 1791, Poland underwent changes aimed at rebuilding the state and strengthening its sovereignty. The reforms provoked opposition from some of the magnates, fearing the loss of their privileges. In May 1792, a group of conservative magnates, including **Szczęśny Potocki**, **Franciszek Ksawery Branicki** and **Seweryn Rzewuski**, formed the Targowica Confederation in Targowica (today in Ukraine). Its goal was to restore the old system based on “golden freedom of the nobility,” which in practice meant anarchy and the weakening of the central government.

The confederates, under the pretext of defending freedom and religion under threat, turned for help to Tsarina Catherine II, who saw this as an opportunity to intervene militarily and further subjugate Poland. On May 18, 1792, Russian troops entered the Republic. Although Polish troops, commanded by **Prince Józef Poniatowski** and **Tadeusz Kościuszko**, among others, put up fierce resistance (e.g., at the Battle of Zieleńiec), the war ended in defeat. King Stanisław August Poniatowski joined the confederation, which was an act of treason against the reformers.

To this day, **Targowica remains a symbol of national treason**, as magnates for their own gain led to the loss of state sovereignty.

## Second Partition of Poland

Following the seizure of power by the Targowitz confederates and defeat in the war with Russia, Poland was forced to make further territorial concessions. On January 23, 1793, Russia and Prussia signed a partition treaty, as a result of which the Republic lost further territories:

- Russia seized the eastern lands of the Commonwealth, including Minsk, Zhytomyr and Kyiv.
- Prussia seized Greater Poland, Gdansk and Torun, securing access to the Baltic Sea.

The partition was formally approved by the Sejm in Grodno, which acted under pressure from the partitioning armies. It was an act of coercion, which in practice meant the further disintegration of the state.



## Lesson 11

### The collapse of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth – the Targowitz Confederation, the Second and Third Partitions of Poland.

Lesson 11 takes us to the final stage of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, when the state was in political, social and military crisis. We will look at the events that led to the final collapse of Polish statehood, analyzing the key moments of this dramatic period.

# Kościuszko Uprising

## March 24 - November 4, 1794.

In response to the dramatic situation of Poland, the Kościuszko Uprising, the first national uprising against the partitioning powers, broke out in March 1794. It was led by Tadeusz Kościuszko, a hero of the American War of Independence. The uprising began on March 24, 1794 in Kraków, where Kościuszko proclaimed the act of insurrection and took command as Supreme Commander of the National Armed Forces.

### Tadeusz Kościuszko

Tadeusz Kościuszko (born February 4, 1746 in Mereczowszczyzna - died October 15, 1817 in Solura) was one of the most prominent Polish military commanders, a military engineer and a hero of the struggle for the independence of Poland and the United States. Educated at the Noble Academy of the Cadet Corps in Warsaw and later in Paris, he gained combat experience during the American War of Independence. Upon his return to Poland, he became involved in reform efforts and later led an uprising against the partitioners. Kościuszko was an ardent supporter of social equality, which was reflected in his actions during the uprising, when he tried to include not only the nobility, but also peasants and other lower classes in the struggle.

### Kościuszko Uprising

The Kościuszko Uprising was a reaction to the dramatic situation of Poland after the Second Partition in 1793. By then, the Republic was already a country largely under the control of the partitioners, especially Russia. The Targowicz Confederation, which led to the weakening of the state, gained Russian support, which enabled Czarina Catherine II to continue interfering in Polish affairs. In response to the humiliation and growing threat, the Poles decided to fight to regain their independence.

The uprising began on March 24, 1794 in Kraków. Tadeusz Kościuszko, in the Main Square in Kraków, proclaimed the act of uprising and was appointed Supreme Head of the National Armed Forces. He vowed to fight for independence, and also announced social reforms to increase peasants' participation in the fighting.

### Battle of Raclawice

One of the first successes of the uprising was the Battle of Raclawice (April 4, 1794), where Kościuszko defeated the Russian army commanded by General Tormasov. In the battle the Kościuszko

soldiers - peasants armed with battle scythes - were famous. This victory was of great symbolic importance, showing that the joint effort of Poles, regardless of social background, can bring success.

### Połaniec Uniwersal

On May 7, 1794 Kościuszko issued the Połaniec Uniwersal, a document aimed at improving the situation of peasants. The decree guaranteed, among other things, a reduction in serfdom, protection from unlawful removal from the land and the right to personal freedom for those who engaged in the struggle. Although these reforms were limited and encountered opposition from the nobility, they were intended to encourage peasants to participate in the uprising.

The uprising quickly spread to other regions of the Republic, including Warsaw and Vilnius, where there was fighting with Russian and Prussian forces. However, the insurgents faced formidable challenges, including the lack of a regular army, logistical problems and the numerical and technological superiority of the enemy.

### More important clashes:

- Defense of Warszawa (1794) - under Kościuszko's command, the insurgents successfully defended the capital against Russian and Prussian troops.
- Battle of Maciejowice (October 10, 1794) - key defeat of the uprising, in which Kościuszko was wounded and taken into Russian captivity.

### The collapse of the uprising

After the defeat at Maciejowice, the uprising lost its leader and began to disintegrate. On November 4, 1794, Russian troops made a brutal assault on Prague, which sealed the fall of the uprising. The fighting ended in November 1794, and a year later, in 1795, the invaders carried out the Third Partition, which wiped Poland off the map of Europe for 123 years.

The Kościuszko Uprising, although an act of heroism and patriotism, ended in defeat, which hastened the final collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After suppressing the insurrection, in 1795, the monarchs of Russia, Prussia and Austria proceeded with the third partition of Poland, completely liquidating its statehood.

After the defeat of the uprising, the invaders applied harsh repressions against its participants. Many insurgents were executed and thousands were exiled to Siberia, where they were subjected to hard labor. These deportations, which were one form of punishment of Polish patriots, affected

the fate of many families and left a deep trauma in Polish society.

As a result of these events, King Stanisław August Poniatowski, seeing no possibility of continuing in power, abdicated on November 25, 1795. This formally ended the existence of the First Republic. Poland disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years, and its lands were incorporated into three powerful empires.

Although the uprising did not achieve its goal, its legacy influenced the formation of national consciousness and Polish patriotism in subsequent generations. Tadeusz Kościuszko, the main leader of the uprising, became a symbol of the struggle for freedom, equality and independence. His figure inspired not only Poles, but also other nations fighting for their rights.

An important part of the uprising's legacy was the Połaniec Uniwersal, which announced social reforms, including the partial enfranchisement of peasants. Although the document was not fully implemented, it had an impact on later discussions of social change in Poland. The Unoval initiated a process that, in the long run, contributed to the growing awareness of the peasantry as an integral part of the nation.

The Kościuszko Uprising reminded Poles of the need for unity and solidarity in the struggle for independence. Although it ended in defeat, its idea survived, inspiring subsequent national uprisings, such as the November and January Uprisings, which took place in the 19th century. The memory of this uprising is forever inscribed in Polish history as a testament to the nation's determination to fight for its rights.

## Third Partition of Poland

**On October 24, 1795**, Russia, Prussia and Austria signed a treaty to partition the remaining lands of the Republic. The borders between the partitioners were drawn in such a way that Poland ceased to exist as a state:

- Russia included the territories east of the Bug River.
- Prussia included Mazovia with Warszawa.
- Austria took over Małopolska and Lublin.

On November 25, 1795, Stanisław August Poniatowski was forced to abdicate in favor of Tsarina Catherine II and left Poland. He spent the last years of his life in St. Petersburg, where he died in 1798.

### Effects of the partitions

The partitions of Poland brought a complete loss of sovereignty and ended the existence of one of the oldest European states. The Republic, which for centuries had been a unique example of a mixed monarchy with extensive liberties for the nobility, ceased to function as a political entity. The state was divided between three neighboring powers: Russia, Prussia and Austria, which took control of its territory.

In practice, this meant:

- the absence of a central political authority representing the interests of the Poles,
- liquidation of the army and administrative structures of the Republic,
- the introduction of foreign laws, offices and language in place of Polish institutions,
- repression of Polish elites, especially those involved in national uprisings.

The loss of statehood forced Poles to operate in underground structures or in exile. Polish political and military leaders, such as Tadeusz Kościuszko and Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, later played key roles in the struggle to regain independence. Social and cultural consequences of the partitions

The Partitions led to profound social changes:

- The nobility lost its dominant political position, and many magnates and landowners had to adapt to the conditions imposed by the partitioners.
- The peasants, although formally subordinated to the partitioning administrations, gradually began to benefit from modernization processes, such as gradual liberation from serfdom (e.g., in the Prussian and Austrian partitions).
- Polish culture was subjected to strong processes of Russification (Russian partition) and Germanization (Prussian partition). In the Austrian partition, in Galicia, Poles had more freedoms, which enabled the development of Polish education and culture.

Despite this, Poles tried to preserve their national identity. The activities of institutions such as the Society of Friends of Science and the later Jagiellonian University became a hotbed of national memory and the education of patriotic elites.

### Economic consequences of the partitions

The division of the lands of the Commonwealth between the three partitioners resulted in the halting of economic development. The introduction of different monetary, legal and customs systems hindered trade between the partitions. Prussia used the Polish lands as a source of raw

materials, while Russia treated the Polish eastern territories as an economic base for its empire.

In particular:

- The Prussian partition introduced restrictive land and language laws, forcing Poles to emigrate or give up their land ownership.
- The Russian partition was characterized by land exploitation and economic repression of Polish entrepreneurs.
- Galicia, the poorest partitioned region, became synonymous with backwardness and poverty. However, the autonomous rights granted to Poles in the late 19th century enabled the development of cultural and economic institutions.

## National identity and the struggle for independence

The partitions did not destroy the Polish national spirit. On the contrary, they became the impetus for the struggle to regain independence. Poles took part in national uprisings such as the Kościuszko Uprising (1794), the November Uprising (1830-1831) and the January Uprising (1863-1864). In exile, they created political structures that played a key role in sustaining the idea of a free Poland.

Polish culture survived thanks to outstanding figures such as:

- Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Fryderyk Chopin, who with their works strengthened patriotism and reminded us of the greatness of the past.
- Exile activities (e.g., in Paris and London) were the intellectual and political engine of the Polish revival.

## The significance of the partitions in European history

The partitions of Poland were the result not only of the internal weakening of the state, but also of the changing balance of power in Europe. They became a warning to other nations, showing how easily strong powers could use internal crises to impose their will on weaker states.

Poland disappeared from the map of Europe, but its spirit survived thanks to the determination of a nation that fought for freedom and sovereignty for more than a century. The partitions are still an important historical lesson today, reminding us of the need for national solidarity and strong state structures.



# Napoleon Bonaparte - Poles' first chance to regain independence

The Napoleonic campaign had a key impact on the situation of Poland in the first half of the 19th century, although it did not restore its independence, it significantly influenced the formation of Polish national and political aspirations.

As a result of the partitions, Poland was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria. **Napoleon Bonaparte, leading the Napoleonic wars, became the hope for Poles to regain their independence.** In 1807, after his victory over Prussia, Napoleon created the Duchy of Warszawa, which became a dependent state of France, and Poles saw it as a step toward full independence.

## Duchy of Warsaw

The Duchy of Warsaw was created by the Treaty of Tilsit (1807), which ended Napoleon's wars with Prussia. Although the Duchy was formally an independent state, Napoleon left a strong French influence in it. Prince Constantine, brother of Tsar Alexander I, was one of Russia's main representatives in the Duchy, and many key decisions depended on Napoleon. However, the Duchy of Warszawa had its own army, administration and reforms to modernize the country, such as civil law reform (the Napoleonic Code) and education reform.

**Napoleon's wars also became a field to try to rebuild Poland. The Poles, fighting alongside Napoleon, hoped that after his victories their country would regain full independence.** Although Napoleon treated the Poles as allies, he had no intention of restoring Poland to a fully sovereign state. Rather, his policy on Poland was pragmatic and subordinated to his desire to create a strong France. Many Poles, including Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, took part in Napoleonic campaigns, fighting in the French army.

## Ties to Napoleon and the Polish Army

The Polish army, although initially small, was one of the main elements of the Duchy of Warszawa. The most important battles in which Poles took



## Lesson 12

**One hundred  
and twenty-three  
years under  
partition.**

**The period of the Partitions of Poland was 123 years of tragic history, when the Polish nation lost its independence. The lands of the Commonwealth were divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria, and Poles experienced oppression, Germanization, Russification and repression. Despite this, there were constant attempts to regain freedom, as demonstrated by national uprisings and the activities of artists who became spiritual leaders of the nation.**

part included the **Battle of Leipzig (1813), the so-called Battle of Nations**, where Poles fought alongside Napoleon against the anti-French coalition, but their efforts ended in defeat. After Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the Poles found themselves in a difficult situation. The Duchy of Warszawa was abolished, and part of its territory became part of the Kingdom of Poland, which was formally part of the Russian Empire.

Despite the end of the Duchy of Warszawa, Napoleonic ideas such as reform and modernization did not disappear from Poland. After the fall of Napoleon, Poles still made attempts to regain their independence, which was reflected in the later **uprisings of November (1830-1831) and January (1863-1864)**. Reference to Napoleonic traditions continued to inspire the Polish independence movement.

## November Uprising 1830-1831

The November Uprising was an attempt by Poles to regain their independence after the third partition of Poland in 1795 and the establishment of the Kingdom of Poland (known as Congress Poland) in 1815. The Kingdom of Poland was formally united with Russia by a personal union, and the Tsar of Russia was at the same time king of Poland. However, Poles soon noticed that Tsar Alexander I's promises of autonomy were being broken, and his successor, Nicholas I, introduced increasingly repressive rule.

In November 1830, tensions grew due to restrictions on freedoms, suppression of freedom movements and fears that the tsar would include Polish troops in his plans to suppress revolutions in Europe. **On November 29, 1830, in Warsaw, a group of young officers led by second lieutenant Piotr Wysocki began an uprising by attacking the Belvedere, the seat of the governor of the Kingdom of Poland, Prince Konstanty.** The event went down in history as the "November night".

### Course of the uprising

The uprising quickly spread throughout the country. On December 5, 1830, General Jozef Chłopicki declared himself dictator of the uprising. However, his policy aimed at negotiations with the tsar, which caused discontent among radical insurgents.

On February 24, 1831, the Russians launched an offensive against the Poles, which set off a series of battles. Among the most important are:

- The Battle of Stoczek (February 14, 1831) - the first victory of Polish troops under the command of General Józef Dwernicki.
- The Battle of Grochów (February 25, 1831) - one of the largest battles of the uprising, in which the Poles, led by General Jozef Chłopicki, held off the Russians, although they did not achieve a decisive victory.
- Battle of Ostrołęka (May 26, 1831) - defeat of the Polish army under General Jan Skrzynecki.
- Defense of Warszawa (September 6-7, 1831) - despite the heroic defense of the city, Warszawa was taken by the Russians.

Generals Jozef Chłopicki, Jan Skrzynecki, Ignacy Prądzyński and Maciej Rybiński played a key role in commanding the Polish forces. Unfortunately, their actions were often inconsistent, which undermined the effectiveness of the Polish troops.

In view of Russia's military superiority, lack of international support and internal divisions among the insurgents, the uprising collapsed. On October 21, 1831, the last insurgent troops crossed the border into Prussia and were interned.

The November Uprising, although it ended in defeat, became one of the most important symbols of the Polish quest for freedom. It demonstrated the nation's courage and determination, and inspired subsequent generations of Poles to fight for independence. The Great Emigration was not only a tragic aftermath of the uprising, but also a testament to the strength of the Polish spirit and the will to survive despite adversity.

## The Great Emigration

After the fall of the uprising, thousands of Poles - officers, soldiers, politicians and intellectuals were forced to leave their homeland. They emigrated mainly to France, Belgium, Great Britain and Switzerland. This emigration movement went down in history as the Great Emigration.

Many emigrants played a significant role in shaping Polish culture and national politics. Among the most important figures were:

- **Adam Mickiewicz**, who created works that inspired Poles to fight for freedom.
- **Juliusz Słowacki** and **Zygmunt Krasiński**, who continued literary traditions in the spirit of Romanticism.
- **Joachim Lelewel**, historian and ideologue of the independence movements.
- **Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski**, founder of the Lambert Hotel - a political organization that supported the Polish cause internationally.

The Great Emigration became a symbol of the struggle of Poles for independence and the salvation of national identity. Support for revolutionary movements and the political and cultural work of the Polish emigration influenced subsequent generations and contributed to the restoration of independence in 1918.

## January Uprising 1863-1864

The January Uprising broke out as a reaction to Russia's repressive policy toward Poles in the Russian partition after the fall of the November Uprising. Poles, deprived of autonomy and subjected to Russification, were particularly outraged by plans to conscript young men into the Russian army, known as *branka*. Preparations for the uprising had already been underway since 1861, when secret patriotic organizations were formed, including the Central National Committee, which later became the Provisional National Government. The government sought to spark an uprising against the Russian invaders.

### Outbreak and course of the uprising

**The uprising began on January 22, 1863**, when the Provisional National Government announced a manifesto calling on Poles, Lithuanians and Byelorussians to fight for independence and the enfranchisement of peasants. The uprising covered the lands of the Kingdom of Poland, as well as Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, gaining the support of various social strata, although the support of the peasants was limited due to their previous distrust of the nobility.

The uprising had the character of a guerrilla war, with hundreds of small units attacking Russian garrisons and transports. The lack of a unified command and Russia's military superiority made coordination difficult. Major events include:

- The Battle of Miechów (February 17, 1863) - which ended in defeat for the insurgents, showed their weakness against the well-organized Russian army.
- Battle of Grochowska (March 18, 1863) - one of the few victories, commanded by General Marian Langiewicz.
- Defense of Sosnowiec (February 5, 1863) - an example of a battle for an important strategic point in the Dąbrowa Basin.
- Repression after the Battle of Opatów (February 21, 1864) - the end of major insurgent activities in the area.

### The most important leaders of the uprising

The January Uprising was led by a number of leaders, the most important of whom are:

- Marian Langiewicz, who briefly declared himself dictator of the uprising, but had to flee to Galicia.
- Romuald Traugutt, the last dictator of the uprising, a symbol of steadfastness and sacrifice. He was arrested by the Russians and executed on the slopes of the Warsaw Citadel in 1864.
- Ludwik Mierosławski, the first dictator of the uprising, who failed to gain popular support.

### The collapse of the uprising and its consequences

The uprising ended in the spring of 1864, when the Russians suppressed most partisan activities. The losses were enormous: tens of thousands killed and wounded, thousands exiled to Siberia, confiscation of property and increased repression of Poles. Czar Alexander II took steps to further Russify Polish lands - monasteries were liquidated, schools were closed and the use of the Polish language was restricted.

The January Uprising, although tragic in its consequences, was another expression of the Poles' steadfast struggle for freedom. It went down in history as a symbol of patriotism and sacrifice, and its heroes, such as Romuald Traugutt, are forever etched in the national memory. Despite its defeat, the uprising contributed to the strengthening of national identity and inspired subsequent generations to work and fight for independence. The positivist movement, which was born after the uprising, played a key role in rebuilding the national spirit, preparing the ground for the rebirth of Poland in 1918.

### The policy of the partitioners

#### -Germanization and Russification

Prussian and Russian authorities sought to eradicate Polish national identity. Polish language was banned in schools and offices, and landowners were forced to give up Polish traditions.

## Symbols of resistance

**Children's strike in Września (1901):** Protest by children against religious instruction in German.

**Drzymała's cart:** Michał Drzymała, refusing to build a house, lived in a circus cart, circumventing Prussian regulations.

## Summary

The 123 years of partition were a period of trials and suffering, but also of brave spurts of independence and a steadfast struggle to preserve national identity. Poles, despite repression and loss of independence, never gave up their dreams of freedom. Uprisings such as national uprisings, emigration activities and the fight against Germanization and Russification contributed to preserving the spirit of the nation, which regained its independence in 1918.



## World War I (1914-1918)

The war, which began on August 1, 1914, was a global conflict involving 33 countries. The clash between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary) and the Entente (Great Britain, France, Russia) affected the situation of Poles living under partition.

**Poles fought on both sides of the conflict, serving in the armies of the partitioners.** Their fate depended on the outcome of the war - the defeat of all three partitioners was crucial to regaining independence.

**Józef Piłsudski was one of the key figures in the struggle for Polish independence in the early 20th century.** His political and military activities were deeply connected with the socialist movement, which Piłsudski saw as a tool in the struggle for the country's sovereignty. From his youth he was involved in underground activities, which led to numerous conflicts with the partitioners, especially Russia.

During World War I, Piłsudski headed the Polish Legions, which fought on the side of Austria-Hungary. Initially, his goal was to take advantage of the world conflict to rebuild Poland, but when he realized that Germany and Austria-Hungary were not interested in establishing a sovereign Polish state, he decided to break off cooperation with the central states. It is worth remembering that the Polish Legions were the first Polish military formation in the 20th century.

In 1917, Piłsudski refused to swear allegiance to the Emperor of Germany and the Emperor of Austria (the so-called "oath crisis"). As a result, he was arrested by the Germans and imprisoned in the Magdeburg fortress. His resolute stance attracted the attention of the Poles and strengthened his position as the leader of the independence movement. Piłsudski's arrest also provoked opposition in Polish society, which further affected his authority.

His release in November 1918 coincided with the end of the war and the creation of the conditions for regaining independence. Piłsudski, returning to Poland, was recognized as the leader of the reborn state, which allowed him to play a key role in the building of the Second Polish Republic.



## Lesson 13

### History of the Second Republic – from World War I to 1939.

The history of the Second Republic is one of the most important periods in the history of Poland. It is a time full of hopes, challenges and dramatic events that shaped the country reborn after 123 years of slavery. The establishment of the Second Republic was the result of a complex mix of political, military and social events that took place both on Polish soil and internationally.

In this section, we will focus on the key moments of this period, discussing the events and figures that played a decisive role in the rebirth and shaping of the Second Republic.

# Heroes of Polish independence

Prominent figures such as Józef Piłsudski, Roman Dmowski, Ignacy Daszynski and Ignacy Jan Paderewski played a key role in these events. Their actions in the political, military and diplomatic fields contributed to the creation of an independent Poland and shaped its character in the inter-war years.

**Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935)** - one of the most important figures in Polish history. He was a socialist and independence activist, founder of the Polish Military Organization (POW), and leader of the Polish Legions. Piłsudski consistently strove to rebuild an independent Polish state, seeing this opportunity in the collapse of the partitioning powers. During World War I, he refused to swear an oath of allegiance to Germany, which earned him not only internment in the Magdeburg fortress in 1917, but also recognition among his compatriots as a steadfast man. Upon his return to Poland in November 1918, he assumed the post of Provisional Chief of State, becoming a key architect of the reborn Second Republic.

**Roman Dmowski (1864-1939)** - a leader of National Democracy, a politician and diplomat who played a fundamental role in diplomatic efforts for Poland. During World War I, he led the Polish National Committee in Paris, recognized by the Entente states as the official representation of Polish interests. His vision of Poland as a nation-state focused on fighting for the borders of a reborn Poland and countering Germanization and Russification. Dmowski was also a co-author of the success of the Versailles Conference, which succeeded in gaining recognition for Polish independence and favorable borders.

**Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941)** - an outstanding pianist, composer, independence activist and politician. His political activity, especially in the United States, was crucial to the Polish cause. Thanks to his efforts, President Woodrow Wilson included Polish independence as one of the items on his peace agenda. After regaining independence, Paderewski became prime minister and foreign minister in 1919, contributing to the strengthening of Poland's position on the international stage.

**Ignacy Daszynski (1866-1936)** - a prominent socialist politician, co-founder of the Provisional People's Government of the Polish Republic in November 1918. He was an advocate of so-

cial equality and the granting of voting rights to all citizens, including women. His actions in the first days of independence were aimed at unifying society and ensuring the stability of the newly formed state. As an MP and Speaker of the Sejm, he played an important role in establishing the democratic foundations of the Second Republic, while promoting social reforms and fighting for workers' rights.

## November 11, 1918 - Poland's regaining of independence

On this day, World War I officially ended under the armistice signed between the Entente states and Germany at Compiègne. In Poland, this day became a watershed moment - **the regaining of independence after 123 years of partition**. In practice, Poles still had to face many challenges, such as the reconstruction of state structures, the unification of the three partitions and the struggle for borders, but symbolically November 11, 1918 is considered the beginning of the rebirth of the Republic.

## Józef Piłsudski's seizure of power

The Regency Council, established by the Germans during the war as a temporary authority, symbolically handed over to Józef Piłsudski the supreme command of the Polish army on November 11, 1918. Then, on November 14, the Council dissolved, handing Piłsudski full state power. Piłsudski, as the Provisional Chief of State, began the process of creating the institutions of a reborn Poland, which included establishing a government and initiating diplomatic efforts. His role as a leader was widely recognized and was further strengthened when he was appointed the first Marshal of Poland on March 19, 1920.

On November 28, 1918, the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland, in which Piłsudski played a key role, issued a decree granting women full voting rights. Poland became one of the first countries in Europe to grant women the right to vote and stand for election. This was a significant achievement, resulting from the recognition of women's contribution to the struggle for independence and their involvement in social

and political life. As early as January 1919, women were able to exercise these rights in elections to the Legislative Assembly.

## Formation of the new borders of the Second Republic

Regaining independence did not mean the end of fighting. The process of establishing borders lasted until 1923 and included:

- **Polish-Ukrainian War (1918-1919)** - conflict over Eastern Galicia.
- **The Silesian Uprisings (1919, 1920, 1921)** - fighting for Upper Silesia that ended with a favorable plebiscite.
- **Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-1921)** - ended with the Peace of Riga, which established the eastern border of Poland.
- **The incorporation of Vilnius (1920)** - the seizure of Vilnius by General Lucjan Żeligowski.

## Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-1921)

The Polish-Bolshevik War was a clash of two political and ideological visions: an independent Poland reborn after more than a century of partition, and Bolshevik Russia, which sought to expand the proletarian revolution throughout Europe. The Bolsheviks saw Poland as an obstacle to the expansion of communist ideology to the West, particularly to Germany, where a workers' revolution was expected to break out. Poland, on the other hand, led by Józef Piłsudski, wanted to rebuild the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from before the partitions, referring to the federative idea of cooperation with the nations of Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus.

An additional factor was the international situation. The Treaty of Versailles did not regulate Poland's eastern borders, leaving this problem to be settled in the course of an armed conflict. Both sides sought to take advantage of the weakening of the opponent - Poland, rebuilding its country after the partitions, and Russia, struggling with a devastating civil war.

### Course of the war

The war began in 1919 with minor clashes in what is now Belarus and Ukraine. The Poles, tak-

ing advantage of Russia's plight, quickly went on the offensive. One of their first successes was the seizure of Vilnius in April 1919. In the spring of 1920, Polish troops, supported by the Ukrainian People's Republic under the command of Symon Petlura, launched an offensive on Kyiv, which they managed to capture in early May.

The Poles' triumph, however, was short-lived. The Bolsheviks, having mobilized their forces, went on the counteroffensive. The Red Army, commanded by Mikhail Tukhachevsky in the north and Semyon Budyonny in the south, quickly regained the lost territories, forcing the Poles to retreat. In the early summer of 1920, the Bolsheviks reached the Vistula line and their troops approached Warszawa. At the time, Moscow was openly talking about the imminent triumph of the revolution in Germany.

### The Battle of Warsaw and Piłsudski's maneuver from the banks of the Wieprz River

The most important moment of the war was **the Battle of Warszawa, fought between August 13 and 25, 1920**. The Poles, mobilized under the command of Józef Piłsudski, prepared the defense of the capital. A key element of the plan was Piłsudski's bold decision to launch a counter-offensive from above the Wieprz River. The plan was to leave part of the forces to defend Warsaw, while the main army was to carry out an outflanking maneuver to the rear of Tuchaczewski's army.

At the decisive moment of the battle, Polish troops broke through the Bolsheviks' lines in the south, forcing them into a chaotic retreat. Piłsudski's maneuver, considered a masterpiece of the art of war, decided Poland's victory. The Battle of Warszawa, known as the „Miracle on the Vistula,” stopped the Bolsheviks from further expansion to the West.

### Key figures:

- **Józef Piłsudski** - commander-in-chief of the Polish army, author of the plan for the counter-offensive from above the Wieprz River.
- **Mikhail Tuchaczewski** - commander of the Bolshevik forces in the north, responsible for the offensive on Warsaw.
- **Semyon Budyonny** - commander of the Horse Army, leading operations in the south.
- **Jozef Haller** - commander of the northern front, key in the defense of Warsaw.
- **Ignacy Jan Paderewski** - representative of Poland in the international arena, building support for the Polish cause.

### Effects of the war

Victory in the Polish-Bolshevik war was of great importance not only for Poland, but also for the

whole of Europe. Thanks to the containment of the Red Army, Poland secured its independence and established its eastern border under the Treaty of Riga (1921). This border was a compromise between Polish territorial ambitions and political realities.

The Battle of Warszawa also had enormous significance for Europe, as it halted the expansion of communism to the West. Historians unanimously recognize it as one of the most important battles in history, which decided the fate of the continent in the 20th century.

## Political situation of the Second Republic

After regaining independence in 1918, the Second Republic faced the difficult task of political stabilization. The country was in chaos, devastated by wars, border changes and internal divisions. During the first few years, there was no clear dominance of a single political force, and the country faced internal crises and external threats. The government was formed by various groups, none of which had complete dominance.

During the 1920s, successive ministers ruled, and the political scene was full of rival factions, including right-wing, centrist and left-wing groups. One of the most important developments of this period was the constitutional reform of 1921, which created a parliamentary-cabinet system. Under this system, power was divided between the president, parliament and the government. Despite attempts at stabilization, the political situation was unstable, and the lack of strong institutions and agreement between factions led to government crises.

## Assassination of President Gabriel Narutowicz

In 1922, Gabriel Narutowicz, a prominent engineer and political activist, was elected president after presidential elections were completed. His election was controversial, especially among right-wing circles that opposed his candidacy. Narutowicz was a representative of left-wing circles, which made him unacceptable to part of the public, especially in the eastern and southern areas of Poland. In an atmosphere of political tension, shortly after he was sworn in, on December

16, 1922, he was assassinated by Eligiusz Niewiadomski, an assassin associated with right-wing circles. His death was a symbolic moment of political crisis in Poland and a shock to the young statehood, which was unable to protect its most important leaders from escalating political hatred.

## May Coup of 1926

The May Coup, also known as the Coup d'état or May Coup, was an armed coup that took place on May 12-15, 1926 in Warsaw. As a result of the growing political crisis, instability in the government, and growing social discontent, Józef Piłsudski decided to seize power in Poland, whose political system he considered ineffective and incapable of dealing with the country's problems. The political conflict between the government and Piłsudski had been growing for several years, and Piłsudski's assumption of control of the army, as well as his opposition to the government, whose activities he judged inept, led to an escalation of the situation.

Piłsudski, already having overwhelming support in the army, decided to come out of opposition and launch an open rebellion against the governments of President Stanisław Wojciechowski and Prime Minister Wincenty Witos. **On May 12, Piłsudski armed his way into the capital, where intense fighting began between troops loyal to the government and Piłsudski's supporters.** About 400 people were killed in the clashes, and more than 900 were wounded. After several days of fighting, Piłsudski took control of Warszawa, and the Witos government resigned.

### Resignation of the President and the Government

Under the influence of the coup, President Stanisław Wojciechowski resigned, which deepened the crisis in the country. As a result of these events, Maciej Rataj, who served as chairman of the National Assembly, temporarily took power. Rataj appointed a new government, in which Piłsudski took the position of Minister of Military Affairs and General Inspector of the Armed Forces, thus gaining enormous power. Although Piłsudski initially did not want to become president, the National Assembly decided in favor of his candidacy. Piłsudski, however, refused to become president, recommending Professor Ignacy Mościcki for the post. Mościcki took office as president and served until September 1939, when the outbreak of World War II forced him to flee.

## Sanation rule

The May coup ushered in a period of so-called “sanation” - an authoritarian government that dominated Poland for the next 13 years. Sanacja was an attempt at political stability, but it involved the centralization of power. Piłsudski and his supporters took full control of the military and administration, which in practice meant that the president and government no longer had real power. Although power was formally transferred to elected presidents and governments, Piłsudski exercised it de facto from the back row, deciding the most important state affairs. His policy was to maintain order and stability, but also to dominate political life, eliminating or marginalizing political opponents.

## Effects of the Coup

After the May coup, Poland began to be dominated by authoritarian governments that controlled political life, limiting the influence of the opposition and taking control of key institutions. Although the period of Sanacja brought economic and political stability, it also meant the curtailment of democracy and civil liberties. The coup had a long-term impact on Polish politics, introducing an authoritarian system that remained in place until the outbreak of World War II.

The May coup ended an era in Polish political life and paved the way for the rule of Piłsudski, who remained one of the most important leaders of the Second Republic for 13 years. However, the final effects of the coup were not seen until after 1939, when World War II forced Poland to face new challenges and threats.

# Economy of the Second Republic

The interwar period was a time of enormous challenges for Poland, especially in the economic sphere. After more than a century of partition, the country inherited three different economic systems, a diverse infrastructure and the devastation caused by World War I. Poland had to create a cohesive national economy, ensure financial stability and raise the standard of living of its citizens. Key economic reforms and investments were critical to strengthening the independent state.

## Currency reform

In 1924, Treasury Minister Władysław Grabski carried out a currency reform aimed at stabilizing the country's finances. A new currency, the Polish

złoty, was introduced, replacing the Polish marks previously used. The reform ended a period of hyperinflation, enabled price stabilization and restored confidence in the Polish financial system. It was one of the most important steps in building a strong economy in the Second Republic.

## Central Industrial District (CID)

Starting in 1936, Poland pursued one of the most ambitious economic projects of the interwar period - the construction of the Central Industrial District. The project, headed by Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, was aimed at developing heavy industry, especially in the central part of the country. New armaments plants, factories and infrastructure were built as part of the CID, which helped reduce unemployment and strengthen Poland's economic potential.

## Construction of the port in Gdynia

Due to limited access to the Baltic Sea after World War I, Poland decided to build a modern port in Gdynia. The work lasted from 1920 to 1930. The port enabled the development of international trade, increased the country's export capacity and made Poland independent of the ports in Gdańsk, which were under the control of the Free City. The construction of Gdynia was a symbol of economic success and a testament to the young country's organizational capabilities.

Poland's economic reconstruction in the interwar period was a difficult process, but it produced significant achievements. **The stabilization of the currency, the development of industry through the Central Industrial District and the construction of the port of Gdynia were the foundations of a modern economy.** These activities not only strengthened the country's economic independence, but also provided evidence of the Poles' determination and ability to rebuild and modernize the country despite difficulties and constraints.

# Outbreak of World War II

**The outbreak of World War II occurred on September 1, 1939, when Germany attacked Poland.** The conflict began with an attack by the 1.5 million-strong German army on Poland to implement Germany's expansionist policy, or Lebensraum (living space). For Adolf Hitler, Poland was a key target in his quest to gain space in eastern Europe. Germany also feared that Poland could become a potential ally of the USSR if war broke out, so it decided to attack. On the other hand, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939, concluded between Germany and the USSR, guaranteed the neutrality of both sides, which allowed the concentration of German forces on a single front.

## The beginning of the "Blitz War"

Germany employed a strategy of instant warfare, known as Blitzkrieg. The goal was to quickly defeat the enemy through a combination of powerful air strikes, artillery and armored forces. Poland, unprepared for this method of warfare, had very few armored units, and its defense was based mainly on infantry and cavalry. The Germans planned to quickly encircle and destroy Polish troops before they could consolidate. The use of instant warfare in practice meant not only rapid attacks on Polish territories, but also uninterrupted, intense pressure to break down defenses against regular ground troops.

## The Gliwice Radio Station and the Pretext for Attack

Just before the outbreak of war, on August 31, 1939, German propaganda organized a provocation in Gliwice to provide a pretext for an attack on Poland. The Germans carried out an attack on a German radio station in Gliwice, impersonating Polish saboteurs. The event, organized by the SS, was intended to give the impression that Poland had launched hostilities against Germany. This pretext became an argument for Hitler to launch an attack on Poland at 4:45 a.m. on September 1, 1939.



## Lesson 14

### World War II – Outbreak of war and Soviet occupation of Poland.

**In this lesson we will discuss, the attack of Germany on Poland on September 1, 1939, the course of the defensive war and the invasion of Poland by Soviet Russia on September 17, 1939.**

## The bombing of Wieluń

In the first hours of the war, the German air force launched attacks on Polish cities. Wieluń, a small town in central Poland, became the first target of German bombers. The German Luftwaffe dropped bombs on the city, which had no anti-aircraft defenses. About 1,200 civilians died as a result of the bombing, and the city was almost completely destroyed. This brutal bombardment was intended to intimidate the civilian population and break the morale of the defenders.

## Defense of Westerplatte

Simultaneously with the air attacks, the German ground offensive began. One of the most iconic moments of the first days of the war was the defense of Westerplatte, the Polish garrison on the Westerplatte peninsula in Gdańsk. **Only 200 Polish soldiers, commanded by Major Henryk Sucharski, resisted the German army, which numbered several times more soldiers.** Although the defense of Westerplatte lasted 7 days and was a symbol of heroism, the steadfastness of Polish soldiers in the face of overwhelming enemy forces.

## Defense of the Polish Post Office in Gdańsk

After the attack on Westerplatte, one of the next symbols of Polish resistance became the defense of the Polish Post Office in Gdańsk. **On September 1, 1939, about 50 Polish Post Office employees and Polish soldiers resisted German soldiers who wanted to take over the Gdańsk post.** The fight lasted for several hours, despite the fact that they had no chance to defend themselves against the overwhelming German forces. All the defenders of the post office were killed, and this event became another symbol of Polish resistance in the war.

## Defense of Warsaw 1939

The defense of Warszawa, which took place from September 8 to 27, 1939, was one of the most important moments of the September campaign and a symbol of the heroism of Polish soldiers and civilians. After the city was bombarded by the Luftwaffe on September 1, German troops went on the offensive against the city. However, the Poles defended

themselves fiercely. The defense was commanded by the city's mayor, Stefan Starzyński, who had held this position since 1934, and had a great influence on the organization of the city's defense, especially in the first days of the war. Starzyński remained in the capital until the last days of the defense, leading both administrative and military operations. He cooperated with the military command, providing the city with supplies, organizing the evacuation of the civilian population as much as possible, and mobilizing Varsovians to fight. His radio speeches were very important, as they gave encouragement to the residents and mobilized them to continue defending themselves.

The Poles fought in difficult conditions, reducing the size of their troops due to constant air and artillery attacks. The city was bombarded by both the Luftwaffe and artillery, leading to much destruction.

On September 27, after 18 days of heroic defense, the Polish command, faced with a shortage of ammunition and supplies, decided to capitulate. The devastation was enormous - about 30% of the city was destroyed, including many monuments and public buildings. Despite the defeat, the defenders of Warszawa were recognized as national heroes, and their struggle in defense of Warszawa became a symbol of steadfastness and determination.

After the fall of the city, President Stefan Starzyński was taken prisoner by the Germans, and was probably executed by the Gestapo between December 21 and 23, 1939, in or near Warsaw. His attitude became a symbol of patriotism and an indomitable will to fight in defense of the capital, as well as all of Poland.

## Battle of Bzura

The Battle of the Bzura River (September 9-22, 1939) was one of the largest clashes during the September campaign and was crucial in the fight against the German invasion. The Polish Army, under the command of General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, wanted to destroy German troops in the Bzura region and divert attention from besieged Warsaw.

The Polish Armies „Poznań” and „Pomorze” crossed the Bzura River, attacked German units and managed to sustain intense fighting for several days. The Poles had some successes, inflicting heavy losses on the Germans, but the superiority of armored vehicles and German aviation quickly

tipped the scales of victory to the side of the Third Reich. Eventually, the Poles were forced to retreat. The Battle of the Bzura, although it ended in defeat, was one of the most outstanding examples of Polish resistance in 1939.

## The most important commanders in the defense of Poland

- **General Juliusz Rómmel** - Commander of the "Łódź" and "Warszawa" Armies, who resisted the German troops at the beginning of the campaign. However, his forces were gradually cornered by the superior German units. One of the commander-in-chief of the defense of Warszawa.
- **General Tadeusz Kutrzeba** - Commander of the "Poznań" and "Pomorze" Armies, who conducted the Battle of the Bzura. Despite the defeat, this offensive was considered an exceptional display of courage and determination.
- **General Walerian Czum** - Commander of the defense of Warsaw. His task was to manage the defense of the capital, which required not only military skills, but also organizational skills, given the lack of resources.
- **Major Henryk Sucharski** - Commander of the defense of Westerplatte. Despite the brutal bombardment and attacks by German troops, the defenders of Westerplatte resisted the attacks for seven days, which became one of the symbols of Poland's resistance.
- **General Stanisław Maczek** - One of the most outstanding military commanders in Polish history, who commanded the "Lublin" Army and spearheaded the defense of Poland's eastern territories against the encroachment of the Red Army.

Despite the final defeat, the defense of Warszawa, the Battle of Bzura and the actions of Polish commanders are to this day symbols of valor, courage and patriotism. The superiority of Germany's military potential was decisive, but Poland's defensive war left an indelible mark on the country's history.

## The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact

**The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, officially known as the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, was signed on August 23, 1939 between the Third Reich and the USSR.** Its main purpose was to ensure the two countries' neutrality in the event of war, allowing the Germans to concentrate their forces on the Western Front and the Soviets on their eastern borders. It was concluded in an atmosphere of secrecy and against previous tensions between Nazi Germany and the Bolshevik USSR.

The most significant point of the pact was a secret clause that specified the division of Central and Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. Poland was to be divided between Germany and the USSR, which marked the de facto beginning of the partition of Poland. Germany and the USSR agreed that after attacking Poland, the USSR would enter eastern Polish territories, while Germany would have a free hand in the west. This pact, which initially appeared to be aimed only at avoiding war between the two countries, had far-reaching consequences and opened the way to a world war.

## The entry of the Soviet Army into Poland on September 17, 1939

**Following the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Red Army entered Polish territory on September 17, 1939, as agreed.** The USSR's attack on Poland was intended to implement the provisions of the agreement, as well as to occupy the eastern part of the country, which would help the USSR strengthen its position in Europe.

The Soviet army initially encountered very little resistance from Polish troops, who had already been forced to withdraw after the German attack. The Polish authorities, faced with an attack by the USSR, tried to find a way to continue defending themselves, but it soon became apparent that any real chance of an effective defense against the two aggressors was no longer available.

Soviet troops took over the eastern part of Poland, including such cities as Lviv and Vilnius, and their seizure meant the total collapse of Polish statehood.

As a result of the September campaign and the Red Army's entry into Poland, the country was effectively partitioned. Here are the details:

### ● Percentage division of Poland

- **The Soviet Union** took over about **51% of Poland's** pre-war **territory** (about 200,000 square kilometers), which was home to nearly 13.5 million people. These were the areas east of the line of the Bug and San rivers, i.e. the eastern provinces of Volhynia, Ternopil, Stanislawow, Lviv, Novogradok, Vilna, Polesie and Białystok.
- **The Third German Reich** occupied about **49% of Poland's territory** (about 188,000 square kilometers), where nearly 22 million people lived. This included areas of western, central and southern Poland, including regions of Greater Poland, Silesia, Mazovia and Małopolska.

### ● The dividing line

- **The border between Germany and the USSR** ran roughly along the Pisa, Narew, Bug and San rivers, as previously agreed upon in a secret protocol.
- After the border was corrected (the so-called **German-Soviet agreement of September 28, 1939**), the Soviet Union ceded small areas of Suwalszczyzna to the Third Reich, and in return took over parts of Lubelszczyzna and Podkarpacie.

### ● Consequences of partition

#### Occupation regimes:

- In areas occupied by the USSR, mass deportations, executions and repressions against Poles began (e.g., the Katyń Massacre in 1940).
- The Germans introduced a brutal occupation regime, including the extermination of Jews, Poles and other war crimes.

**Loss of sovereignty:** The Polish state ceased to exist as an independent entity on the map of Europe.

**Demographic changes:** Millions of Poles were deported to Siberia, Kazakhstan or forced to flee.

The division of Poland between Germany and the USSR was a tragic consequence of the appeasement policy, the betrayal of the Allies and the inability to defend against the two totalitarian powers.

## The tragic fate of Poles under Soviet occupation

Following the USSR's aggression against Poland on September 17, 1939, the Soviet authorities began a brutal policy of deprivation and elimination of the Polish intelligentsia and culture. The occupier's goal was to destroy the Poles' national identity, which was carried out through repression, violence and propaganda. Thousands of Poles were deported to Siberia and other remote areas of the USSR. The deportees were subjected to harsh living conditions, disease and starvation. Many ended up in Soviet prisons, and hundreds of thousands lost their lives.

### Deportations of Poles

Deportations of Poles to Siberia and other remote regions of the USSR were one of the cruelest actions of the Soviet regime against the Polish population after September 17, 1939. It is estimated that between 1940 and 1941 the Soviet Union deported between 320,000 and 400,000 Poles, although some sources indicate that the number may have been even higher.

### ● Waves of deportations

#### The deportations took place in four main waves:

- **February 1940** - the first and largest deportation, which included families of military settlers, foresters and civil servants. About 140,000 people were deported at the time.
- **April 1940** - deportation of families of officers, policemen and officials arrested or murdered by the NKVD.
- **June 1940** - refugees from the western areas of Poland, which had been occupied by the Germans and later by the USSR, were deported.
- **June 1941** - the last wave of deportations, carried out just before the German attack on the USSR.

### ● Conditions of transportation and life in exile

Poles were deported in cattle cars, in which conditions were inhumane. The journey to Siberia lasted from several weeks to as long as two months. People suffered from cold, hunger, lack of water and disease. Many did not survive the journey.

On the spot, the deportees were forced to work in harsh climatic conditions, such as in forests, logging, mines and road construction. They received minimal food rations, which were often not enough

to survive. In addition, they were subjected to ideological pressure and attempts at indoctrination.

### ● Number of victims and survivors

The exact number of deportees and those who died in exile is not known because the USSR did not keep complete statistics, and many documents have been destroyed or are unavailable. However, historians estimate that about 10-20% of the deportees died from exhaustion, starvation, disease or working beyond their strength.

### ● Returns

Some of the deportees were able to return to Poland after the signing of the Sikorski-Mayski pact in 1941, which made possible the formation of the Anders Army and an amnesty for Polish citizens residing in the USSR. Unfortunately, many deportees never returned, and their fate remains unknown.

### ● Remembrance of deportations

Today, the deportations of Poles to Siberia are one of the most important historical topics, reminding us of the suffering and perseverance of the Polish people. The fate of the deportees is documented in books, films and the memories of witnesses. The aforementioned Polish Siberia is one such work, which movingly shows the harsh realities of life in exile.

It is worth remembering this tragedy as a symbol of the heroism of Poles who tried to preserve their dignity and national identity under the most difficult conditions.

Based on the decision of the USSR authorities, deportations began in 1940. They involved entire families, including children and the elderly, who were forced to live in extreme conditions. The fate of the deportees was movingly portrayed in the film *Syberiada Polska*, an adaptation of Zbigniew Domino's novel. The production depicts the dramatic stories of Poles persecuted by the NKVD and deported to Siberia in the 1940s. The film is an important testimony of that difficult period.

## Katyń Massacre - a symbol of Soviet terror

One of the most tragic events in Polish history was **the Katyń Massacre**, committed by the USSR in 1940. After the aggression against Poland, many Polish officers, policemen, border guards, firefighters, doctors, engineers and other officials were taken prisoner.

Polish prisoners of war were held in camps in:

- **Kozielsk** - about 250 kilometers southwest of Moscow,
- **Starobielsk** - east of Kharkiv,
- **Ostaszów** - on an island in Lake Seliger near Tver.

By a decision of the Politburo and Joseph Stalin on March 5, 1940, the captives were considered "enemies of Soviet power" and sentenced to death. **A total of 21,857 people were murdered between April 1 and 10, 1940.**

### Course of executions and burials of victims

The executions were organized and carried out in secret. The victims were restrained, blindfolded and killed with a shot to the back of the head. The bodies were buried in mass graves, including:

- **Katyń Forest** - 4,421 POWs from Kozielsk were buried there,
- **Pyatichatki near Kharkiv** - 3,820 POWs from Starobielsk,
- **Miednoye** - 6,311 POWs from Ostashkov,
- **Bykovnia** - about 3,500 prisoners from Ukraine.

The search for the graves of victims from Western Ukraine and Western Belarus continues to this day.

### The film „Katyń” by Andrzej Wajda

The Katyń massacre was depicted in the poignant 2008 film *Katyn*, directed by Andrzej Wajda. The production, nominated for an Oscar, is dedicated to the memory of the victims, including the director's father, Jakub Wajda, who was killed in Katyń. The film's script is based on the diaries of Polish officers held in the Kozielsk camp.

The film is not only a tribute to the victims, but also a reminder of the great national tragedy and suffering of Poles during World War II.

## Brutal occupation regime

After the defeat of the September campaign in 1939, Poland found itself under the occupation of two totalitarian powers: the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. From the very beginning, the Germans treated the Poles as a nation destined for destruction and enslavement. Their occupation policies were aimed at exterminating the intellectual elite, mass deportations, introducing terror and exploiting the Polish economy for the war needs of the Third Reich.

## Annexation and displacement

The German-occupied territories were divided into two parts. Some of the lands were incorporated directly into the Third Reich - these included Pomerania, Greater Poland, Silesia and part of Mazovia, which was called the Wartheland. The inhabitants of these areas were subjected to brutal Germanization - the Polish language was forbidden, property was confiscated, and from December 1939 to March 1941 more than 280,000 Poles were expelled from the Land of Warta.

The remaining territories that were not annexed formed the General Government - an area under German occupation administration that was to become a kind of reservoir of cheap labor and a place for the extermination of the Jewish population.

## Structure and management of the General Government

**The General Government (often abbreviated as GG)** was officially established on October 26, 1939, and included the areas of today's central and southeastern Poland: Mazovia and Małopolska and Lublin and part of Podkarpacie. Kraków was established as the capital of the GG, and Hans Frank, one of the leading Nazi functionaries and a close associate of Adolf Hitler, was appointed its administrator. As Governor General, he exercised dictatorial powers, ruling these lands in a brutal and ruthless manner.

Administratively, the General Government was divided into four districts: Kraków, Warszawa, Lublin and Radom. In 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, part of the occupied Eastern Bor-



## Lesson 15

### World War II. German occupation in Poland.

**During this lesson we will deal with one of the most tragic periods in Polish history – the German occupation during World War II. We will discuss the policy of terror used by the Nazis, their methods of extermination and Germanization of the Polish people. We will also analyze the dramatic events that took place between 1939 and 1945, such as the Holocaust, the Slaughter of Volhynia, the Warsaw Uprising and the activities of the Polish resistance movement.**

derlands was also annexed to the GG, creating the new Galicia District. The Germans aimed to make the General Government an area under their complete control, where no international laws applied - the inhabitants were treated as subhumans, deprived of any civil rights.

## A policy of terror and extermination

The General Government became a place of systematic destruction of the Polish nation and extermination of the Jewish population. The Germans implemented a policy of brutal terror, the main pillars of which were mass executions, deportations, forced labor and the deliberate destruction of the population through starvation and lack of basic living conditions.

From the very beginning, severe restrictions were placed on Poles - they were forbidden to hold official positions, universities and colleges were closed, the printing of newspapers and books was banned, and all cultural activities were banned. Only elementary schools were maintained, the curriculum of which was limited to elementary mathematics and reading, so that Poles would be able to do only the simplest physical work.

In the first months of the war, the Germans began a planned extermination of the Polish intelligentsia, carrying out the so-called Intelligenzaktion. This action was aimed at liquidating representatives of the social elite - teachers, priests, professors, doctors, lawyers and political activists. Particularly brutal repressions affected Kraków, where the **Sonderaktion Krakau action was carried out on November 6, 1939**. Professors from the Jagiellonian University and the AGH University of Science and Technology were tricked into attending a supposed scientific meeting, after which they were arrested by the Gestapo and deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Many of them died as a result of inhumane conditions and torture. The persecution of the Polish intelligentsia continued under the so-called **Operation AB (Ausserordentliche Befriedungsaktion)**, carried out in 1940. As part of this operation, the Germans executed thousands of teachers, priests, doctors, lawyers and political activists. Many of them were executed in Palmiry, Piasnica, the Kampinos Forest and other mass execution sites.

## Economic exploitation and forced labor

The General Government was intended to serve the Third Reich as an economic base and source of free labor. Poles were sent en masse to forced labor in Germany, where they worked in inhumane conditions in factories, mines and farms. They were often treated worse than animals - they received minimal rations and worked several hours a day.

The Germans deliberately kept the standard of living in the GG low so that Poles would be completely dependent on the occupying power. A food card system was introduced, but the rations for Poles were extremely low - an adult Pole received about 700-1000 calories a day, while a German living in the same area was provided with more than 2600 calories. As a result, many people died of starvation and disease.

## Extermination of the Jewish population and construction of death camps

One of the most horrifying aspects of the occupation was the policy of exterminating Jews. From the beginning of the war, the Germans introduced a system of segregation of the Jewish population, forcing them to live in ghettos.

In 1942, the Germans began implementing the plan for **the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question"**, that is, the mass extermination of the Jewish population. The Germans began deporting ghetto residents to extermination camps such as Treblinka, Sobibor and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Jews were murdered in gas chambers and their bodies were burned in crematoria. It is estimated that the Germans murdered some 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, including 3 million Polish Jews.

# Warszawa ghetto uprising - the first armed rebellion against the Third Reich in Europe

The Warszawa Ghetto Uprising was the first armed uprising of the Jewish people against the German Nazis during World War II. Although it was unlikely to win militarily, it became a symbol of heroic resistance to the Holocaust and one of the most dramatic pages in Warszawa's history.

**The Warsaw Ghetto was established on October 2, 1940 by order of the Warsaw District Governor Ludwig Fischer.** It was cut off from the rest of the city by a 3-meter-high wall topped with barbed wire. Nearly 400,000 people were gathered in a small area - about 307 hectares. Living conditions were catastrophic: famine reigned, disease was rampant, and the death rate among the residents increased with each passing day. It is estimated that in 1941 alone about 100,000 people died from starvation and epidemics in the ghetto.

The situation became even more dramatic in the summer of 1942 when mass deportations to the Treblinka extermination camp began. In two months, from July to September, some 300,000 Jews were deported from the ghetto and murdered. The remaining residents realized that they had nothing left to lose - their fate was sealed. In this situation, the idea of armed resistance began to form.

## Organization of the uprising and the first clashes

After the great deportation action in 1942, about 50-60 thousand people remained in the ghetto. Some of them hid in the ruins of houses and shelters, others were forced to work for the Germans. Under these conditions, two main fighting organizations were formed:

- Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB), headed by Mordechai Anielewicz,
- The Jewish Military Union (ZZW), led by Pavel Frenkel.

Jewish militia groups began preparations for battle: shelters and bunkers were built, weapons and ammunition were collected. Most of the armaments came from smuggling or purchases made on the black market - the few pistols, homemade grenades and incendiary bottles were the only weapons available to the insurgents.

The first attempt at resistance took place on January 18, 1943, when the Germans began another

wave of deportations. Surprised by the armed opposition, they withdrew for a time, giving the insurgents a few extra months to prepare.

## Course of the uprising

On April 19, 1943, the Germans began the final liquidation of the Warszawa ghetto. SS troops under the command of General Jürgen Stroop, supported by auxiliary units, entered the district. However, they encountered unexpectedly strong resistance - Jewish fighters, hidden in the ruins and bunkers, began a desperate fight. At first, the Germans suffered losses and were unable to quickly suppress the resistance. The insurgents, though poorly armed, managed to repel attacks for several days. On April 22 the Germans changed their tactics - they began systematically burning successive quarters of the ghetto, destroying houses and bunkers where insurgents and civilians were hiding. On May 8, German troops surrounded the bunker at 18 Miła Street, where the headquarters of the ŻOB was located. The attack resulted in the death of the uprising's commander, Mordechai Anielewicz, who, along with dozens of comrades, committed suicide to avoid falling into enemy hands.

Fighting continued until mid-May, but the insurgents were increasingly isolated. On May 16, Jürgen Stroop, wishing to finally declare victory, blew up the Great Synagogue at 7 Tłomackie St. With this symbolic gesture, the Germans announced the end of the uprising and the complete destruction of the Warszawa Ghetto Uprising.

One of the few survivors was Marek Edelman - one of the leaders of ŻOB. Throughout his life, he tried to remind the world of the events of 1943 and fight for the memory of the victims. It is thanks to him that since 2013 daffodils have become a symbol of remembrance of The Warszawa Ghetto Uprising. Every year, on April 19, the anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising, ceremonies are held and Warszawa residents pin the paper yellow flowers to their clothes as a sign of remembrance. Contemporary commemorations of the anniversary of the uprising are an important part of historical memory, reminding us that resistance to tyranny and crime is never in vain. The Warszawa Ghetto has ceased to exist, but the memory of those who fought in it remains alive and continues to inspire successive generations to reflect on history and human courage.

# The slaughter of Volhynia - one of the most tragic genocides of World War II

## Genesis of the conflict and escalation of violence

Polish-Ukrainian tensions in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia had been escalating since the late 19th century, but the events of the 20th century, especially the Polish-Ukrainian War (1918-1919) and the annexation of these territories by the Second Polish Republic, were crucial. The Ukrainian nationalists, seeking to establish an independent state, considered the Poles to be the main obstacle to their goals. After the Germans occupied the Borderlands in 1941, Ukrainians saw the Third Reich as a potential ally. At that time, the Germans formed a collaborationist Ukrainian police force, which played a key role in the extermination of Jews and repression of Poles. **In 1943, the OUN-UPA, under the leadership of Stepan Bandera and Roman Shuchevych, launched a widespread extermination campaign against Polish civilians.**

## Course of the genocide

The bloodiest events took place in 1943, culminating in the so-called "Bloody Sunday" on July 11, 1943, when 99 Polish villages were attacked simultaneously. Ukrainian nationalists attacked villages, murdering entire families in an exceptionally brutal manner - using axes, pitchforks, hammers and knives. Churches were burned down along with the faithful praying in them, and children and women were tortured. Poles who were in mixed Polish-Ukrainian marriages were also murdered. **It is estimated that between 50,000 and 120,000 Poles were murdered between 1943 and 1945.** In addition to Volhynia, the crimes extended to Eastern Galicia, where the UPA continued to exterminate Poles until 1945.

## The reaction of Poles and the aftermath of the Volhynia Massacre

Poles tried to defend themselves by forming self-defense units in larger villages, such as Przebraże, which successfully repelled UPA attacks. In some areas of Volhynia, Home Army units carried out retaliatory actions, but their scale was incomparable to the UPA's actions. The slaughter of Volhynia was one of the most tragic events in Polish-Ukrainian relations.

# Polish resistance movement during World War II

## Polish Underground State

The Polish Underground State was a unique phenomenon in occupied Europe - it was a clandestine administrative, military and civilian structure aimed at maintaining Poland's sovereignty and preparing for a future uprising. It was subordinate to the Polish Government in Exile in London, which exercised authority over it.

## The main structures of the PPP were:

- **Government Delegation for Poland** - a clandestine civilian administration, headed by Cyril Ratajski, Jan Piekalkiewicz and later Stanisław Jankowski.
- **Council of National Unity** - clandestine political representation.
- **Home Army** - the armed arm of the Underground State.

The PPP organized secret education, judiciary, intelligence, and sabotage and diversionary activities.

**Union of Armed Struggle (Union of Armed Struggle)** - was formed on November 13, 1939 as an underground military organization, subordinate to the Polish government in London. It was headed by General Kazimierz Sosnkowski. In 1942, the ZWZ was transformed into the Home Army.

**The Home Army (AK)** - was the largest underground organization in Europe, with about 390,000 soldiers at its peak. Its commanders included General Stefan "Grot" Rowecki, Tadeusz "Bor" Komorowski and Leopold "Niedźwiadek" Okulicki. The AK carried out sabotage (blowing up railroad tracks, destroying German infrastructure), intelligence and diversionary actions.

**The Peasant Battalions (BCh)** - were the armed arm of the peasant movement, formed by the People's Party. Their main task was to protect the rural population from German and UPA repression and partisan activity.

**People's Guard (GL)** - was formed in 1942 as an armed organization of the communist Polish Workers' Party. It conducted guerrilla and sabotage activities, but its significance was less than that of the Home Army. In 1944 it was transformed into the People's Army.

**Grey Ranks** - was an underground scout organization that joined the fight against the occupying forces. Young scouts took part in actions of small sabotage, and older members fought in AK units. The most famous action of the Grey Ranks was the Action at the Arsenal - the rescue of Jan Bytnar "Rudy" from the hands of the Gestapo in 1943.

## Warszawa Uprising - a heroic struggle for independence

The Warszawa Uprising was one of the most important and at the same time the most tragic events in Polish history during World War II. It was the largest armed uprising in occupied Europe, which aimed to liberate Warszawa from German occupation before the arrival of the Red Army. It lasted 63 days - from August 1 to October 3, 1944 - and ended with the capitulation of the insurgents. It resulted in the destruction of the city, the deaths of more than 150,000-200,000 residents and massive repression of the civilian population and soldiers of the Home Army. Although the uprising ended in military defeat, it is permanently inscribed in history as a symbol of the steadfastness, courage and sacrifice of the Polish people.

### Genesis and goals of the uprising

The decision to launch the uprising was made in the context of the general military and political situation in Europe. In the summer of 1944, Soviet troops were advancing rapidly westward and approaching Warszawa. The Polish underground command was aware that the country's future was uncertain - officially Poland was an ally of the West, but the Soviet Union had its own plans for its territory.

### The goal of the uprising was:

- To liberate the capital before the entry of the Red Army and establish the legitimate authority of the Polish Underground State,
- Demonstrate the strength of the Home Army as the representative of a sovereign Polish state,
- Avoiding total domination of Poland by the USSR - the liberation of Warsaw was to force Stalin to recognize the legitimate government of the Polish Republic in exile.

**Unfortunately, this strategy failed, and the USSR's attitude toward the uprising proved hostile - Stalin halted the offensive on Warszawa, leaving the city at the mercy of the Germans.**

Warsaw was one of the most important conspiratorial centers in Poland. In the spring of 1944, the Home Army carried out sabotage and sabotage actions as part of the so-called Operation Tempest, aimed at recapturing more areas from the Germans.

At the outbreak of the uprising, the insurgent forces numbered about 40-50 thousand soldiers, but only one in five had weapons. The AK's armament was inadequate - the insurgents had mainly small arms, incendiary bottles and a few sub-machine guns. They counted on Allied assistance and weapons airdrops, but these were small and ineffective.

The Germans had about 15,000 well-armed troops in the city, supported by heavy artillery, aviation and armored units. However, their forces were scattered, giving the insurgents a chance for initial success.

### The "W" Hour - August 1, 1944

The uprising began on August 1 at 5pm - the so-called "W" Hour. Fighting broke out in various parts of the city, and the first days brought the insurgents some success. They managed to capture parts of the City Center, Old Town, Powiśle and Wola. The insurgents seized key buildings, such as the Central Post Office, Police Headquarters and the Powiśle power plant.

However, after just a few days, the Germans launched a brutal counteroffensive. SS units, led by Oskar Dirlewanger and Heinz Reinefarth, entered Wola and Ochota and massacred the civilian population. In Wola alone, some 40,000 people - men, women, children and old people - were murdered in the first days of August.

### Fighting in the Old Town and Powiśle districts

One of the bloodiest episodes of the uprising was the fighting for the Old Town, where the insurgents defended themselves for almost all of August. The Germans carried out carpet raids, destroying the district and killing thousands of civilians hiding in basements.

When the defense of the Old Town collapsed, the insurgents made their way through the sewers to Śródmieście and Żoliborz. Fighting also continued in Powiśle, where the Germans gradually captured more buildings, destroying the power plant and driving out the insurgents.

## Capitulation and the consequences of the uprising

By the end of September, the situation of the insurgents was dire - there was a shortage of food, ammunition and medicine. Despite the heroic defense, a surrender act was signed on October 2, 1944, which guaranteed the insurgents the status of prisoners of war, but did not protect the civilian population from reprisals.

### As a result:

- 150,000 to 200,000 civilians died,
- The city was 85% destroyed,
- 500,000 Varsovians were expelled,
- Home Army soldiers were sent to German prisoner-of-war camps.

Hitler ordered the complete demolition of Warszawa - the Germans blew up the Royal Castle, palaces, churches, monuments and tenements.

### Key figures of the Warsaw Uprising:

- **Tadeusz "Bor" Komorowski** - commander of the Home Army, responsible for the decision to launch the uprising.
- **Antoni Chruściel "Monter"** - commander of the Warszawa Uprising, commanded the fighting.
- **Jan Mazurkiewicz "Radoslaw"** - commander of the "Radoslaw" Grouping, fought in Wola and the Old Town.
- **Zbigniew Ścibor-Rylski "Motyl"** - commander of units in Powiśle.
- **Anna Borkiewicz-Celińska** - a nurse who brought aid to wounded insurgents.
- **Krystyna Krahelska "Danuta"** - scout, author of the song "Hey, boys, bayonet to arms", died in combat.

### The significance of the Warszawa Uprising

Although the Warszawa Uprising ended in defeat, it became a symbol of the fight for freedom. It was a demonstration of the steadfastness of Poles, although its consequences were tragic. Today, every year, on August 1, at 5 pm, alarm sirens sound throughout Poland, and people pause for a minute of silence, paying tribute to the heroes of the Warsaw Uprising.



# Escape of the Polish authorities to Romania

After the September defeat in 1939, Poland found itself under the occupation of two totalitarian powers: the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Despite the loss of territory and the impossibility of further fighting at home, the Poles did not lay down their arms. The activity of **the Polish Government in Exile**, which organized **the Polish Armed Forces in the West** and sought to preserve state continuity and represent Polish interests on the international stage, began.

On September 17, 1939, in the face of the USSR's aggression against Poland, the president, government and military command decided to evacuate to Romania, which formally remained neutral. From there, the plan was to organize further fighting and continue diplomatic activity on the international stage.

The Polish government delegation crossed the border on the night of September 17-18 and was interned by Romanian authorities under pressure from Germany and the USSR. The internment meant total isolation and inability to direct further military operations.

## The most important persons interned:

- **Ignacy Mościcki (1867-1946)**  
- **President of Poland**  
Scientist, politician and President of Poland since 1926. In the 1930s he pursued policies that supported the Sanation, but in the face of war he sought to maintain Poland's independence. After his internment in Romania, he handed over the office of president to Władysław Raczkiewicz and went to Switzerland, where he died in 1946.
- **Edward Rydz-Śmigły (1886-1941)**  
- **Commander-in-Chief**  
Marshal of Poland, hero of the war against the Bolsheviks in 1920. He was responsible for Poland's defense strategy in September 1939. After his internment in Sălănică, he escaped to occupied Poland, where he was active in the underground under a false name. He died of a heart attack in 1941.
- **Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski (1885-1962)**  
- **Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland**  
Military doctor, politician and prime minister



## Lesson 16

### World War II – the Polish government and military in exile

In this lesson you will learn how Poland continued to fight in exile after the September 1939 defeat. We will discuss the evacuation of the Polish authorities, the formation of the Polish Government in Exile and the formation of the Polish Armed Forces in France and Great Britain. You will learn about the most important military units, such as Squadron 303, the 1st Armored Division and the 2nd Polish Corps, and their participation in key battles – the Battle of Britain, Monte Cassino and at Falaise. We will also look at the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement and the evacuation of the Anders Army from the USSR. Finally, we will summarize Poland's wartime losses and its situation after the end of hostilities.

in 1936-1939. After internment, he settled in Great Britain, where he died in 1962.

- **Józef Beck (1894-1944)**  
- **Minister of Foreign Affairs**

One of the key diplomats of the Sanation. Proponent of the policy of balance between Germany and the USSR. After internment, he stayed in Romania, where he died in 1944.

## Continuity of the Polish state in exile

Despite the internment of the authorities, Poland retained its statehood through the establishment of the Polish Government in Exile. On September 30, 1939, Władysław Raczkiewicz became president, and Władysław Sikorski became prime minister and Commander-in-Chief. The new government first operated in France, and after its fall in June 1940 moved to London, where it functioned until 1990.

After the defeat of the defensive war in September 1939, thousands of Polish soldiers made their way abroad to continue the fight against the Germans. Some were interned in Hungary, Romania and Lithuania, but many made their way to France and Great Britain, where the Polish Armed Forces in the West began to be organized.

**As early as October 1939, the Polish government-in-exile, led by General Władysław Sikorski, began forming the Polish Armed Forces in France.** The Polish Army was subordinated to the Allied command, but retained its own command and organizational structures.

## Polish Army in France (1939-1940)

The main center for the organization of the Polish Army in France was the camp at **Coëtquidan in Brittany**, where the training of Polish recruits began. At the beginning of 1940, the Polish Army numbered about **80,000 soldiers**, and consisted of:

- **1st Grenadier Division** - fought in Lorraine, suffered heavy losses and was disbanded after the defeat of France.
- **2nd Infantry Rifle Division** - fought in Switzerland, where it was interned after losing a battle.
- **10th Armored Cavalry Brigade** - commanded by Gen. Stanisław Maczek, showed high effectiveness in battles against the Germans.

- **Independent Highland Rifle Brigade** - fought in Norway near Narvik in May 1940.

When the Germans launched an offensive on France in May 1940, Polish units fought alongside the French. Unfortunately, after the Allied defeat, many Polish soldiers had to evacuate to Great Britain.

## Evacuation to Britain and the reorganization of the Polish Army

**After the fall of France in June 1940, some 27,000 Polish soldiers made their way to Great Britain.** There, under the auspices of the Polish government in exile, the reorganization of the Polish Army began. Polish soldiers were deployed to various parts of Britain, where they trained for further combat. The main military centers were in Scotland, where, among other things, the 1st Armored Division and infantry units were formed.

Polish Military Aviation and the Polish Navy were also formed as part of the British forces, which participated in convoys and naval battles from the beginning of the war.

## The most important units of the Polish Armed Forces in the West

**1st Polish Air Force - Squadron 303 and the Battle of Britain** - the most famous unit of the Polish Air Force was Squadron 303, which became famous during **the Battle of Britain (1940)**.

### The Battle of Britain

In the summer of 1940, Britain faced a German invasion. The Luftwaffe launched massive air raids on British cities and airfields. Polish pilots, thanks to their experience and bravado, played a key role in repelling the German attacks.

The 303 Squadron, although formed later than other units, quickly became the most successful fighter squadron of the Battle of Britain, shooting down 126 German aircraft. Pilots such as Witold Urbanowicz, Jan Zumbach and Zdzisław Krasnodębski went down in gold in the history of air combat.

## General Stanisław Maczek's 2nd Armored Division

One of the most important ground units was the 1st Armored Division, formed in 1942 in Great Britain.

### Battle of Falaise (August 1944)

During the Allied offensive in Normandy, the 1st Armored Division took part in closing the encirclement of German troops at Falaise, a key moment in the Battle of France. The Poles defended the so-called "Mace of Falaise" - positions on the hills that closed off the German retreat. Their actions led to the smashing of the German 7th Army and the destruction of much of the Wehrmacht forces on the Western Front.

Later, the Poles also fought in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, capturing Breda, among other places, where they were enthusiastically welcomed by the local population.

## 3rd Anders Army

### The Sikorski- Mayski Agreement and the formation of the Polish Army in the East

After the USSR's aggression against Poland on September 17, 1939, hundreds of thousands of Poles found themselves under Soviet occupation. The Soviet authorities recognized Polish citizens as "former Polish citizens" and began mass repressions. Between 1939 and 1941, the NKVD carried out four waves of deportations of the Polish population deep into the Soviet Union. It is estimated that **a total of 320,000 to 500,000 Poles were deported**, who were transported in inhumane conditions to labor camps in Siberia, Kazakhstan and the Far East.

Many of them died of hunger, cold and disease, and those who survived were forced to work in kolkhozes, gulags and logging. At the same time, the NKVD arrested thousands of officers and representatives of the Polish intelligentsia, who were murdered in the spring of 1940 as part of **the Katyń Massacre**.

The fate of Polish citizens changed dramatically after **June 22, 1941**, when the Third Reich attacked the USSR. Faced with the new geopolitical situation, Stalin, who had hitherto treated Poland as an enemy, was forced to establish an alliance with the Polish government-in-exile in London.

### Sikorski-Mayski Agreement (July 30, 1941).

In the face of the German offensive, Stalin agreed to restore diplomatic relations with Poland. On July 30, 1941, the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement was signed in London, which:

- **restored diplomatic relations between Poland and the USSR,**
- **canceled the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact** with regard to Poland,
- **provided for the release of Polish prisoners of war and prisoners from Soviet gulags,**
- **agreed to the creation of a Polish Army on the territory of the USSR** under the command of General **Władysław Anders**.

The deal was crucial to the fate of hundreds of thousands of Poles residing in the USSR. Although Stalin did not agree to the restoration of Poland's pre-war borders, his agreement to the creation of a Polish army gave hope that thousands of compatriots could be saved.

### Creation of the Polish Army in the East

Under the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement, the formation of the Polish Army in the East began. The commander of the newly formed unit was General Władysław Anders, who himself had been released from the NKVD prison at Łubianka.

The headquarters of the Anders Army became Buzuluk in the Orenburg region, but units were also organized in Tatishchev, Koltubanka and other towns in the south of the USSR.

Despite official approval for the formation of the army, recruitment conditions were dire:

- Poles were reaching the camps in a state of extreme emaciation,
- there was a shortage of clothing, footwear and weapons,
- food rations were meager, and many soldiers suffered from disease and malnutrition.

Despite this, thousands of Poles began arriving in the units - both former Polish Army soldiers and civilians rescued from Soviet captivity.

### Problems with the Anders Army and deteriorating relations with the USSR

As the Polish troops were being formed, tensions began to grow between the Polish command and the Soviet authorities. The most important problems were:

- lack of sufficient weapons and equipment,
- difficulties in recruitment - many Poles were still in the gulags,
- Stalin avoided handing over lists of missing Polish officers - which was linked to the Katyń crime,

- Soviet pressure to subordinate the Anders army to the Soviet command,
- starvation and dire living conditions in the military camps.

Anders realized that under such conditions his army would not be able to fight, so he began negotiations with the Allies to evacuate the army from the USSR.

### The evacuation of Anders' Army to Iran

Consent for the evacuation was obtained through negotiations with the British and Stalin. In two stages, in March and August 1942, more than 115,000 Poles - soldiers and civilians - were evacuated from the USSR to Iran.

#### Course of the evacuation:

- **March 1942** - the first group of Poles (about 43,000) left the USSR and were transported across the Caspian Sea to Iran.
- **August 1942** - the second wave of evacuation, involving about 72 thousand people.
- **Women and children** - among the evacuees were **more than 40 thousand civilians**, including women, children and the elderly, who had previously been imprisoned in gulags.
- **Iran and the Middle East** - upon arrival in Iran, soldiers and civilians were deployed in Tehran, Ahwaz and Isfahan, and then transferred to **Iraq, Palestine and Egypt**, where Polish units undertook further training.

The evacuation saved the lives of tens of thousands of Poles who were condemned to a slow death from starvation, disease and exhaustion in the USSR.

## Battle for Monte Cassino

After the evacuation, the Polish Army in the East was renamed the 2nd Polish Corps and subordinated to the Allied command. The formation's greatest success was the Battle of Monte Cassino in May 1944, a hill that was a key point in the German defense of the so-called Gustav Line, which blocked the Allied route to Rome. After several unsuccessful attacks by American, British and French troops, the Poles were tasked with capturing the hill. **After several days of bloody fighting, on May 18, 1944, Polish soldiers planted the red-and-white flag on the ruins of the Monte Cassino monastery.** The battle opened the way to Rome for the Allies, and its success became a symbol of the heroism of the Poles.

### Polish War Cemetery at Monte Cassino

There are 1,072 Polish soldiers resting at Monte Cassino, including General Władysław Anders, who was buried there in 1970.

## Poland's war losses

World War II was disastrous for Poland:

- **6 million Polish citizens perished**, including **3 million Jews** murdered in the Holocaust.
- **325,000 Poles were deported to Siberia.**
- **Poland lost 38% of its national assets.**
- **Warszawa was 85% destroyed.**
- **Poland came under the domination of the USSR until 1989.**

The Polish Armed Forces in the West played a huge role in the fight against Germany. Polish soldiers fought in France, Belgium, Holland, Great Britain, Africa and Italy, contributing to the Allied victory. Despite the heroism of Polish soldiers, after the war Poland came under the domination of the USSR, and many veterans were unable to return to their homeland. Their fate became one of the most dramatic episodes of World War II.

# The Polish Committee for National Liberation (PKWN) and the beginning of communism in Poland

## The formation of the PKWN - July 21, 1944

Before World War II even ended, the USSR sought to create its own subordinate government in Poland. The result of these efforts was the establishment of the Polish Committee for National Liberation (PKWN) on July 21, 1944, in Lublin. The PKWN was formed on Stalin's initiative and consisted of Polish communists who had spent years in the USSR. This committee, by promulgating the PKWN Manifesto (July 22, 1944), became the first tool for introducing communist power in Poland.

PKWN had nothing to do with the legal Polish government-in-exile, which had been recognized by Britain and the United States since the beginning of the war. Stalin unilaterally imposed his authority, which was the first step toward Soviet domination over Poland.

## The Yalta Conference and the consequences for Poland

### Yalta (February 4-11, 1945) - the division of Europe

The Yalta Conference was one of the most important events that sealed Poland's fate for decades to come. During the meeting of the leaders of Great Britain (Winston Churchill), the USA (Franklin D. Roosevelt) and the USSR (Joseph Stalin), it was agreed:

- **a westward shift of Poland's borders** - Poland was to lose the Eastern Borderlands to the USSR, and in return receive territories previously belonging to Germany (the so-called Recovered Territories),
- **Soviet sphere of influence in Poland** - Stalin pledged to hold free elections, which were to give Poles a chance to choose a government, but from the beginning he falsified political reality,
- **the need to form a new government** - the Allies agreed to form a new government in Poland, but it was actually dominated by the USSR.



## Lesson 17

### Poland under communism

During this lesson you will learn about key events related to the communist period in Poland. You will learn about the consequences of the Yalta Conference (1945), how the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) was established, and what mechanisms of governance were introduced by the communist system. We will discuss the activities of the post-war anti-communist underground, also known as the movement of the Cursed (Polish: Wyklętych) Soldiers, and the brutal repressions against its participants. We will also look at the communist authorities' struggle against the Catholic Church, including the activities of Primate of the Millennium Stefan Wyszyński and his repressions. There will be no shortage of analysis of the social protests and key workers' strikes that took place in 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1976. You will learn how social resistance to communist power gradually grew and the consequences of the signing of the Warszawa Pact (1955). Understanding these events will allow you to better assess the scale of repression, resistance and social change that took place in Poland between 1945 and 1989.

In Polish history, Yalta has become a symbol of betrayal of the Allies, because the decisions made without the participation of Polish representatives resulted in almost fifty years of domination of the USSR over the country.

## The Polish People's Republic (PRL) - the rise of the communist state

### Falsified elections and the beginnings of Stalinization

After the end of World War II, Poland found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence. The communist authorities, controlled by Joseph Stalin, sought to completely take control of the country. A key step was the holding of a people's referendum in 1946, followed by rigged elections to the Legislative Sejm in 1947 to legitimize Communist rule in Poland.

### The "3xTAK" („3xYES") People's Referendum

The first step in the complete seizure of power by the communists was a people's referendum organized on June 30, 1946. Citizens were asked three questions concerning:

- Abolition of the Senate,
- Nationalize the economy and carry out land reform,
- The consolidation of the borders on the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers.

The Communists, using terror and falsification, obtained "official" support for their demands. The result of the referendum was aimed at destroying the political opposition, especially the Polish People's Party (PSL) led by Stanisław Mikołajczyk.

The January 19, 1947 elections were completely rigged - the communist authorities used terror, intimidated opponents, and repressed members of the PSL and other opposition parties. Thanks to election fraud and machinations, the Democratic Bloc (PPR, PPS, SL and SD) gained power, and the real opposition was marginalized. As a result, the communist system prevailed in Poland for decades to come, and the country came under the full influence of the Soviet Union.

## Resettlement to the USSR (1944–1946):

After the end of World War II, Poland faced the need to rebuild the country and resolve national-ity issues within its newly defined borders. In this context, a series of forced resettlements of the Ruthenian population, including Ukrainians, Lemkos, and Boykos, took place, which had a dramatic impact on the lives of thousands of families.

Between 1944 and 1946, under agreements between Poland and the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian population was resettled from south-eastern Poland to the Ukrainian SSR. This operation affected approximately 487,000 people, most of whom were displaced from the provinces of Rzeszów (273,330 people), Lublin (193,975 people), and Kraków (20,093 people). Initially, the resettlements were voluntary, but over time, the Polish authorities, seeking to create a ethnically homogeneous state, began to use coercion. In practice, this meant brutal pacification of villages, confiscation of property, and forcing people to leave their homes within a matter of hours. Many of those displaced ended up in unfamiliar regions, where they had to start their lives anew in difficult conditions.

### Operation Vistula

In 1947, the communist authorities carried out Operation Vistula, aimed at finally resolving the so-called "Ukrainian problem" in Poland. As part of this operation, over 140,000 people of Ukrainian nationality, including Lemkos and Boykos, were forcibly resettled from south-eastern Poland to the so-called Recovered Territories in the west and north of the country. These people were settled in scattered locations, which was intended to assimilate them and prevent them from recreating their national communities. The resettlements took place in an atmosphere of terror; families had only a few hours to pack their belongings, and their homes were often burned or looted. Transport conditions were inhumane, and in their new homes, the resettlers were met with hostility from the local population.

### The tragedy of the Ruthenian population:

For many Ruthenians, Lemkos, and Boykos, resettlement meant not only the loss of their homes, but also the severing of social, cultural, and religious ties. The deportations led to the breakdown of traditional communities,

the destruction of cultural heritage, and a sense of uprootedness. Many deportees were forced to abandon their identity, change their names or religion to avoid further repression. The trauma associated with the forced deportations left a lasting mark on the memory of subsequent generations.

### **State Repatriation Office (PUR):**

The State Repatriation Office (PUR) was responsible for organizing the resettlements. Its task was not only to carry out the deportations, but also to settle the population in new areas. However, the PUR's actions were often chaotic and unprepared, which exacerbated the suffering of the displaced persons. The lack of adequate support, difficult living conditions, and hostility from the local population made adaptation to their new homes extremely difficult.

**“Agreement between the Polish People’s Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the regulation of dual citizenship,”** signed in Moscow on November 22, 1958.

Poland and the USSR signed an agreement prohibiting dual citizenship. As a result of this agreement, many former citizens of the Second Polish Republic who found themselves in the USSR after the war lost their Polish citizenship. This, in turn, deprived their descendants of the right to apply for Polish citizenship, which had far-reaching consequences for many families with Polish roots.

The forced resettlement of the Ruthenian population after World War II is a painful chapter in Polish history. It was a tragedy for thousands of families who were torn from their homes and forced to live in unfamiliar conditions.

## **Terror and repression - Stalinism in Poland (1947-1956)**

### **Communist repression machine**

After seizing power, the Communists began brutal repression against all political opponents.

- Ministry of Public Security (MBP) - a secret political police force whose purpose was to fight the opposition.

- Office of Security (UB) - an instrument of terror that used torture, arrests and executions.
- Military courts - conducted political show trials, sentencing underground activists, Home Army soldiers and Church representatives to death.

## **Victims of the communist regime**

**The years of Stalinism were a period of mass imprisonment, torture and executions. Among the hundreds of thousands of victims were:**

- **Witold Pilecki (1901-1948)  
- hero of the underground and prisoner of  
Auschwitz**

Witold Pilecki was born on May 13, 1901 in Olonec, in what is now Russia, to a family with strong patriotic traditions. As a young boy, he was involved in independence activities and took part in the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920, fighting in the ranks of the Polish Army. After the war ended, he settled in Vilnius, where he ran a farm and developed his social activities. During World War II, Pilecki joined the Polish Secret Army, one of the first underground organizations in occupied Poland. In 1940, he voluntarily volunteered to be arrested by the Germans in order to enter the German concentration camp Auschwitz and form a resistance movement there. He was one of the first people to transmit detailed reports to the West about the mass extermination of Jews and conditions at the camp. After his spectacular escape from Auschwitz in 1943, he returned to underground activities and fought in The Warszawa Uprising (1944). After the fall of the uprising, he was taken prisoner by the Germans, and after the war ended he returned to Poland to work in the structures of the anti-communist underground. In 1947 he was arrested by the Ministry of Public Security (MBP) and accused of subversive activities against the communist state. After a brutal investigation, in which he was tortured, he was sentenced to death in a show trial and murdered on May 25, 1948 in Warszawa’s Mokotów prison. His body was buried in an unknown location, and the communist authorities tried for years to erase the memory of his heroism. Pilecki was posthumously rehabilitated in 1990 and awarded the Order of the White Eagle in 2006. Today he is considered one of the greatest heroes of the Polish underground.

- **August Emil Fieldorf "Nil" (1895-1953)**  
**- legendary commander of the Home Army**  
 August Emil Fieldorf was born on March 20, 1895 in Kraków. His military path began while he was still young, when he joined Józef Piłsudski's Polish Legions. After Poland regained its independence, he continued his service in the Polish Army, participating in the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920. During World War II, he was one of the key commanders of the Home Army (AK), serving as organizer and head of the Kedyw - the AK's special forces responsible for diversion and sabotage against the Germans. After the fall of the The Warszawa Uprising, he was deported to a German prisoner-of-war camp, and after its liberation returned to Poland in 1945, where he became active in the anti-communist underground. In 1948 he was arrested by the Communist security services and imprisoned without trial for several years. In 1952, the communist authorities organized a show trial in which he was accused of "fascization of Poland" and "collaboration with the Nazis" - absurd charges designed to discredit the heroes of the underground. Fieldorf was sentenced to death and executed on February 24, 1953, in Mokotow prison. His body was buried in an unknown location, and Communist propaganda hid the truth about his activities for years. He was posthumously rehabilitated in 1989 and awarded the Order of the White Eagle in 2006.

- **Józef Franczak "Lalek" (1918-1963)**  
**- the last Wyklęty Soldier**  
 Józef Franczak, alias "Lalek," was born on March 17, 1918 in the Lublin district. He was a soldier in the Polish Army and fought in the 1939 September campaign. After the defeat of Poland, he made his way to the structures of the Union of Armed Struggle (ZWZ) and then the Home Army (AK). After the war ended, he did not reconcile himself to the fact that Poland had fallen under Soviet domination. In 1945, he joined the anti-communist underground, hiding from the communist security services for nearly two decades. He was one of the longest-serving independence partisans. He supported himself with the help of the residents of the Lublin region and carried out activities against the communist regime until the end of his days. On October 21, 1963, he was killed in a raid organized by the Security Service in the village of Majdan Kozice Górne. He was the last Wyklęty Soldier who fell with a weapon in his hand in the fight against the communists. After years of oblivion, he was rehabilitated,

and in 2008 was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Rebirth of Poland.

## The struggle of the communists against the Church

### - Primate Stefan Wyszyński as a symbol of resistance

After World War II, the Catholic Church was one of the few institutions in Poland that enjoyed authority and influence in society, remaining independent of communist power. Precisely because of this, the Communists saw it as a threat to their monopoly of power and sought to weaken, subordinate and ultimately eliminate it as a social force.

As early as the 1940s, the first repressions against the clergy began. Communist authorities liquidated lower seminaries, restricted the activities of church charities and seized church property. Arrests, surveillance of priests and attempts by the secret services to infiltrate the clergy were also the order of the day.

#### Primate Stefan Wyszyński

##### - spiritual leader of the nation

The leading figure in the Church's resistance to communist rule was Primate Stefan Wyszyński, later known as the Primate of the Millennium. After becoming Archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw in 1948, he quickly became a symbol of the Church's steadfastness against the communist regime. Wyszyński was aware that confrontation with the communist authorities could lead to even greater repression of the Church, so he initially tried to negotiate with the communists. In 1950, the Church and the communist authorities signed an agreement in which the Church pledged loyalty to the state, and in return was to receive guarantees that it could conduct its activities.

However, the communist authorities quickly broke these agreements - repression of the clergy intensified, Catholic schools were closed, religion was removed from schools, and many priests were subjected to brutal interrogations and imprisonment.

#### The arrest and internment of Primate Wyszyński (1953-1956)

The repression against the Church culminated in the arrest of Stefan Wyszyński on September 25, 1953. The Primate was interned and placed in solitary confinement in various places, including Rywałd, Stoczek Warmiński, Prudnik and Komańcza.

Wyszyński's internment was intended to weaken the Church and subordinate it to communist power, but it did not achieve the intended results. On the contrary, the cult of the Primate grew during his imprisonment, and society increasingly identified the Church with the fight for freedom.

While in solitary confinement, Wyszyński wrote the text of the Jasna Góra Vows of the Polish Nation, which were meant to be a response to the repression of the Church and the nation's spiritual commitment to fight for its identity and sovereignty.

After his release in 1956, during the brief "thaw" in the People's Republic of Poland, Wyszyński once again stood at the head of the Church and became the main opponent of the communist government. Over the following decades, he fought to preserve the independence of the Church, opposed communist indoctrination and defended human rights and religious freedom.

### **The Church as the center of social resistance**

Despite repression, the Church in Poland was never subjugated to communist power. Masses, pilgrimages and sermons became a place for manifestations of patriotism, and priests played a huge role in maintaining the spirit of resistance in society. The Church also supported the democratic opposition, and in the 1980s played a key role in the Solidarity movement. Primate Wyszyński died on May 28, 1981, but his work was continued by Pope John Paul II, who inspired millions of people to fight for freedom through his pilgrimages to Poland.

## **The Warszawa Pact - a military alliance of the Eastern Bloc**

### **The origins of the Warszawa Pact**

After the end of World War II, Europe was divided into two opposing spheres of influence: **the Western bloc** led by the United States and its allies, and **the Eastern bloc** controlled by the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities, seeking to maintain their domination over the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, imposed **communist governments and political systems subservient to Moscow** in these countries.

In 1949, Western countries formed **the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, designed to defend against a potential threat from the USSR. In response, **the Kremlin decided to create its own**

**military alliance**, which would cement its control over the Eastern Bloc states and enable it to coordinate military action within the Soviet sphere of influence.

### **The Warszawa Pact was signed (May 14, 1955)**

The Warszawa Pact was signed **on May 14, 1955** in **Warszawa** by representatives of eight countries:

- **Soviet Union**
- **Poland**
- **Czechoslovakia**
- **Hungary**
- **Romania**
- **Bulgaria**
- **Albania** (withdrew from the Pact in 1968)
- **German Democratic Republic (GDR)** (joined the Pact in 1956)

The main purpose of the agreement was to **ensure "peaceful cooperation" between the socialist countries** and their "defense" against "imperialist threats" from NATO. In fact, however, the Warszawa Pact was a political and military tool of the USSR to maintain **the unity of the Eastern bloc and the possibility of rapid intervention in the event of attempts by any country to break out of Moscow's control.**

### **The Warszawa Pact's structure and activities**

The Warszawa Pact was **a military alliance with a centralist structure**, in which real power belonged to the Soviet Union. Key decisions on military operations were made in Moscow, and the other countries had **limited sovereignty over defense policy.**

The Pact consisted of:

- **United Command of the Armed Forces** - reported to the Soviet Marshal, who had full control over the Eastern Bloc's military,
- **Committee of Defense Ministers** - formally consisted of representatives of all member states, but the actual decisions were made in Moscow,
- **Standing Political Committee** - the body responsible for political coordination within the Pact.

Each member state was required to **maintain a large army capable of interacting with the troops of the USSR.** The Alliance also provided for the possibility of **military intervention**, if a member country was deemed to "threaten the unity of the socialist camp."

## The Warszawa Pact interventions - brutal suppression of rebellions:

The Warszawa Pact became a tool of **military control over satellite states** and was used to suppress attempts at **democratization and independence from the USSR**.

### Hungarian Uprising 1956

The Warszawa Pact's first major test was the **1956 revolution in Hungary**. After Stalin's death, Hungarians began to demand reforms and a move away from Stalinism. In October 1956, there were mass demonstrations in Budapest, which turned into **an armed uprising**.

The Soviets initially withdrew their troops, but when the Hungarian government announced its withdrawal from the Warszawa Pact, **Soviet tanks entered Budapest, brutally suppressing the uprising. More than 2,500 people were killed**, and Hungarian Prime Minister **Imre Nagy** was executed.

### Intervention in Czechoslovakia - Prague Spring 1968

In 1968, Czechoslovakia began a process of **liberalization of the communist system**, known as **the Prague Spring**. The new party secretary **Alexander Dubček** introduced reforms aimed at **increasing civil liberties and reducing Moscow's control**.

These changes caused panic among Eastern Bloc leaders. **On August 21, 1968**, the armies of the USSR, Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria **entered Czechoslovakia, violently suppressing the reforms**.

**The Warszawa Pact collapsed and was dissolved** The Warszawa Pact **gradually lost its importance in the 1980s**. The reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR (perestroika and glasnost) and **the wave of democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989** led to the collapse of communism.

In 1991, member states began to leave the Pact, and it was formally dissolved in Prague on **July 1, 1991**.

## Thaw after Stalin's death (1953-1954)

Stalin's death was a watershed event for the entire Eastern Bloc, including Poland. Although the communist authorities initially did not intend to introduce reforms, the social and economic situation forced a gradual easing of repression. The most important change was the reduction of the role of the Ministry of Public Security (MBP), or the Office of Security (UB), which was responsible for terror in Poland. In December 1954, the MBP was abolished and its functions were taken over by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MSW). This marked a partial weakening of terror and a change in methods of controlling society - the UB ceased to be an all-powerful institution, although repression still continued.

After Stalin's death, the authorities gradually began to release some political prisoners. **In 1954 an amnesty** was announced, which covered about **30,000 people**.

A key moment for the thaw in Poland was the death of Boleslaw Bierut on March 12, 1956. Bierut, who was the most faithful executor of Soviet policy in Poland, died in Moscow under mysterious circumstances, probably as a result of a heart attack. His death paved the way for changes at the top of government - the Communist elite began to consider a new model of governance, and the public was increasingly vocal in its demands for reform.

By the fall of 1956, the situation in Poland was becoming increasingly tense. The public expected change, and disputes were growing within the ranks of the Communist Party over the country's further political direction. **Władysław Gomułka**, the former First Secretary of the PPR, who had been one of the leading communist activists after the war, returned to the power game, but was ousted and arrested in 1948 on charges of "right-wing-nationalist deviation" - in reality, this meant that he did not support the full subordination of Poland to the Soviet Union. He remained in solitary confinement for several years, and the communist authorities treated him as a political opponent. But in 1956 his image changed - in the eyes of the public he became a symbol of independent Polish communism, a man who could lead the country out of the crisis and make it independent of Moscow.

## **Political crisis and the Soviet threat of intervention**

In mid-October 1956, there was open conflict within the party between a faction of hard-line Stalinists, who wanted to preserve the existing regime, and supporters of reform, who saw Gomulka as the new leader. On October 19, 1956, a dramatic meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) was held in Warszawa, during which it was decided to entrust Gomulka with the post of party First Secretary. However, Moscow did not intend to passively watch the events in Poland - the Soviets feared that changes in the party leadership could lead to the separation of the People's Republic of Poland from the Eastern Bloc. At the same time, Soviet troops began moving toward Warsaw. A Soviet delegation headed by Nikita Khrushchev arrived in the Polish capital, demanding that the "loyal" communists retain power and threatening military intervention.

### **"Poland's road to socialism" - Gomulka's first reforms**

Władysław Gomułka, who was an advocate of reform but also a political realist, entered into negotiations with Khrushchev. He assured Moscow that Poland would remain loyal to the USSR and would not leave the Eastern Bloc, but at the same time obtained permission to carry out internal reforms. Thanks to these negotiations, Soviet troops withdrew from the vicinity of Warszawa, and the threat of Soviet intervention was averted. On October 21, 1956, Gomulka officially assumed the position of First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, and his rise to power was received with great enthusiasm by the public.

The new leader promised change, and indeed the first months of his rule brought real reforms to ease social tensions and improve the situation in the country.

The most important steps taken by Gomulka:

- Release of political prisoners - including many former Home Army soldiers and opposition activists.
- Release of Primate Stefan Wyszyński and easing of repression against the Church.
- Abandonment of forced collectivization of agriculture - peasants regained the right to individual land ownership.
- Limiting the power of the security apparatus, holding some UB functionaries accountable.
- The promise of greater sovereignty vis-à-vis Moscow - although Poland remained in the Eastern Bloc, propaganda proclaimed slogans of a "Polish road to socialism."

At first, the public was hopeful - Gomulka was greeted as the "savior of the nation," and his rule was to usher in a more "humane" communism.

However, after just a few years, it became apparent that his reforms were superficial, and Gomulka gradually moved to the side of the hard-line communists. In the decades that followed, his rule became increasingly authoritarian until it led to mass protests and his downfall in 1970.

## **Workers' strikes and popular resistance**

The communist government of the People's Republic of Poland presented itself as a "government of workers and peasants," but it was the workers who most often rebelled against the regime. The People's Republic of Poland had been facing economic problems since its inception - low wages, food shortages, abysmal working conditions and pervasive censorship left the public increasingly disillusioned with the promises of communist propaganda.

The authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, implementing a planned centrally controlled economy, were unable to provide citizens with basic products. Sloppy economic reforms, price hikes and lack of civil liberties led to growing social opposition. Protests and strikes by workers occurred regularly every few years and were brutally suppressed by the security apparatus - the militia, the Security Service (SB) and the army. The labor movement in Poland not only fought to improve living conditions, but also became a major opposition force to the communist regime. Strikes often turned into political demonstrations, and repression of workers only strengthened anti-communist sentiment. In subsequent years, workers repeatedly rose up against the authorities - the most important waves of protests took place in 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1976, and the strikes culminated in the creation of Solidarity in 1980, which began the process of the collapse of communism in Poland.

### **Poznań June 1956 - the first great workers' rebellion in the People's Republic of Poland**

After Stalin's death in 1953, an expectation of liberalization of the system began to emerge in the Eastern Bloc countries. People believed that the new leadership in Moscow, headed by Nikita Khrushchev, would be more willing to reform. In Poland, however, the economic situation was deteriorating, with the communist authorities tightening

fiscal policy on workers and increasing production standards without compensating with wage increases.

**In June 1956, a strike broke out at the Cegielski Works in Poznań**, which quickly escalated into mass demonstrations. The workers demanded raises, improved working conditions and the abolition of political repression.

The course of the protests (June 28-29, 1956)

- On the morning of June 28, workers at the Cegielski Plant stopped work and took to the streets. Workers from other factories joined the protest, as well as students and city residents.
- The demonstrators attacked state administration buildings, seized weapons and set fire to the building of the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party.
- The authorities brought the army, tanks and militia units into the city, which opened fire on the protesters.
- Street fighting continued into the next day, with at least 79 people killed and more than 600 injured.

Poznań June 1956 was the first open rebellion against the communist government. Although the protests were bloodily suppressed, they led to changes - in October 1956 Władysław Gomułka became head of the Communist Party and announced a partial liberalization of the system.

### **March 1968 - student protests and anti-Semitic campaign**

On January 30, 1968, "Dziady" by Adam Mickiewicz, directed by Kazimierz Dejmek, was staged for the last time at the National Theater in Warsaw. The play, which premiered in November 1967, quickly became not only an artistic event, but also a political one. Its interpretation, strongly emphasizing anti-Russian and patriotic themes, caused concern among the communist authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, who considered the staging to be anti-Soviet.

In January 1968, by a decision of the party authorities, the play was taken off the air. The last show became a manifestation of opposition to censorship and interference in culture. After the show ended, the audience, which included many students, spontaneously began chanting patriotic slogans, including "Independence without censorship!". Then a group of young people went to the Adam Mickiewicz monument in Krakowskie Przedmieście, where a demonstration took place.

This event was one of the igniters of the student protests in March 1968, which grew into a broad movement of opposition to the policies of the communist authorities. The reaction of the communist regime was a brutal pacification of the demonstration and repression of academic and cultural circles. Kazimierz Dejmek himself lost his position as director of the National Theater, and the actor playing the role of Gustav-Konrad, Gustaw Holoubek, was banned from appearing on television.

The suspension of "Dziady" in 1968 became one of the symbols of the struggle for freedom of speech and cultural independence in People's Poland, and the events of January 30 went down in history as one of the most important moments of resistance to communist censorship.

The course of the protests

- On March 8, 1968, Warszawa University students organized a demonstration demanding freedom of speech.
- The demonstration was brutally suppressed by the police and the so-called "workers' activists" - students were beaten and arrested, and many were expelled from the university.
- The protests spread to other cities, but the authorities quickly crushed the resistance.

After the events, the communist authorities unleashed an anti-Semitic campaign - thousands of Poles of Jewish origin were forced to emigrate.

### **December 1970 - massacre of workers on the Coast**

In December 1970, Władysław Gomułka's government announced drastic increases in food prices. Port and shipyard workers in Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin and Elbląg began strikes.

The course of the massacre

- On December 14, 1970, Gdańsk shipyard workers began a protest.
- On December 17, as workers in Gdynia walked to work, the military and militia opened fire on them.
- Authorities used firearms, tanks and armored personnel carriers to suppress the protests.
- At least 44 people were killed and hundreds wounded in the massacre.

After the events, Gomułka was ousted from power and his place was taken by Edward Gierek, who promised reforms and improved living conditions.

## June 1976

### - protests in Radom, Ursus and Płock

Edward Gierek's government introduced further increases in food prices, which triggered a wave of public outrage.

The course of the protests

- On June 25, 1976, in Radom, workers took to the streets, demanding the withdrawal of the increases. The militia brutally pacified the demonstrators, many were arrested and beaten.
- In Ursus, protesters stopped production and blocked railroad tracks, paralyzing transportation.
- The authorities withdrew the raises, but the repression of the protesters continued.

After these events, the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) was formed, which became one of the foundations of the future democratic opposition. Workers' strikes were evidence of social discontent and growing rebellion against communism. Each successive protest weakened the communist government and prepared the ground for the emergence of "Solidarity" in 1980, which ultimately led to the collapse of communism in Poland.



## The government of Edward Gierek

Edward Gierek took power in Poland in December 1970 after Władysław Gomułka's resignation following the brutal suppression of workers' protests on the Coast. Initially, Gierek promised to modernize the country and improve the living conditions of Poles. **His economic policy was based on extensive foreign borrowing and dynamic industrialization.** Many industrial plants were expanded, infrastructure was developed, and the public felt a short-term improvement in its material situation. Wages rose, and stores were better stocked for a time.

By the late 1970s, however, the economic situation had already begun to deteriorate dramatically. Poland's growing debt, the inefficiency of new investments and inflation led to a shortage of goods and growing social discontent. In 1976 there were protests in Radom and Ursus, which were brutally suppressed by the authorities. In response to the repression, the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) was formed and played a key role in organizing resistance against the communist regime.

## Strikes and the rise of Solidarity

The economic and political situation reached a critical point in 1980, when the authorities once again announced food price hikes. This led to a wave of strikes across the country, the most important of which took place at the Gdańsk Shipyard. The workers, led by **Lech Wałęsa**, demanded not only an improvement in material conditions, but above all political freedoms and the right to organize independent trade unions.

On August 21, 1980, the Inter-Union Strike Committee at the Gdańsk Shipyard announced **21 demands**, which included:

- Acceptance of independent trade unions.
- Guaranteeing the right to strike.
- Respect for freedom of speech.
- Release of political prisoners.
- Abolition of repression of opposition activists.
- Improvement of working conditions.
- Increasing salaries.
- Guaranteeing increases in pensions.
- Limiting censorship.
- Better supply of food and necessities.
- Changing the card system for products.



## Lesson 18

### The times of Solidarity

In this lesson, we will discuss a key period in Polish history – the Solidarity era. It was a time when Poles became increasingly vocal in demanding political and economic change, opposing communist rule. Solidarity, first as a social movement and later as a political force, played a fundamental role in dismantling the communist system in Poland. We will present the reign of Edward Gierek, the 1980 strikes in Gdańsk, the creation of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity,” the introduction of martial law and the Round Table Talks that led to Poland's democratic transition.

- Lowering the retirement age.
- Improving the health care system.
- Improving the housing situation.
- Reform of the judiciary.
- Reforms in education.
- Improvement of living conditions in the countryside.
- Regulation of the uniformed services.
- Elimination of party privileges.
- Improving the relationship of the state with the Church.
- Reform of the economic system.

After difficult negotiations between the strikers and the authorities, the August 31, 1980 August **Agreements** were signed, which enabled the establishment of the **Solidarity** Trade Union, the first independent trade union in the Eastern Bloc. In a short period of time, the organization attracted millions of members and became a real threat to the communist government.

## Solidarity's key figures

Solidarity was a social movement that included people from different backgrounds who fought for civil rights, freedom of speech and democracy alongside workers and intellectuals. Among the most important figures are:

### Lech Wałęsa

Lech Wałęsa was born on September 29, 1943 in Popowo. He was an electrician at the Gdańsk Shipyard and one of the leaders of the strikes in August 1980 that led to the signing of the August Agreements and the legalization of Solidarity. His charismatic leadership and ability to mobilize people made him a symbol of the struggle for freedom. In 1983, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his peaceful struggle for workers' rights and political freedom in Poland. After the fall of communism, in 1990, he became the first democratically elected president of the Third Republic of Poland.

### Anna Walentynowicz

Anna Walentynowicz was one of the key figures in the resistance movement at the Gdańsk Shipyard. Her unjust dismissal from work in August 1980 was the immediate cause of the outbreak of strikes. She was involved in the underground Solidarity movement after the imposition of martial law and actively participated in the struggle for democracy until the end of her life.

### Bronisław Geremek

Historian and politician who played a key role in the Round Table talks. He was one of Solidarity's advisors and an expert in negotiations with the communist authorities. After 1989, he became foreign minister and helped bring Poland into NATO.

### Jacek Kuroń

Jacek Kuroń was one of the best-known opposition activists. Already in the 1960s he openly opposed the communist regime. He co-founded the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), which helped repressed workers. He was arrested several times, but never gave up the fight for freedom and democracy.

### Zofia Romaszewska

One of the key activists in the democratic opposition. She organized the structures of the underground Solidarity movement after the introduction of martial law, was involved in helping repressed people and fought for human rights in Poland.

### Bogdan Borusewicz

He was one of the main organizers of the 1980 Gdańsk Shipyard strike. After martial law was imposed, he was active in the underground, organizing secret Solidarity structures. After 1989, he played a key role in Polish politics.

### Henryka Krzywonos

A streetcar driver from Gdańsk who stopped her streetcar on August 15, 1980, signaling the start of protests throughout the city. She was one of the key strike activists and took part in talks with the communist authorities.

## Martial law in Poland (1981–1983) – a time of fear, resistance and change

In the 1980s, Poland was a country of shattered hopes and brutal reality. After the wave of strikes in 1980 and the uprising of the Solidarity trade union, the public hoped for change, but the communist government had other plans. **On December 13, 1981**, General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law, which plunged the country into an atmosphere of terror and repression for nearly two years.

### Reasons for and preparations for martial law

The decision to introduce martial law was not

spontaneous. The authorities of the Polish People's Republic, under the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), had been planning for months to crack down on "Solidarity", a movement that threatened the monopoly of the party and destabilized control over the state.

After the strikes in August 1980, which ended with the signing of the August Agreements, the first independent trade union organization in the Eastern Bloc was established - NSZZ "Solidarność". The authorities of the Polish People's Republic, fearing the loss of power, did not intend to allow further democratization of the country. Pressure also came from Moscow - the Soviet Union, remembering the interventions in Czechoslovakia (1968) and Hungary (1956), did not rule out military intervention in Poland. General Jaruzelski later claimed that martial law was the "lesser evil" that protected Poland from a Soviet invasion, but this remains a controversial issue to this day.

The army and the militia had been preparing to take control of the country since October 1980. Operation Azalia was supposed to detain opposition leaders, seize strategic facilities and block the media.

### **The night of December 13, 1981**

On the night of December 12-13, 1981, over 70,000 soldiers and 30,000 militia officers took to the streets of Polish cities. The military took control of key buildings, including radio and television stations, telephone exchanges and workplaces. Shortly after midnight, a wave of arrests began, with around 3,000 Solidarity activists, including Lech Wałęsa, Jacek Kuroń, Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Bronisław Geremek, being taken to detention centers.

At 6 a.m., Poles saw General Jaruzelski on their TV screens in uniform, sternly announcing that martial law had been imposed in the country. A curfew was introduced (10 p.m. to 6 a.m.), strikes and gatherings were banned, and correspondence was censored. The military blocked roads throughout Poland and long-distance telephone calls were cut off. ZOMO militia units brutally dispersed the protests, and any opposition to the authorities was severely punished.

### **Public resistance and repression - a tragedy at the "Wujek" coal mine**

Despite brutal repression, the Poles did not give up without a fight. As early as December 14th, strikes began in many workplaces. The biggest protest took place in the "Wujek" mine in Katowice, where the miners decided to defend their rights.

On December 16, 1981, ZOMO troops and the army entered the scene. During the pacification of the mine, the police opened fire on the protesters. Nine miners were killed and dozens were injured. It was the greatest tragedy of the martial law period, which went down in history as a symbol of the regime's brutality.

In the following months, **more than 10,000 people were interned and independent media were completely marginalized.** The authorities controlled every aspect of everyday life, and the economy continued to plunge into crisis. Shortages in shops, food stamps and terrible living conditions only deepened the frustration of the population.

The lifting of martial law and its consequences  
Martial law was officially suspended on December 31, 1982, and on July 22, 1983, the authorities announced its end. However, this did not mean the end of repression - many oppositionists were still in prison and "Solidarity" remained banned. Despite the terror and censorship, the spirit of resistance in the nation did not die out. Martial law was one of the darkest periods in Poland's post-war history. It was a time of brutal repression, but also proof of the strength of a society that did not give up and fought for freedom despite enormous difficulties.

## **The assassination of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko**

Father **Jerzy Popiełuszko** was one of the most important clergymen associated with the Solidarity movement. As chaplain to the workers, he openly opposed the communist regime, saying masses for the homeland and supporting the democratic opposition. His sermons, full of references to human rights and human dignity, drew crowds and inspired the opposition.

Because of his activities, Popiełuszko was constantly under surveillance by the Security Service. On October 19, 1984, he was kidnapped by SB officers Grzegorz Piotrowski, Waldemar Chmielewski and Leszek Pękala. After brutal torture, he was murdered and his body was thrown into the Vistula River near Włocławek.

His death caused a huge stir throughout Poland and the world. Father Popiełuszko's funeral gathered hundreds of thousands of people and became a huge demonstration of opposition to the communist regime. The slogan, **"Conquer**

**evil with good**", which was the motto of his activities, became a symbol of peaceful resistance against communism.

## The role of John Paul II during the Solidarity era

The election of Karol Wojtyła as pope in 1978 was an event of great significance for Poland and the entire Eastern Bloc. From the very beginning, his pontificate focused on supporting human rights, freedom and the dignity of nations oppressed by totalitarian systems.

During his first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979, John Paul II delivered the memorable words at Victory Square in Warszawa: „**May your Spirit descend and renew the face of the earth! This earth!**". The words were interpreted as a call for political and social change.

During subsequent pilgrimages in 1983 and 1987, the Pope repeatedly expressed support for Solidarity and its values. During martial law, John Paul II pressed the communist authorities to end repression and release interned opposition activists. He also supported Polish society through numerous appeals to the international community to put pressure on Poland's communist government. Thanks to his involvement, the Vatican became one of the key centers of support for Solidarity. John Paul II met with Lech Wałęsa and other opposition leaders, and his talks with Ronald Reagan and other Western leaders helped weaken the position of the communist regime. Undoubtedly, the Pope's spiritual and moral support had a huge impact on the survival of Solidarity and its eventual victory in 1989.

## The Round Table and the end of communism

Faced with growing social discontent and a difficult economic situation, the communist authorities decided to negotiate with the opposition. **The Round Table deliberations**, which lasted from February 6 to April 5, 1989, led to the legalization of Solidarity and the establishment of rules for partially free elections. Participating in the negotiations were:

- **On the side of the communist authorities:** Wojciech Jaruzelski, Czesław Kiszczak, Aleksander Kwaśniewski,

- **On the side of the opposition:** Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuron,
- **Representatives of the Catholic Church:** Archbishop Józef Glemp.

On June 4, 1989, the first partially free elections were held, resulting in a devastating defeat for the communists. **Tadeusz Mazowiecki** became prime minister of the new government, and Poland began the process of democratic transition.

## Summary

The times of Solidarity are one of the most important periods in the history of Poland in the 20th century. They showed that the determination of society could bring about the collapse of an authoritarian system. The struggle for freedom, democracy and workers' rights found its finale in 1989, when Poland embarked on the path of democratic transition.

# The collapse of communism and the beginning of democracy

Before 1989, Poland was under the influence of the Soviet Union and was part of the Eastern Bloc. The communist system restricted civil liberties and hindered the development of the economy. Poles sought greater freedom and democracy, which led to a wave of protests and political change. A key role in the process of change was played by strikes organized by Solidarity, a trade union that had been the main opposition force to the regime since the early 1980s.

**The breakthrough came in 1989, when the first partially free parliamentary elections were held.** Their results led to the formation of a government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Poland's first non-communist prime minister after World War II. This was a symbolic end to the era of communism and the beginning of democratic rule. Eventually, the one-party system was abolished and Poland began the process of integration with the Western world.

## Economic transformation

After the regime change, economic reforms were introduced. A key role was played by the Balcerowicz Plan, named after Leszek Balcerowicz, finance minister in Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government. The plan called for a transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. The process was fraught with difficulties, such as rising unemployment and the closure of unprofitable industrial plants. However, the reforms were necessary for Poland to become a competitive economy. In the early 1990s, inflation reached several hundred percent, and society had to adjust to the new economic realities.

## New Constitution

After a period of political transition, Poland adopted a new Constitution on April 2, 1997. Work on it took several years and was the result of extensive political debates. The Constitution was aimed at stabilizing the political system, defining the rights and duties of citizens and laying the foundations for further development of the country. The draft Constitution was created with the participation



## Lesson 19

### History of the Third Republic

**In this lesson, you will learn about the history of the Third Republic – the period that began after the fall of communism in 1989. We will discuss key events such as the political transformation, the adoption of the 1997 Constitution, Poland's accession to NATO and the European Union, as well as other significant moments in the country's history. You will learn about the changes that have taken place in Poland in the political, economic and social spheres and how they have affected the lives of citizens. We will also introduce the profiles of the presidents and prime ministers of the Third Republic and their contribution to the development of the country.**

of various political groupings, including the Freedom Union, SLD, PSL and AWS. The document was adopted in a nationwide referendum on May 25, 1997, in which the majority of voters supported its introduction. The ceremonial signing of the Constitution took place in Warsaw, and the ceremony was attended by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the Speakers of the Sejm and the Senate, and government representatives.

## Poland in NATO

**On March 12, 1999, Poland joined NATO, a military alliance that guarantees the country's security.** The decision to join NATO stemmed from Poland's need for stability and protection in the face of an uncertain geopolitical situation. The accession process took several years and required the adaptation of the Polish armed forces to NATO standards. The signing of the accession documents took place in Independence, Missouri, and the ceremony was attended by Foreign Minister Bronisław Geremek and US President Bill Clinton. Poland, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, became the first Eastern Bloc country to be admitted to NATO. In the following years, Poland actively participated in NATO operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq, strengthening its position in the alliance's structures.

## Poland in the European Union

Poland's accession to the European Union was one of the most important political goals of the Third Republic. The process formally began in 1994, when Poland applied for membership. Negotiations lasted nearly a decade and included legal adjustments, economic reforms and changes in public administration. The Accession Treaty was signed on April 16, 2003 in Athens by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Prime Minister Leszek Miller. **On May 1, 2004, Poland officially became a member of the European Union.** Poland held celebrations to mark the occasion, and an EU flag-raising ceremony took place in Warsaw's Castle Square.

## Smoleńsk catastrophe

On April 10, 2010, a plane crash occurred near Smolensk, killing President Lech Kaczyński, his wife and 94 other people, including senior government, military and clergy officials. On board were, among others, the last president of the Republic of Poland in exile Ryszard Kaczorowski, deputy speakers of the Sejm and Senate, generals of the Polish Army, bishops and family members of the Victims of the Katyń Massacre.

## Poland today

Poland today is a country of dynamic change that combines a rich historical heritage with a modern approach to economy, science and culture. As a member of the European Union and NATO, Poland actively participates in shaping international policy and takes care of its security. Thanks to EU funds, it is developing infrastructure, modernizing transportation and supporting technological innovation. Polish cities such as Warszawa, Kraków, Wrocław and Gdańsk are becoming modern centers of business and culture, attracting investors and tourists from around the world. The country is going through numerous challenges, such as energy transition, ecological development and demographic changes, but at the same time it remains one of the most forward-looking countries in Central Europe. **Poles value their independence, tradition and openness to the world, which makes Poland constantly evolve and strive for a better tomorrow.**

## Presidents of the Third Republic

### **Wojciech Jaruzelski (1923-2014).**

President from 1989 to 1990, the last leader of the People's Republic of Poland and the first president of the Third Republic. He was an advocate of systemic transformation and participated in the Round Table talks. His term was a transitional period, ending with the election of Lech Wałęsa as president.

### **Lech Wałęsa (born 1943).**

President from 1990 to 1995, the first president elected by popular vote. He was the leader of the Solidarity movement and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. His presidency was characterized by economic reforms and attempts to create a modern political scene in Poland.

**Aleksander Kwaśniewski (born 1954).**

President from 1995 to 2005, he represented the Democratic Left Alliance. His term of office brought the enactment of the Polish Constitution in 1997 and Poland's accession to NATO. He was a supporter of Poland's integration into the European Union.

**Lech Kaczyński (1949-2010)**

President from 2005 to 2010; co-founder of Law and Justice (PIS) party. He emphasized historical policy and national security. Died in the Smolensk crash on April 10, 2010.

**Bronisław Komorowski (born 1952).**

President from 2010 to 2015, he took office after the death of Lech Kaczyński and subsequently won the presidential election. He focused on foreign policy and cooperation with the EU and NATO.

**Andrzej Duda (born 1972)**

President since 2015. He represents the Law and Justice party. He actively participates in international politics and has supported judicial reforms and social policy.

## Prime Ministers of the Third Republic

**Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1927-2013)**

Prime Minister from 1989 to 1991, Poland's first non-communist prime minister after World War II. He introduced economic reforms and began the process of systemic transformation.

**Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (born 1951).**

Prime Minister in 1991, representing the Liberal Democratic Congress. Continued economic reforms started by Mazowiecki, pushed for market liberalization.

**Jan Olszewski (1930-2019)**

Prime Minister from 1991 to 1992, he represented the Porozumienie Centrum. His government was overthrown as a result of the so-called "night shift" after an attempt to vet people in high state positions.

**Hanna Suchocka (born 1946)**

Prime Minister from 1992 to 1993, the first woman prime minister of Poland. She represented the Democratic Union. Her government fell as a result of a vote of no confidence.

**Waldemar Pawlak (born 1959)**

Prime Minister in 1992 and 1993-1995, he represented the Polish People's Party. He focused on political stabilization of the country and economic negotiations.

**Józef Oleksy (1946-2015)**

Prime Minister in 1995-1996, he represented the Democratic Left Alliance. His term ended with his resignation following accusations of contacts with USSR intelligence.

**Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz (born 1950).**

Prime Minister in 1996-1997, he represented the Democratic Left Alliance. He carried out administrative and economic reforms, preparing Poland for NATO membership.

**Jerzy Buzek (born 1940)**

Prime Minister from 1997 to 2001, he represented the Solidarity Electoral Action. He carried out four major reforms: administrative, health, education and pension. At the end of his term, he became President of the European Parliament.

**Leszek Miller (born 1946)**

Prime Minister from 2001 to 2004, he represented the Democratic Left Alliance. It was during his term that Poland joined the European Union in 2004.

**Marek Belka (born 1952)**

Prime Minister from 2004 to 2005, he represented the Democratic Left Alliance. He focused on stabilizing public finances and economic policy.

**Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (born 1959).**

Prime Minister from 2005 to 2006, he represented Law and Justice. His term was a period of making changes in state administration.

**Jarosław Kaczyński (born 1949).**

Prime Minister in 2006-2007, he represented Law and Justice. He introduced changes in foreign policy and state administration.

**Ewa Kopacz (born 1956)**

Prime Minister in 2014-2015, representing the Civic Platform. Focused on social policy and international relations.

**Beata Szydło (born 1963)**

Prime Minister from 2015-2017, she represented Law and Justice. She was focused on developing many social programs, including 500+.

**Mateusz Morawiecki (born 1968).**

Prime Minister from 2017 to 2023, he represented Law and Justice. His tenure included the introduction of the 500+ program, economic reforms and management of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

**Donald Tusk (born 1957)**

Prime Minister from 2007 to 2014, and again from 2024. Representative of the Civic Platform (PO). He focused on modernizing the country, improving international relations and economic development.



## Polish Nobel Prize winners:

- **Maria Skłodowska-Curie** (1867- 1934) - discoverer of two elements: polonium and radium. She is the only woman to receive the Nobel Prize twice - in 1903 and 1911 (in two different scientific fields: physics and chemistry). She contributed to the establishment of the radiological laboratory of the Warsaw Scientific Society and the Radium Institute in Warszawa.
- **Henryk Sienkiewicz** (1846 - 1916) - an outstanding writer, received the Nobel Prize in literature in 1905 - for lifetime achievement. He gained great authority in Poland, especially through his historical novels with strong patriotic tendencies. In „Trilogy ’ he presented a colorful picture of life and events in 17th-century Poland, and in ‘Teutonic Knights ’ he depicted the reign of Władysław II Jagiełło.
- **Władysław Reymont** (1867- 1925) - a talented writer, won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1924. He received it for his novel “Peasants”, which presents a faithful and multi-layered picture of the Polish countryside in the rhythm of the four seasons.
- **Czesław Miłosz** (1911 - 2004) - poet, essayist, novelist, prose writer, translator , literary historian; he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1980 for „outstanding humanistic values in the totality of his poetic works.” After the war, he worked as a diplomat for the Polish communist authorities, including in New York and Paris. His works were not published in Poland for many years, and the poet was published only abroad. He returned to Poland permanently in 1993.
- **Lech Wałęsa** (born 1943) - worker, union activist and politician, leader and hero of the democratic opposition during the communist period. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983. After the banning of the first Solidarity movement and the events of December 13, 1981, he was honored for his outstanding contribution to the promotion and maintenance of peace in the world. After the 1989 transition, Lech Wałęsa became the first president of the Third Republic elected by popular vote. With his determination, he initiated changes that later contributed to the exponential growth of similar movements in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.



## Lesson 20

### Outstanding Poles – Part I

During this lesson we will introduce you to the figures of Polish Nobel Prize winners, selected outstanding scientists and inventors, important directors, actors and athletes.

- **Wisława Szymborska** (1923 - 2012) - an outstanding representative of Polish literature. In 1996 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for lifetime achievement in poetry. She was judged as an artistic master, which refers to the experience of 20th century poetry and the humanist tradition. Selected volumes of poetry: "Calling to the Yeti" (1957), "Salt" (1962), "Moment" (2002), or "The End and the Beginning" (1993).
- **Olga Tokarczuk** (u. 1962) - writer, poet, essayist, screenwriter, psychologist. In December 2019, Olga Tokarczuk received the Nobel Prize in Literature „for her narrative imagination, which presents crossing borders as a form of life with encyclopedic passion.” Tokarczuk is the author of such works as: "Journey of the People of the Book", "Prawiek and Other Times", "Games on Many Drums" , "The Jakub Books" and "Bieguni".

## Polish scientists and inventors:

- **Nicolaus Copernicus** (1473 - 1543) - one of the most eminent astronomers in history, not only of Poland, but of the whole world. He was born in Toruń and studied at the Kraków Academy and in Italy. He was a true Renaissance man, the creator of the heliocentric theory - his theorem remains one of the most important scientific revolutions in history. We say about him that he "stopped the Sun, moved the Earth - the Polish tribe brought him out".
- **Stefan Banach** (1892 - 1945) - an outstanding mathematician, considered the founder of functional analysis. His name is memorialized in many basic mathematical concepts, such as the Banach-Tarski paradox, the Hahn-Banach theorem and the Banach-Mazur game.
- **Jacek Rafał Karpiński** (1927 - 2010) - an engineer, electronics engineer and computer scientist, as well as a participant in the Warszawa Uprising in the „Zośka” Battalion. He is known as the inventor of the K-202 computer, designed in 1970-1973, which became the first Polish computer built with integrated circuits. In his career he was involved not only in designing computer hardware, but also in software development.
- **Józef Hofmann** (1876 - 1957) - pianist, composer, educator and inventor. He patented more than 70 inventions closely related to automobiles or music. Among other things, he was the author of the paperclip, a device for measuring the pressure of a pianist's fingers, an automobile windshield wiper and a height-adjustable piano stool.
- **Kazimierz Funk** (1884 - 1967) - world-renowned creator of the science of vitamins. He was a Polish biochemist, discoverer of the first vitamin (B1) and creator of the term "vitamin". He was involved in the treatment of patients with avitaminosis.

## Polish directors:

- **Andrzej Wajda** (1926 - 2016) - major films: "Man of Iron," "Man of Marmur," "Katyń." Awards: "Palm" at the Cannes Film Festival, Oscar for lifetime achievement.
- **Krzysztof Zanussi** (born 1939) - major films: "Colors of Protection," "Structures of Crystal," and "Illumination." He received statuettes for his films at Cannes and the Gdynia Film Festival, among others.
- **Krzysztof Kieślowski** (1941 -1996) - created, among others: "Talking Heads" and "The Decalogue." For "Three Colors. Blue" won the Golden Lion statuette in Gdynia, as well as an Oscar nomination for "Three Colors. Red."
- **Jerzy Hoffman** (born 1932) - most important films: adaptation of "Trilogy" Henryk Sienkiewicz: "Pan Wołodyjowski," "The Deluge," "With Fire and Sword."
- **Roman Polański** (b.1933) - Polish films of the 1960s, "China Town", "Rosemary's Baby", "The Pianist" (Academy Award winner).
- **Agnieszka Holland** (b.1948) - major films: "In Darkness" (2011, nominated for the Academy Award for Foreign Language Film) and 'Citizen Jones' (2019) received Golden Lions at the Polish Feature Film Festival.

## Polish actors:

- **Jerzy Stuhr** (1947 - 2024) - known for his films: "Sexmission," 'Citizen,' 'Amateur,' "A Week of a man's life," "Persona non grata." Outstanding actor, director, polonist and university teacher.
- **Boguslaw Linda** (born 1952) - starred in films such as: "Psy", 'Sara', 'Man of Iron', 'Quo Vadis', '1920 Battle of Warsaw'.
- **Krystyna Janda** (born 1952) - starred in films such as: "Man of Marble," 'Man of Iron', 'Pestka,' "My Mother's Mother."
- **Piotr Adamczyk** (born 1972) - starred in such films as: "Letters to M.," 'Karol - The Man Who Became Pope', 'Einstein', 'Testosterone'.
- **Anna Dymna** (born 1951) - theater and film actress, starred in such films as: "Janosik", 'Leprechaun', 'Love or Throw', 'Znachor', 'Panna z morską głową'.
- **Daniel Olbrychski** (born 1945) - film and theater actor, most important films: "Ashes," 'Pan Wolodyjowski', 'The Wedding,' "Salt."

## Polish athletes:

- **Iga Świątek** (born 2001) - tennis player, winner of twenty-two WTA singles tournaments, including five Grand Slam tournaments: bronze medalist at the Paris Olympics (2024) in singles, leader of the WTA singles ranking.
- **Robert Lewandowski** (born 1988) - footballer, center forward for Spanish club FC Barcelona, captain in the Polish national team. Considered one of the best players of his generation in the world and one of the best center forwards in the history of soccer. He scored more than 600 goals in senior club and national team competitions.
- **Adam Małysz** (born 1977) - ski jumper, four-time Olympic medalist and four-time world champion. He is one of the most successful athletes in the history of individual ski jumping world championship competitions and a four-time ski jumping World Cup winner.
- **Robert Kubica** (born 1984) - racing and rally driver. In 2005, he became the champion of Formula Renault 3.5. Kubica is the first ever

and only Pole competing in Formula One, in which he made his debut at the 2006 Hungarian Grand Prix, and made his last appearance at the 2021 Italian Grand Prix.

- **Otylia Jędrzejczak** (born 1983) - swimmer specializing in the butterfly and freestyle, Olympic champion, world champion and European long-course champion, three-time world record holder. President of the Polish Swimming Federation since 2021.
- **Andrzej Gołota** (b. 1968) - fighter, four-time Polish heavyweight champion, Olympic bronze medalist from Seoul and European championships from Athens, professional champion of North America of the IBF federation. According to BoxRec rankings, he is the seventh greatest Polish fighter of all time.

## Literature - Polish writers:

- **Adam Mickiewicz** (1798-1855) - one of the most outstanding poets, publicist and national bard. His epic „Pan Tadeusz” was written in 1832-1834 and published in 1834 in Paris, where Mickiewicz was living at the time. It tells the story of the life of the Novgorod nobility, their hunting, love and attachment to the Lithuanian land. It is a masterpiece of Polish literature and compulsory reading in elementary school. Other important works: “Ballads and Romances”, “Dziady”, “Crimean Sonnets”.
- **Juliusz Słowacki** (1809-1849) - poet, playwright and epistolograph, as well as a national bard. He was born in Krzemieniec, now in Ukraine. In 1832 in Paris, where he published two volumes of “Poetry”. His poetry dealt with themes of freedom, national struggle and spirituality, gradually evolving into mysticism. His literary legacy, full of artful language and original visions, cemented his place in the canon of Polish literature. He also wrote such works as “Kordian” and “Balladyna”.
- **Zygmunt Krasiński** (1812 -1859) - poet, playwright, prose writer, one of the three national bards, representative of Polish Romanticism and messianism. He came from an aristocratic family, which influenced his works and views, often caught in the conflict between patriotism and loyalty to the tsarist empire. The most important works are “Nie-Boska komedia”, “Irydion”, “Letters”.
- **Julian Tuwim** (1894-1953) - poet of the period of the first half of the 20th century, of Jewish origin, author of wonderful poems for children, such as: “Locomotive”, “Bird Radio”, “Mr. Hilary”, or “The Trumpeter’s Elephant”. He was also a cabaret and revue lyricist and librettist, as well as a political writer. He was also known as a co-author and editor of literary and satirical magazines.
- **Zbigniew Herbert** (1924 - 1998) - poet associated with the communist period. His work was a form of protest against the prevailing system, as well as a call for perseverance in difficult times. It is poetry deeply rooted in Polish realities. The most important works: “Barbarian in the Garden”, “Still Life with a Rod”, “Labyrinth by the Sea” and “King of the Ants”.
- **Stanisław Lem** (1921 - 2006) - writer of the hard science fiction genre, futurologist, philosopher, and literary critic. He was a leading representative of Polish fantasy literature. He is the most translated Polish writer - his works have been translated into 41 languages. Among his most important works are the novels: “Solaris”, “The Star Diaries”, and “Tales of the Robots”.



## Lesson 21

### Outstanding Poles – Part II

In this lesson we will introduce you to the characters of selected outstanding representatives of Polish literature, as well as painters, artists, composers and musicians.

## Art - painters, visual artists:

- **Jan Matejko** (1838 - 1893) - painter, creator of historical and battle paintings, historian. One of the most outstanding Polish painters in history. He was the author of more than three hundred oil paintings and several hundred drawings and sketches, including "Stańczyk" (1862), "The Sermon of Skarga" (1864), "Copernicus' Astronomer, or Conversations with God" (1874), "The Battle of Grunwald" (1878), "The Prussian Homage" (1880-1882), and "Vernyhora" (1883-1884). Matejko's works, distributed by thousands of reproductions, became standard illustrations of many key events in Polish history.
- **Jacek Malczewski** (1854 - 1929) - is one of the most outstanding Polish modernist painters. Many of Malczewski's works depict the world of the Polish countryside with landed manors, where many elements of Greek and Roman mythology appear at the same time. He created, among others: "Wrong Circle", "Thanatos", "My Soul", "Death of Ellenai", "Polish Hamlet".
- **Stanisław Wyspiański** (1869 - 1907) - painter, graphic artist, architect, playwright, poet, furniture designer. His artistic output is very wide and includes works of various types: drawings, sketchbooks, oil paintings or pastels. He painted views of Kraków, portraits and self-portraits, plants, stained glass designs and illustrations. The most important works: the drama "Wedding", paintings: "Self-portrait with wife", "Sleeping Staś", stained glass "God the father".
- **Olga Boznańska** (1865 - 1940) - painter, representative of modernism, the Munich school and the most outstanding Polish painter of the Young Poland period. Her greatest fame came from her portraits, which she painted primarily in her studio. Her unique style was related, among other things, to her unique technique of laying down paint with small touches of the brush and waiting for it to dry. Key works: "Bretton"; "Girl with chrysanthemums"; "Portrait of Miss Dygat".
- **Magdalena Abakanowicz-Kosmowska** (1930 - 2017) - sculptor, professor of fine arts (1979), creator of artistic textiles, from 1965 to 1990 teaching at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań, visiting professor at the University of California in Los Angeles (1984) her characteristic textiles - spatial compositions, became known as abakans. The most characteristic works: "Embryology," "Alterations," or "Frozen."

## Composers and musician

- **Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin** (1810 -1849) - pianist and composer - one of the most outstanding of his time. He was called the poet of the piano, and represented the music of the Romantic period. He created Mazurkas, Polonaises and etudes. His artistic sensitivity and ability to draw inspiration from Polish folk music were the foundation of his work. Key works: "Revolutionary Etude", "Funeral March", "Polonaise-Fantasy", "Wish", "Rain Prelude", "Etude in E Major".
- **Stanisław Moniuszko** (1819 - 1872) - composer, conductor, pedagogue and organist. Author of about 268 songs, operettas, ballets and operas, his most famous works include "Halka", "Haunted Manor" and "Paria". Belarusian musical color is present in each of his compositions, and Moniuszko is still considered the most outstanding creator of Polish operas.
- **Karol Szymanowski** (1882-1937) - pianist and composer who significantly influenced the development of music during the period of Young Poland (the Second Republic). He composed symphonies and introduced motifs of Polish folklore, including Podhale and Kurpie, into his music, which resulted from his frequent stays in Zakopane. Major works: "Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 8", "Fantasy in C major, Op. 14 for piano", "Metopes 29 - three poems for piano".
- **Witold Lutosławski** (1913 - 1994) - an outstanding composer and conductor of the 20th century, who created many works for orchestra, including symphonies. He was also known for often conducting during performances of his compositions. Major works: "Funeral Music", "Venetian Games", "String Quartet", "Preludes and Fugue".
- **Krzysztof Penderecki** (1933 - 2020) - composer, conductor and music educator, was a professor and rector of the Academy of Music in Kraków for most of his life. His most famous works are "St. Luke Passion", "To the Victims of Hiroshima - Threnody", "Polish Requiem" and "Third Symphony". In total, he created four operas, eight symphonies and many other orchestral works.
- **Czesław Niemen** (1939 - 2004) - versatile artist, musician, multi-instrumentalist, singer and composer, songwriter, rock singer. One of Poland's most prominent popular music creators. His best-known songs are: "Dziwny jest ten świat", "Sen o Warszawie", "Pod Papugami".



## Lesson 22

### Poles you need to know!

In this lesson we will introduce you to the figures of prominent Polish military men, commanders, clergymen, as well as the resting places of famous Poles abroad.

## Military men and commanders:

- **Tadeusz Kościuszko** (1746 - 1817) - prominent military engineer, Supreme Commander of the National Armed Forces during the Kościuszko Insurrection, Lieutenant General of the army of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Major General commanding in the Greater Poland Division. He was also a brigadier general of the Continental Army during the American War of Independence. A national hero of Poland and the United States. Around the world there are approx. 220 Kościuszko monuments, and the highest peak in Australia is named after him.
- **Kazimierz Pułaski** (1745-1779) - outstanding military commander, hero of Poland and the United States, brigadier general of the Continental Army. He was one of the leaders of the Bar Confederation, fighting against Russian domination of Poland. After the fall of the confederation, he emigrated to France, where Benjamin Franklin introduced him to George Washington. During the American War of Independence, he played a key role in the formation of the American cavalry. He commanded the Pulaski Legion, a multinational cavalry and infantry formation. Pułaski is considered the "father of the American cavalry". General Pułaski Memorial Day is celebrated in the United States, and in 2009 he was posthumously awarded honorary citizenship of the United States.
- **Józef Piłsudski** (1867 - 1935) - soldier, politician, social and independence activist, statesman; from 1892 member of the Polish Socialist Party and its leader in the country, founder of the PPS Fighting Organization (1904) and the Polish Military Organization (1914), member of the Military Commission in the Provisional Council of State (1917) from November 11, 1918 Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, from 1918-1922 the Chief of State. He played a key role in regaining Poland's independence in 1918 and in shaping Polish politics in the first years after the war. In 1920 he became the first Marshal of Poland. Piłsudski was also the leader of the Sanation camp after the May Coup (1926), twice Prime Minister of Poland (1926-1928 and 1930); he exerted a significant influence on the formation of the internal and foreign policy of the Second Republic.

- **Władysław Sikorski** (1881-1943) - politician and military officer, military theorist, prime minister and Minister of Military Affairs of the Second Republic, Lieutenant General of the Polish Army, Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile (from September 30, 1939), founder and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces (in the West); commander of the Home Army and the Polish Underground State; died tragically in a plane crash in Gibraltar.
- **Władysław Anders** (1892 - 1970) - military officer, politician, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces. In 1940 he helped organize the Polish army in the USSR. Thanks to this, in 1942 he led out of the Soviet Union more than 115,000 Poles - civilians and soldiers rescued from Soviet camps and prisons. The army under his command fought and won the Battle of Monte Cassino in 1944. After the war, he became one of the leaders of the Polish community in exile. He rests on Monte Cassino among his comrades-in-arms.

## Clergy:

- **Stefan Wyszyński** (1901 - 1981) - Primate and cardinal, served as head of the Catholic Church in Poland during the most difficult periods of the communist regime in the country. He went down in history as **the "Primate of the Millennium"**. Wyszyński was not only a spiritual leader, but also a strong defender of human rights and religious freedom in the People's Republic of Poland. His activities and teachings contributed to the unity of Polish society and to the criticism of the communist regime, which had a major role in the democratic transition process in Poland in the 1980s.
- **John Paul II, or Karol Wojtyła** (1920 - 2005) - Pope and head of the Catholic Church. A poet, polyglot, as well as a non-professional actor, playwright, educator and philosopher of history, he was the first ever Knight of the Order of the White Eagle in the history of the Third Republic of Poland. He also became a Saint of the Catholic Church. He is the most recognizable Pole in the world. **He was elected Pope in 1978**, making him the first non-Italian pope in 445 years. One of the main demands of his papacy was to "place his Church at the heart of a new religious alliance that would bring together Jews, Muslims and Christians in a great religious armada." He was one of the most trav-

eled world leaders in history, (he visited 129 countries, which was interpreted as a desire to build relations between different nations and religions). The Pope's words on Victory Square during his **first pilgrimage to Poland (1979): „Let your Spirit come down. And renew the face of the Earth“**, with the added emphasis of 'This Earth,' became a catalyst for change in this part of Europe. One of the pope's most important achievements was his contribution to the fall of communism. Wadowice is the birthplace of St. John Paul II. In 1999, the Pope came on another pilgrimage to Poland and visited his hometown. During a sermon to the people of Wadowice, he said: "And there was a candy store. After high school graduation, we used to go for creameries. That we endured all this, these creameries after high school graduation." Thanks to these words, **the Pope's kremówka** (cream cake) became known to the whole world - it became a famous Polish dessert.

*To learn more about the Polish Pope, one of the most famous Poles in the world, we recommend watching the film: „Karol. The Man Who Became Pope“, director: Giacomo Battiato, year: 2005*

*Main roles: Piotr Adamczyk (Karol Wojtyła), Malgorzata Bela (Hanna Tuszynska).*

*Plot: Karol Wojtyła's life until his election as pope. The film has a sequel "Karol. The Pope Who Remained a Man."*

- **Jerzy Popiełuszko** (1947 - 1984) was a Roman Catholic priest, chaplain of the Warsaw „Solidarity” movement, blessed and martyred by the Catholic Church. He was **murdered by functionaries of the Security Service of the People's Republic of Poland**. His pastoral ministry was characterized by his commitment to **defending human rights and the fight for freedom under communism**. Popiełuszko gained great popularity through his sermons, in which he addressed the difficult political situation in Poland, and his tragic death in 1984 became a symbol of the struggle against the regime.

*To learn more about the heroic attitude and life of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, we recommend watching the film: „Popiełuszko. Freedom Is Within Us” - a 2009 Polish biographical drama about Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, directed by Rafał Węclawski. It depicts the fate of the protagonist against the background of significant historical events of Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. The main roles are played by Adam Woronowicz as Jerzy Popiełuszko, Marek Frąckowiak as Father Teofil Bogucki and Zbigniew Zamachowski as Ireneusz.*

## Famous Poles resting in foreign countries:

### ● Lviv - Lychakiv Cemetery:

Lviv was a Polish city for centuries, an important center of Galicia, so many famous Poles rest in the Lychakiv Cemetery, including poet Seweryn Goszczyński, playwright Gabriela Zapolska, poet Maria Konopnicka, mathematician Stefan Banach, painter Artur Grottger.

### ● Vilnius - Ross Cemetery:

The Ross Cemetery (Vilnius) is the resting place of, among others: Joachim Lelewel - Polish historian, poet Władysław Syrokomla, archaeologist Eustachy Tyszkiewicz, physicist Władysław Dziewulski, Maria Piłsudska (Józef Piłsudski's first wife). The heart of Piłsudski himself also rests here - it was buried (according to his will) together with his comrades-in-arms with his comrades in arms.

### ● Paris - Pere Lachaise and Montmartre cemeteries:

At the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris rests Fryderyk Chopin. On the other hand, the grave of Juliusz Słowacki is located in the Montmartre cemetery . It is empty because his body was moved to Wawel Castle to the Crypt of the National Bards. The poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid is buried in the Montmorency cemetery.



## Public holidays (national/state/religious holidays)

In Poland - during these holidays banks, shopping centers and state institutions are closed. These include **Sundays** and the days listed below:

- **January 1:** New Year's Day,
- **January 6:** Epiphany,
- **the first day of Easter,**
- **second day of Easter,**
- **May 1:** Labor Day,
- **May 3:** National Holiday of the Third of May, (May 1-3 are called May Day), anniversary of the adoption of the May 3 Constitution,
- **the first day of Pentecost,**
- **Corpus Christi day,**
- **August 15:** Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Polish Army Day,
- **November 1:** All Saints' Day,
- **November 11:** National Independence Day,
- **December 25:** first day of Christmas,
- **December 26:** second day of Christmas.

## Other public holidays

These are **not days off work**:

- **February 19:** Polish Science Day,
- **March 1:** National Day of Remembrance of Cursed Soldiers,
- **March 24:** National Day of Remembrance of Poles who saved Jews under German occupation,
- **April 13:** Memorial Day for Victims of the Katyń Massacre,
- **May 2:** Day of Polonia and Poles Abroad; Flag Day,
- **May 8:** National Victory Day,
- **June 20:** National Day of the Silesian Uprisings,
- **July 11:** National Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Genocide in Volhynia,
- **August 1:** Warsaw Uprising Memorial Day,
- **December 27:** National Day of the victorious Greater Poland Uprising.

## Other traditional Polish holidays (non-religious):

- **Grandmother's and Grandfather's Day** (January 21 and 22),
- **International Women's Day** (March 8),
- **Prima Aprilis:** a day of pranks and jokes (April 1),
- **Mother's Day** (May 26),



## Lesson 23

### Polish national, state, traditional holidays

This lesson will introduce you to Polish national holidays – national, religious and those associated with Polish tradition and culture.

You will learn about the traditions within each cycle of the year in lessons: 24, 25, 26.

- **Children's Day** (June 1),
- **Father's Day** (June 23),
- **National Education Commission Day** -  
Teacher's Day (October 14),
- **St. Andrew's Day** (29/30.11) - an evening of  
fortune-telling.





## Lesson 24

### Polish holidays and traditions – winter cycle

During this lesson we will introduce you to holidays and traditions related to the winter cycle. You will learn about Advent, St. Nicholas, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. We will also introduce you to the Feast of the Epiphany, tell you about the tradition of Fat Thursday, as well as Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent.

## Advent:

The liturgical year in the Catholic Church begins with Advent, which is also **the beginning of the calendar of religious holidays**. It is a period of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. During this time, the Advent Mass in honor of the Mother of God, known as Rorats, is practiced in Poland (since the 12th century).

This Mass is celebrated early in the morning, usually at 5 a.m. During this Mass, **four candles** are lit on the altar, one of which, symbolizing the Blessed Virgin Mary, is placed higher than the others.

Advent in the Catholic Church is a time of joyful **anticipation of the birth of Christ**, while in the Orthodox Church it signifies fasting. In the Catholic Church, this period is not associated with fasting.

Advent consists of **four Sundays**, which are counted down towards Christmas: 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Advent Sundays. Since Christmas falls on December 25, Advent usually lasts three weeks and a few days. The last Sunday of Advent ends with a Midnight Mass, on the night of December 24-25.

## St. Nicholas Day, or St. Nicholas Day - December 6.

This tradition commemorates the saintly **bishop Nicholas of Myra**, who is known for his charity and helping those in need, especially children. On this special day a figure dressed as Santa Claus brings **gifts** to children. Often parents hide the gifts at night so that children can discover them under their pillows in the morning. In many homes, schools, or workplaces, there are also shared games, which further enhance the atmosphere of Santa Claus.

## Christmas Eve, December 24.

Christmas Eve, falling on **December 24**, is the day before Christmas. According to Polish tradition, the Christmas tree (a coniferous tree - often pine, spruce, or fir; natural or artificial) is decorated and set up in homes on December 23 or 24, although increasingly the event is still held a few weeks before Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve, one gathers with loved ones to look forward together to the coming of Jesus. Pol-

ish tradition dictates that the supper should not begin until after the appearance of the first star in the sky, symbolizing the Star of Bethlehem.

The Christmas Eve supper begins with the **reading of a passage from the Gospel telling about the birth of Jesus**. After the prayer, the participants break the wafer and wish each other well. On the table, **the wafer** is often placed on a plate, and a bit of **hay** is placed under the tablecloth, a reference to the manger in which Jesus lay after his birth.

Customs related to the number and type of dishes at Christmas Eve can vary widely. The key element of the supper is the **12 Lenten dishes**, especially fish **dishes**, and including carp, which in ancient times symbolized Jesus.

The table is usually served **red borscht with ravioli, mushrooms with cabbage**, a variety of **fish** - boiled or baked, **noodles with poppy seeds**, and **compote of dried fruit**. For dessert, **gingerbread, cheesecake** or **poppyseed cake** is often served. Traditionally, **one free table setting** is left to symbolically leave room for the **“unannounced guest”**, i.e. Jesus.

In eastern Poland, it is traditional to serve **kutia**, which is cooked wheat or barley with honey, nuts and almonds. After the supper is over, **carols are sung** together, and children and adults give each other **gifts, which usually lie under the Christmas tree**.

The evening usually ends with **a shepherdess**, or solemn mass, which takes place at midnight on Christmas Eve night. In churches, before the midnight mass, Christmas trees are traditionally decorated and the Christmas nativity scene is prepared.

## Christmas Day December 25-26

Poles celebrate Christmas Eve and **Christmas Day itself** on **December 25** with their families. On the other hand, on the **Second Day of Christmas**, which is **December 26**, they usually meet in a wider group. It is dedicated to the patron saint, St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. In the past, in the villages, oat or other grains were blessed on this day. Nowadays, the second day of Christmas is primarily a time of visits, meetings, parties and joyful gatherings.

## Feast of the Epiphany - January 6

This holiday, also known as Epiphany, is celebrated on **January 6** in memory of the **three Wise Men - Casper, Melchior and Balthazar**, who came to Bethlehem to pay homage to the newborn Jesus. The custom of consecrating gold and incense on this day developed in the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

According to the legend of the Wise Men from the East, when a bright star appeared in the sky, three wise men from different parts of the world set off towards Bethlehem to worship the newborn Jesus Christ and offer him gifts: **gold, frankincense** and **myrrh**.

Since the 18th century, there has also been a tradition of ordaining **chalk** on this day, with which in many Catholic homes the letters **K+M+B** (Casper, Melchior and Balthazar) and the current date are written on the front door.

**Carnival** in Poland begins after Epiphany and lasts until Ash Wednesday. It is a time of fun, balls and lavish parties. Although some carnival traditions are disappearing, weddings are still not held in Polish culture during Lent or Advent.

## Fat Thursday

Fat Thursday marks the **beginning of the last week of Carnival**, which ends on Ash Wednesday. According to tradition, you can overeat on this day, thus ending the carnival before **Lent**. The most commonly served foods are **doughnuts** and **faworki**, also known in some regions as **chrust** or **chruściki**.

## Ash Wednesday - the beginning of Lent

Ash Wednesday, also known as Ash Wednesday, is **the first day of Lent** in the Catholic Church. It is a penitential day that ushers in the **46-day** period of Lent, which includes the five Sundays before Easter. A **strict fast** is observed on this day.

In the Roman Catholic rite, during the Mass celebrated on this day, **the priest sprinkles ashes on the heads of the faithful**, making the sign of the cross and reciting “Repent and believe

in the Gospel” or “From dust you were formed and to dust you shall turn.” Ash, which is used for sprinkling heads, is traditionally obtained by **burning the palms consecrated during the previous year’s Palm Sunday.**



## Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday, also known as “Passion Sunday”, “Flower Sunday” or “Willow Sunday”, is a movable feast in the Christian calendar, celebrated **seven days before Easter**. It marks the beginning of Holy Week.

The holiday is associated with the memory of Christ's arrival in Jerusalem. Residents greeted Christ riding into the city on a donkey by cheering in his honor with palm branches. It marks a time of spiritual preparation for Christmas, which is characterized by tranquility, concentration and reliving the passion of Jesus. In Poland, Palm Sunday has its roots in the Middle Ages.

According to Catholic tradition, the faithful bring to church **palms**, which are a symbol of new life. In many places competitions are held for the most beautiful and tallest palms.

## Easter holidays

Easter is the oldest and most significant holiday in Christianity, which commemorates both the **martyrdom and resurrection of Jesus Christ**. The holiday is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first spring full moon.

The week preceding this feast, during which key events for the Christian faith are remembered, is called **Holy Week**. The last three days of this period - **Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday** and Resurrection Sunday - are known as the **Paschal Triduum**.

### Holy Thursday

The first masses in the Paschal Triduum are celebrated on Holy Thursday. This is the day on which **the Last Supper of Jesus** is celebrated, and for many Poles it is a day of fasting, forgiveness and penance.

### Good Friday

On Good Friday, churches usually fill up with the faithful for evening prayer. People go to pray over the “Tomb of Christ,” which symbolizes the place where the Savior was laid in the tomb.

### Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is therefore the only day of the year on which no mass is held. On this day, Poles bring **Easter baskets with so-called “święconki”** to church for sacrifice, which must contain:



## Lesson 25

### Polish holidays and traditions – spring cycle.

In this lesson we will introduce you to Polish holidays and traditions of the spring cycle.

- **a white lamb**, which symbolizes the Risen Christ. Usually made of sugar, it also takes center stage on the Easter table.
- **bread** - in the Christian tradition it symbolizes the Body of Christ. It is the food necessary for life, represents abundance, satiety and human dignity.
- **horseradish** symbolizes health and physical strength.
- **cold cuts** symbolize health, material abundance and fertility.
- **salt** - purification, simplicity and truth.
- **painted/decorated eggs** (as well as undecorated ones) are a symbol of new life - unpainted eggs are meant to be shared on Easter Sunday.

### Easter Sunday

The celebration of Easter Sunday, also known as Easter Sunday or Resurrection Sunday, is the first day of Easter.

In Poland, on Easter Sunday, early in the morning (and sometimes as early as late in the evening of Holy Saturday), a solemn mass called **resurrection** is celebrated, the traditions of which date back to the Middle Ages.

During the resurrection, bells and chimes sound for the first time since Maundy Thursday in the churches. Trumpets are also often heard, loudly announcing the resurrection of Jesus.

After returning home, the family sits down to a **festive Easter breakfast**, which begins with mutual, heartfelt wishes and the sharing of a holy egg from a basket. The tables are dominated by eggs, cold meats, Easter sour soup, white sausage, Christmas ham, stuffed eggs, quorn, cheesecake, as well as traditional babas and mazurkas. Tables are decorated with bouquets of the first flowers of spring - especially basil, the fluffy willow blossoms, also known as basil catkins.

### Easter Monday - Śmigus Dyngus

Easter Monday, also known as **Lany Poniedziałek** or Śmigus-dyngus, is the second day of Easter. In Polish tradition on this day, people pour water on each other in a playful manner, even if they are strangers. The pouring of water refers to ancient pagan practices that symbolized the awakening of nature to life and the annual cycle of regeneration of the earth.



## Corpus Christi

Corpus Christi is a movable feast, always celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, exactly sixty days after the celebration of Easter. The celebration of Corpus Christi is deeply rooted in Polish tradition.

**A solemn procession** is held on this day. During the procession, while the priest carries a monstrance that contains a wafer symbolizing the Body of Christ, the faithful head to altars created outside the church. Festively dressed children throw flowers and flower petals in front of the monstrance, adding charm and joy to the entire ceremony.

## Midsummer Night /St. John's Night (June 23-24)

These celebrations are still held the night before the day of their patron saint, in Poland also called **Sobótka** or **Kupała Night**. Just on this shortest night of the year the legendary **fern flower** blooms. Tradition has it that the one who finds it will lead a happy and prosperous life, but beware: with his happiness and wealth he is not allowed to share with anyone. Divination on this evening mainly concerns love and marriage.

## Pentecost (Feast of Our Lady of the Herbs)

Also known as the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated **on August 15**, takes place in the Catholic Church around the world. The feast is associated with the tradition of consecrating and harvesting nature's crops: herbs, grains, vegetables, fruits or flowers. The consecrated crops are supposed to ensure safety and harmony in homes throughout the year.

On this day, solemn masses are held in churches, and crowds of the faithful make a pilgrimage to the sanctuary in Częstochowa's Jasna Góra. Pedestrian pilgrimages from all corners of Poland cover hundreds of kilometers, persisting in prayer and song for several days.



## Lesson 26

### Polish holidays and traditions

### – summer and autumn cycle.

**In this lesson we will introduce you to the most important Polish holidays and traditions of the summer cycle and autumn.**

# Harvest Festival

It is the largest **celebration of farmers**, a folk tradition, usually celebrated on one of the Sundays or Saturdays in August or September - after the harvest. It is the culmination of their year-long efforts. An important element of the harvest festival is the handing over of the **harvest wreath**, symbolizing the harvest, which is prepared by the villagers. The festival is also an opportunity to feast together, enjoy artistic performances and cultivate local traditions.

## All Saints' Day (November 1)

This holiday derives primarily from the veneration of martyrs, saints of the Catholic Church. The holiday is celebrated to honor both known and unknown saints.

The first day of November in Poland is a day off from work, which prompts many people to travel, in order to **visit the graves of their deceased loved ones**. During this time, the faithful gather at cemeteries, decorating graves with flowers, lighting candles and praying for the souls of the dead.

The holiday is mainly religious in nature, especially in the Catholic tradition, but many people who follow other religions or do not belong to any religion participate in these ceremonies. It is a form of worship and commemoration of those who have passed away.

## All Souls' Day (November 2)

Also known as All Souls' Day or formerly Dziady - is the modern equivalent of the pagan **holiday of Dziady**. This day immediately follows the celebration of All Saints' Day.

The tradition has its roots in the folk rituals of the Slavs and Balts, dating back to pre-Christian times. Its primary purpose was to make contact with the souls of the dead and win their favor. Dziady was celebrated at two times of the year - in spring and autumn.

On All Souls' Day, as on All Saints' Day, cemeteries and graves of loved ones are visited, and the

faithful attend masses, praying for the souls of the dead. On these days there is also a tradition of lighting **candles on graves**, as well as placing **flowers, wreaths** and other decorations symbolizing **the memory of the dead**.

The custom of placing candles originates from ancient pagan practices, according to which people burned bonfires on graves, believing that they could warm the souls wandering the earth.



## Lesson 27

### | Polish cuisine

During this lesson you will learn what Polish traditional dishes are, learn about their history. You will also be introduced to sample recipes of the most famous Polish dishes.

Take a journey through traditional Polish soups, main dishes, drinks and desserts. These dishes will tell you about our culture, history and flavors. Polish cuisine is a unique combination of traditions, flavors and history. The history of many dishes goes back centuries and reflects Poland's multicultural past - You can find influences of Eastern, German, Jewish, Lithuanian and Tartar cuisines in our dishes.

Polish cuisine is divided into everyday dishes, which are filling and simple, and holiday dishes, which have a special meaning. For holidays, we prepare special dishes that are passed down from generation to generation, such as borscht with ravioli on Christmas Eve or sour soup on Easter. Each region of Poland has its own specialties and local flavors, creating a rich array of dishes.

**Soups** are a very important part of meals in Poland. Many Polish soups have a long history and special meaning, especially those served on holidays.

### Rosół (chicken broth)

It is a classic soup, cooked with a meat base and served with pasta. It is perfectly warming and is often served for Sunday dinner or at family celebrations.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of meat (chicken, beef or turkey)
- 2 carrots
- 1 parsley (root)
- 1/4 celery
- 1 leek
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 onion
- A few bay leaves, allspice
- Salt, pepper to taste
- Pasta (such as threads)

#### Preparation:

Rinse the meat, put it in a pot, pour cold water. Bring to a boil, remove the foam, add vegetables and spices. Cook on low heat for 2-3 hours, until the meat is tender. Serve with noodles and chopped parsley.

### Barszcz czerwony (red borscht)

It is a popular soup, known for its intense ruby color, is prepared from beets. It is traditionally served with ravioli, making it a favorite for various holidays.

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of beets
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsley
- 1 onion
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1-2 bay leaves, allspice
- Lemon juice or vinegar (to taste)
- Salt, pepper, sugar to taste

### Preparation:

Peel the beets, cut them into pieces, pour water over them. Add vegetables and spices, cook until beets are soft. Take out the vegetables, strain the borscht, season with lemon juice. Serve hot, with ravioli or on its own.

## Sour soup and white borscht

both of these soups are prepared on rye sourdough, which gives them a distinctive flavor. Served with sausage or eggs, they make an excellent dish for festive dinners, especially during the holiday season.

### Sour soup Ingredients:

- 1 liter of sourdough for sour soup
- 500 ml of meat or vegetable broth
- 200 g white sausage
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsley
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 bay leaves, allspice
- 1-2 tablespoons of cream
- Salt, pepper to taste
- Hard-boiled eggs (to serve)

### Preparation:

Boil broth with vegetables and spices, add sausage and cook until soft. Take out the sausage, pour the sourdough into the broth and boil. Season with garlic, cream, salt and pepper. Serve with eggs and sausage slices.

## Chłodnik (cold soup)

This is a refreshing summer soup based on yogurt or cream, and often contains fresh vegetables such as cucumbers and radishes. It is an ideal choice for hot days, providing a healthy dose of vitamins.

### Ingredients:

- 500 ml of kefir, yogurt or buttermilk
- 2 fresh cucumbers
- A bunch of radishes
- A bunch of dill

- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- Salt, pepper to taste

### Preparation:

Finely dice the cucumbers and radishes. Chop the dill and mix with the kefir. Season with salt and pepper and chill in the refrigerator. Serve with a hard-boiled egg.

## Pea soup

It is a filling soup in which the main ingredient is peas, often enriched with pieces of smoked meat.

### Ingredients:

- 300 g dry peas
- 200 g of smoked bacon
- 2 carrots
- 1 parsley
- 2 potatoes
- 2 bay leaves, allspice
- Salt, pepper to taste

### Preparation:

Soak peas overnight, then cook until tender. Add chopped vegetables and sausage. Season with salt, pepper and spices. Serve hot, preferably with bread.

## Pomidorówka/ Tomato soup

Served with pasta or rice, is a favorite soup of many Poles. It is popular for everyday dinner.

### Ingredients:

- 1 liter of meat or vegetable broth
- 500 g of tomatoes or 200 ml of tomato puree
- 100 ml of 18% cream
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsley
- Salt, pepper, sugar to taste
- Pasta or rice to serve

### Preparation:

Boil the broth with the vegetables. Add tomatoes or puree, cook for a few minutes. Season with salt, pepper and a little sugar. Whisk in cream, serve with pasta or rice.

## Czernina

A controversial soup, combines rich broth and blood from a duck or hen, which gives it an unusual flavor. Traditionally prepared during special occasions, it is highly regarded among lovers of traditional cuisine.

### Ingredients:

- 1 liter of duck or poultry broth
- 200 ml of duck blood (with vinegar)

- 2 carrots
- 1 parsley
- 1 apple
- 3 tablespoons of flour
- Sugar, salt, pepper, marjoram to taste
- Pasta or potatoes to serve

**Preparation:**

Boil broth with vegetables and apple. Add blood mixed with flour, boil. Season with sugar, marjoram, salt and pepper. Serve with pasta or potatoes.

## Tomato soup

**Ingredients:**

- 1 liter of meat or vegetable broth
- 500 g of tomatoes or 200 ml of tomato puree
- 100 ml of 18% cream
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsley
- Salt, pepper, sugar to taste
- Pasta or rice to serve

**Preparation:**

Boil the broth with the vegetables. Add tomatoes or puree, cook for a few minutes. Season with salt, pepper and a little sugar. Whisk in cream, serve with pasta or rice.

## Cabbage soup

A soup whose main ingredient is sauerkraut, often prepared with a meat broth. It is an excellent choice for cold days, as it is filling and warming.

**Ingredients:**

- 500 g of sauerkraut
- 1 liter of meat broth
- 2 potatoes
- 1 carrot
- 200 g smoked bacon
- Salt, pepper, cumin to taste

**Preparation:**

Cook bacon, cabbage and vegetables in broth. Add sliced potatoes, cook until soft. Season with salt, pepper and cumin. Serve with bread or as a stand-alone dish.

## Mushroom soup

A main ingredient is dried forest mushrooms, often prepared with a vegetable or meat stock base. It has an intense, aromatic flavor and is perfect for cold days, as it warms and envelops with a deep forest aroma.

**Ingredients:**

- 300 g of fresh or dried forest mushrooms
- 1 liter of vegetable broth
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsley
- 100 ml of 18% cream
- Salt, pepper, parsley to taste
- Pasta or potatoes to serve

**Preparation:**

Wash, slice and fry mushrooms in butter. Add to broth with vegetables, cook until soft. Whisk in cream, season with salt, pepper and parsley. Serve with pasta or potatoes.

## Cucumber soup

Prepared from pickled cucumbers, this soup with a distinctive flavor is particularly popular among Poles. Served with potatoes or pieces of meat, it is a perfect dish for a family dinner.

**Ingredients:**

- 500 g of pickled cucumbers
- 1 liter of meat or vegetable broth
- 2 potatoes
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsley
- Salt, pepper, dill to taste

**Preparation:**

In broth, boil chopped potatoes and vegetables. Add grated pickled cucumbers, cook for a few minutes. Season with salt, pepper and dill. Serve with bread or as a stand-alone dish.

## Sorrel Soup

This soup, based on fresh sorrel, has a refreshing and slightly sour taste. Often enriched with a hard-boiled egg, it is the perfect dish for spring days, providing vitamins and freshness.

**Ingredients:**

- 200 g of fresh sorrel or a jar of sorrel
- 1 liter of vegetable broth
- 2 potatoes
- 1 carrot
- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 100 ml of 18% cream
- Salt, pepper to taste

**Preparation:**

In the broth, cook the chopped potatoes and carrots. Add chopped sorrel, cook for a few minutes. Whisk in the cream, season with salt and pepper. Serve with hard-boiled eggs.

### Main dishes.

Polish dishes are very diverse, often filling and prepared from simple ingredients like potatoes, meat and cabbage. Many of them come from rural and hunting traditions.

## Bigos

It is by far one of the most popular dishes in Polish cuisine, combining cabbage, meat and spices. Its flavor becomes deeper with each passing day, making it an ideal dish for reheating.

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of sauerkraut
- 500 g fresh white cabbage
- 500 g meat (pork, beef or game)
- 200 g sausage
- 150 g smoked bacon
- 1 onion
- 2 tablespoons of tomato paste
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 grains of allspice
- Salt, pepper, marjoram to taste
- Oil for frying

### Preparation:

Squeeze the sauerkraut and chop finely. Shred the fresh cabbage. Dice the meat and bacon, slice the sausage, chop the onion. In hot oil, fry onions, then add meat and bacon. Fry until they are browned. Add sausage, both cabbages, spices, and pour water so that the ingredients are covered. Cook on low heat for 2-3 hours, stirring occasionally. At the end, add tomato paste. Bigos tastes best after a few days, when the flavors have melded.

## Pierogi

The most recognizable dish of Polish cuisine, which can be served both salty and sweet. They can be stuffed with a variety of fillings, from meat to cabbage to fruit.

### Pierogi ruskie

### Ingredients for the dough:

- 500 g wheat flour
- 250 ml of warm water
- 1 tablespoon of oil
- Pinch of salt

### Ingredients for stuffing:

- 500 g boiled potatoes
- 250 g cottage cheese
- 1 onion
- Salt, pepper to taste

### Preparation:

In a bowl, combine flour, water, oil and salt. Knead into an elastic dough, cover and set aside for 30 minutes. Press the cooked potatoes through a press, add cottage cheese and fried onions. Season with salt and pepper. Roll out the dough thinly, cut out circles, put stuffing and seal the edges. Cook dumplings in salted water for 3-4 minutes after they float. Serve with butter or fried onions.

## Pork Chop /Breaded Pork Chop.

It is usually served with potatoes and salad is a popular everyday dish, served for generations. Gołąbki - cabbage stuffed with rice and meat.

### Ingredients:

- 4 slices of pork loin (about 150 g each)
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup of breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup of flour
- Salt, pepper to taste
- Oil or lard for frying

### Preparation:

Gently break the pork loin with a pestle, salt and pepper. Coat each piece in flour, then in beaten egg, and finally in bread crumbs. Fry in hot oil or lard until golden on both sides. Serve with potatoes and coleslaw.

## Gołąbki

Gołąbki are cabbage leaves stuffed with meat and rice, cooked, popular especially in eastern Poland.

### Ingredients:

- 1 head of cabbage
- 500 g minced meat (pork or mixed)
- 100 g of rice
- 1 onion
- 2 tablespoons of tomato paste
- Salt, pepper to taste

### Preparation:

Cut the stalks from the cabbage, boil the leaves in salted water and gently remove. Cook the rice half hard, combine with the meat and fried onions, season with salt and pepper. Place a portion of stuffing on each cabbage leaf, fold the sides and roll up. Arrange the cabbage rolls in a pot, pour water with tomato paste. Cook on low heat for about 1.5 hours.

## Potato pancakes

Potato pancakes are a fried potato cake, served with various toppings.

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of potatoes
- 1 onion
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons of flour
- Salt, pepper to taste
- Oil for frying

### Preparation:

Grate the potatoes and onions on a fine-mesh grater. Add eggs, flour, salt and pepper. Mix thoroughly. In hot oil, fry the pancakes on both sides until golden brown. Serve with sour cream, sugar or stew.

## Kopytka

Small oblong dumplings prepared from boiled potatoes and wheat flour, are popular in Polish cuisine and can be served salty or sweet. Excellent with a variety of sauces, such as mushroom or cream sauce.

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of boiled potatoes
- 250 g wheat flour
- 1 egg
- Salt to taste

### Preparation:

Squeeze the potatoes through a press, add flour, egg and salt. Knead the dough. Form rolls from the dough and cut them into small noodles. Cook in salted water until they float to the surface. Serve with butter, sour cream or mushroom sauce.

## Silesian noodles

a type of potato dumplings prepared from boiled potatoes and potato flour, formed into heavily flattened balls with an indentation, cooked in salted boiling water. Silesian noodles are included in the List of Traditional Products of the Opole and Silesian Voivodeships, but are known throughout Poland.

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of boiled potatoes
- 250 g of potato flour
- Salt to taste

### Preparation:

Squeeze the potatoes through a press. Add potato flour and salt, knead the dough. Form balls, and make an indentation in the center of each with your finger. Cook the noodles in salted water until they float. Serve with roast or meat sauce.

## Carp, zander, eel and other freshwater fish.

These fish, especially carp, are an integral part of the Polish table on Christmas Eve.

### Fried carp

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of carp fillets
- Salt, pepper to taste
- Lemon juice
- Flour for coating
- Oil for frying

### Preparation:

Sprinkle the carp fillets with lemon juice, season with salt and pepper. Set aside for 30 minutes. Coat the fish in flour and fry in hot oil until golden on both sides. Serve with potatoes and salad.

**Polish desserts** are varied and rich in flavor. Baked goods such as poppy seed cake or cheesecake are prepared for the holidays, while faworki are often eaten on a daily basis or at a carnival.

## Pączki

Deep-fried portions of fluffy yeast dough. As a rule, they are filled with rose jam, Cream or chocolate, sprinkled with powdered sugar or icing glaze. Traditionally eaten on Fat Thursday.

### Ingredients:

- 500 g wheat flour
- 50 g sugar
- 50 g butter
- 250 ml of milk
- 25 g fresh yeast
- 4 egg yolks
- A pinch of salt
- Rose jam, cream or chocolate (for filling)
- Powdered sugar or icing (for decoration)
- Oil for frying

**Preparation:**

Dissolve yeast in warm milk with a tablespoon of sugar and set aside for 10 minutes. Sift flour into a bowl, add sugar, salt, egg yolks, melted butter and yeast starter. Make an elastic dough, cover and set aside to rise for 1 hour. Form balls from the dough, fill with jam, closing the dough thoroughly. Fry the doughnuts in hot oil until golden brown, turning them as you go. After cooling, sprinkle with powdered sugar or glaze.

## Faworki

Thin and crisp cookies sprinkled with powdered sugar, which can be eaten both on Fat Thursday and during other celebrations. Their delicate texture makes them a favorite treat of many Poles.

**Ingredients:**

- 300 g wheat flour
- 3 egg yolks
- 50 g butter
- 100 ml of 18% cream
- A pinch of salt
- Oil for frying
- Powdered sugar (for sprinkling)

**Preparation:**

Combine all ingredients and knead into a smooth dough. Wrap in plastic wrap and set aside for 30 minutes. Roll out the dough very thinly, cut into rectangles, notching them in the middle, and thread one end through the notch. Fry the favors in hot oil until golden brown. Drain on paper towel and sprinkle with powdered sugar.

## Crumpets

Fluffy pancakes, often prepared with apples or other fruits, are a popular snack or dessert. Served warm with powdered sugar, they are a tasty alternative to pancakes.

**Ingredients:**

- 500 g wheat flour
- 300 ml of milk
- 25 g of yeast
- 2 eggs
- 3 apples (optional)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- A pinch of salt
- Oil for frying
- Powdered sugar (for sprinkling)

**Preparation:**

Dissolve yeast in warm milk with sugar and set aside for 10 minutes. Mix flour, salt, eggs and yeast

starter until a thick dough forms. Add sliced apples, if desired. Set aside for 30 minutes to rise. Fry the pancakes in hot oil until golden brown, serve sprinkled with powdered sugar.

## Poppysed cake

A traditional cake, filled with poppy seed paste and nuts, often sprinkled with powdered sugar or topped with icing. It is especially popular during the Christmas season.

**Ingredients:**

- 500 g wheat flour
- 25 g of yeast
- 200 ml of milk
- 100 g butter
- 3 eggs
- 100 g sugar
- 500 g of poppy seed paste
- Bakery products (raisins, nuts, almonds)

**Preparation:**

Dissolve yeast in warm milk with a tablespoon of sugar. In a bowl, mix flour, sugar, eggs, butter and starter. Knead into a smooth dough and set aside to rise for an hour. Roll out the dough, put the poppy seed mixture mixed with nuts, and roll it up. Bake at 180°C for about 40-50 minutes. After cooling, sprinkle with powdered sugar or glaze.

## Mazurek

It is a flat cake, often decorated with nuts and sweet toppings. Each region in Poland has its own recipes for mazurkas, which means they can differ in taste and appearance. This is a baked good prepared for Easter.

**Ingredients:**

- 250 g wheat flour
- 150 g butter
- 100 g powdered sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- Jam, chocolate, nuts, dried fruits (for decoration)

**Preparation:**

Knead a shortcrust dough from flour, butter, sugar and egg yolk. Wrap in plastic wrap and put in the refrigerator for 30 minutes. Roll out the dough and put it on a baking sheet. Bake at 180°C for 20 minutes. After cooling, decorate with jam, chocolate and nuts.

## Applepie

A shortcrust pastry filled with a mass of grated apples, often served with whipped cream or ice cream. A classic dessert for family gatherings.

### Ingredients:

- 500 g wheat flour
- 250 g butter
- 200 g sugar
- 5 apples
- 1 teaspoon of cinnamon

### Preparation:

Knead a shortcrust dough from flour, butter and sugar. Divide into two parts. Grate the apples, mix with sugar and cinnamon. Spread one part of the dough on a baking sheet, add apples and cover with the other part of the dough. Bake at 180°C for 45 minutes.

## Cheesecake

A cake made on the basis of cottage cheese, often served with various additives, such as raisins, fruit, topped with chocolate or jelly. Its creamy texture and unparalleled taste make it very popular in Polish homes.

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg cottage cheese
- 250 g butter
- 200 g sugar
- 4 eggs
- 100 g potato flour
- Raisins (optional)

### Preparation:

Grind cottage cheese twice. Mix with butter, sugar, egg yolks and potato flour. Whip egg whites to foam and gently mix into the mixture. Add raisins, if desired. Bake at 180°C for 60 minutes.

## Easter Babka

It is a traditional curly cake baked to celebrate Easter, in a tall traditional mold. It is often decorated with icing or chocolate frosting.

### Ingredients:

- 500 g wheat flour
- 200 g butter
- 200 g sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon of baking powder

### Preparation:

Cream the butter with the sugar, add the eggs and then the flour with the baking powder. Transfer to a muffin tin. Bake at 180°C for 50 minutes. After cooling, glaze or pour with chocolate.

## Gingerbread

This spicy aromatic cake, often decorated with chocolate or icing, is an integral part of Christmas.

### Ingredients:

- 500 g wheat flour
- 250 ml of honey
- 100 g sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp gingerbread spice

### Preparation:

Heat the honey with sugar and spices, and when cooled, mix with flour and eggs. Bake at 180°C for 45 minutes.

## Kutia

It is a traditional sweet Christmas Eve dish, made of wheat, poppy seeds, honey and nuts. A symbol of peace and abundance, it is often served as the first course at Christmas Eve dinner.

### Ingredients:

- 200 g wheat
- 200 g of poppy seeds
- 100 g of honey
- Bakalie

### Preparation:

Cook the wheat until soft. Grind poppy seeds twice. Mix wheat with poppy seeds, honey and nuts. Serve chilled.

## Jelly

Fruit flavored, served with light whipped cream or fresh fruit, was a popular dessert during the communist era.

### Ingredients:

- 1 package of fruit jelly
- 500 ml of water
- Fresh fruit
- Whipped cream

### Preparation:

Dissolve the jelly in water, pour into goblets. Add fruits and chill in the refrigerator. Serve with whipped cream.

### Cold snacks.

In Poland, cold snacks/snacks are often served as appetizers at parties, family gatherings or special occasions. These snacks are simple but full of flavor, often based on natural processes such as pickling, marinating and smoking.

## Pickled Cucumbers

A classic Polish delicacy, pickled cucumbers are made from cucumbers that ferment in water with salt and spices. It's a popular snack at parties and an accompaniment to many dishes. Pickling cucumbers has been practiced for centuries in Polish villages.

### Ingredients:

- 2 kg of fresh ground cucumbers
- 1.5 l water
- 2 tablespoons of salt
- 5 cloves of garlic
- 2 sprigs of dill (with canopies)
- A few horseradish leaves
- Optional: black currant or cherry leaves

### Preparation:

Boil the water with salt and cool. Wash the cucumbers thoroughly and arrange them tightly in jars, adding garlic, dill and horseradish leaves. Pour the cold brine over the cucumbers, making sure they are completely covered. Cap the jars and set aside in a warm place for a few days for fermentation to begin. Then store in a cool place.

## Meat jelly

It is an appetizer prepared from pork or poultry stock. It is served chilled, with pieces of meat, carrots and sometimes peas.

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg of pork (e.g., pork knuckle, pork neck) or poultry meat
- 2 carrots
- 1 parsley
- 1 small celery
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 grains of allspice
- Gelatin (amount according to the instructions on the package)
- Salt, pepper to taste

### Preparation:

Cook the meat with vegetables and spices in about 2 liters of water until tender. Take out the meat

and cut into pieces. Strain the broth and season to taste. Dissolve the gelatin in the hot broth, according to the instructions. In a dish, spread the meat pieces, sliced carrots and peas, if any. Pour over the stock and refrigerate until set.

## Marinated herring

Herring marinated in oil and spices is a classic appetizer, especially popular during Lent and the holidays. It is served with onions, sometimes with apple or sour cream.

### Ingredients:

- 500 g herring fillets (salted)
- 2 onions
- 200 ml of vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon of mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon of peppercorns
- Optional: 1 apple or sour cream

### Preparation:

Soak the herrings in water for several hours, changing the water from time to time. Cut the fillets into pieces. Cut the onion into thin slices. In a jar, arrange herring, onion and spices in layers. Pour in the oil. Store in the refrigerator for at least 24 hours before serving.

## Liver and meatpate

Roasted and served cold, often appears on holiday tables. It can be cut into thin slices and served with bread and horseradish.

### Ingredients:

- 500 g of poultry liver
- 500 g of pork meat (such as shoulder)
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsley
- 1 onion
- 2 eggs
- 100 g butter
- 1 tbsp breadcrumbs
- Salt, pepper, nutmeg to taste

### Preparation:

Cook the meat, liver and vegetables until tender. Cool. Grind everything in a meat grinder. Add butter, eggs, bread crumbs and spices. Put the mixture into a baking pan, bake at 180°C for about 60 minutes. After cooling, serve cold with bread and horseradish.

# Kaszanka

A traditional Polish dish, made from groats, blood and offal. It is served in many ways, often with onions. It is an excellent example of the richness of Polish regional cuisine.

## Kaszanka with Onions

### Ingredients:

- 500 g black pudding
- 2 onions
- 2 tablespoons of oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Preparation:

Slice the onion into feathers and fry in oil until glazed. Add the sliced black pudding, fry over medium heat until warm and slightly crispy. Serve hot with bread or potatoes.

# Kompot

A refreshing fruit drink, usually prepared from seasonal fruits, perfect for summer. Kompot is often on Polish tables on the occasion of various holidays and family gatherings.

### Ingredients:

- 500 g of fruit (e.g. apples, plums, cherries, strawberries)
- 1 l of water
- 2-3 tablespoons of sugar (or more, to taste)
- Optional: cinnamon, cloves

### Preparation:

Wash the fruits, cut the larger ones into pieces. Boil the water with sugar and spices. Add fruit and cook on low heat for 10-15 minutes. Set aside to cool. Serve the compote cooled.





## Lesson 28

### | Polonia in the USA

In this lesson we will tell you about the American Polish community – its size, its most famous representatives and the places, festivals and organizations associated with it.

The United States is home to the largest Polish diaspora in the world - about 10 million people. Most Poles have settled in cities such as Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York and Seattle. Below is a more detailed breakdown.

#### American states with the largest number of Poles:

- Illinois about 900 thousand (7% of the state's population)
- New York about 850 thousand (4% of the state's population)
- Wisconsin about 500 thousand (8% of the state's population)
- Michigan about 800 thousand (8% of the state's population)
- Pennsylvania about 700 thousand (5% of the state's population)
- New Jersey about 600 thousand (6% of the state's population)
- Connecticut approx. 250 thousand (7% of the state's population)
- Massachusetts about 300 thousand (5% of the state's population)
- California about 1.2 million (~3% of the state's population)
- Minnesota about 150 thousand (3% of the state's population)

#### Famous Poles in the US:

- **Kazimierz Pułaski** (1745-1779) - after arriving in the US, Pułaski became a national hero, fighting for American independence. Known as the "father of the cavalry," he was killed at the Battle of Savannah, and his likeness is immortalized on nearly 100 monuments in the US.
- **Tadeusz Kościuszko** (1746-1817) - born in Poland, came to the United States in 1776 and became one of the key commanders during the War of Independence. He was responsible for building American field fortifications at Saratoga, which contributed to the American victory. After the conflict, he settled in Philadelphia and New York.
- **Joseph Conrad** (1857 - 1924) - actually Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, although born in Poland, became one of the most influential English-language writers, and his work is revered by the Polish community in the US for its profound analyses of human nature and morality.
- **Max Factor** (1872-1938) - born Maksymilian Factorowicz in Łódź in 1872, created one of the world's most influential cosmetic brands after

emigrating to the United States. His innovations revolutionized the American cosmetics industry.

- **Pola Negri** (1897-1987) - was one of the first Polish film stars to achieve international fame, becoming an icon of silent cinema in Hollywood - one of the most recognizable actresses of the 1920s. She worked with major film studios, such as Paramount Pictures, and starred alongside some of the biggest stars of the time, including Rudolph Valentino.
- **Zbigniew Brzezinski** (1928-2017) - Polish-American political scientist, was born in Warszawa and settled in the US while still young. As an advisor to President Carter, he played a key role in shaping American policy during the Cold War.

And many, many others...

## Polish places in the US:

**Jackowo, known as the “Polish Quarter” in Chicago**, and especially Milwaukee Avenue, is the heart of the Polish community in the United States. Residents appreciate the neighborhood’s many Polish stores, restaurants and organizations that help keep Polish culture and traditions alive locally.

**Greenpoint**, a neighborhood also known as “**Little Poland**”, for many years was regarded as the second largest concentration of the Polish community in the United States. Although today, due to the local rise in real estate prices, the number of Poles has decreased significantly, there are still many Polish stores, restaurants and churches here.

## Polish festivals and parades in the US:

**The Pulaski Parade in New York is an annual event**, which celebrates Polish heritage and the memory of national hero § Kazimierz Pułaski. For the Polish community in the US, it is a unique opportunity to unite, manifest Polish culture and traditions, and support local community organizations.

**Every year, Chicago hosts a variety of festivals** and events that integrate the Polish community and promote Polish history, culture and traditions, including the **May 3 Parade in Chicago**. Milwaukee, Wisconsin also has a rich tradition of

Polish settlement, making it an important place for the Polish community, with an annual **Polish Heritage Festival**.

**It is worth knowing that October** is the month in which the Polish community in the US especially celebrates its **ties with Poland**, celebrating **Polish Heritage Day** and other events promoting Polish culture and traditions.

## Polish organizations in the US:

**Union of Poles in America (Polish American Congress)** - founded in 1944. The union plays a key role in representing the interests of Poles in the United States. The organization works to protect the rights of Poles, promotes Polish culture and traditions by organizing thematic events, lectures and festivals.

**The Józef Piłsudski Institute of America**, founded in 1943 in New York, is one of the most important Polish institutions abroad. It serves as a depository of valuable historical archives, documenting Polish heritage and patriotic activities in exile.

**Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America in New York** - The Institute, founded in 1942, is an important scientific center that supports research related to Poland and Poles. It organizes conferences, produces publications and conducts lectures to promote Polish culture and science.

**Polish House in Chicago (Polish Museum of America)** - is the oldest Polish museum in the United States, which preserves and promotes the cultural heritage of Poles in America. It offers a variety of exhibitions on Polish history and culture, and conducts educational programs and art workshops for children and adults.



## Lesson 29

### Polish community in Canada

This lesson will tell you about the Polish community in Canada – its size, its most famous representatives and the places, festivals and organizations associated with it.

**The Polish community in Canada** is one of the largest national minorities, concentrated mainly in cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg. It numbers about 1 million people, and includes:

- Toronto, Ontario - about 200,000 Poles and people of Polish descent.
- Montreal, Quebec - about 80,000 people.
- Winnipeg, Manitoba - about 60,000 people.

### Famous Poles who conquered Canada:

- **Kazimierz Gzowski (Sir Casimir Gzowski)** (1813 - 1889): Polish-Canadian engineer, politician and builder. Born in St. Petersburg, he emigrated to North America after the fall of the November Uprising. He was responsible for the construction of key pieces of infrastructure, such as the International Railway Bridge. In 1890 he received a knighthood from Queen Victoria, recognizing his contribution to Canada.
- **Janusz Żurkowski** (1914 - 2004): test pilot and war hero. He fought as a pilot in the Battle of Britain during World War II. After the war, he worked for Avro Canada, testing modern aircraft, including the famous Avro Arrow. After his aviation career, he settled in Barry's Bay, Ontario, becoming involved in the local community.
- **Władysław Lizon** (born 1954): Canadian politician of Polish descent, former member of the Parliament of Canada. He immigrated to Canada in the 1980s and actively worked for the Polish community. As the first Pole elected to the Canadian Parliament, he promoted Polish heritage and strengthened Polish-Canadian relations.
- **Aleksandra Wozniak** (born 1987): Canadian tennis player of Polish descent. In 2008 she won the WTA tournament in Stanford, becoming the first Canadian woman in 20 years with such success. She achieved a world ranking of 21st in 2009 and has been involved in promoting physical activity among young people after her career.

## Polish places in Canada:

The Canadian Polish community houses tens of thousands of Kashubians, who in the second half of the 19th century settled in the area around **Barry's Bay** and **today's Canadian Vilnius**. The area reminded them of the landscape of Polish Kashubia. It was in Barry's Bay that the first Polish school and Boy Scouts were built. The first Polish parish was established in Canadian Vilnius.

Today's **Canadian Kashubia** is the center of Polish culture in Canada, where, in addition to churches, school, scout stands, there are two monuments to the "1000th Anniversary" and the "Grey Regiments", and Polish cultural events are organized.

## Polish festivals in Canada:

**Roncesvalles Polish Festival** (Toronto, Ontario). The largest Polish festival in North America, usually held in September on Roncesvalles Street in Toronto. The event showcases Polish culture, music, cuisine and folk art.

**Polish Festival Vancouver** (Vancouver, British Columbia). A festival celebrating Polish culture, cuisine and traditions, organized by the North Shore Polish Association "Belvedere." The event is usually held in late summer or early fall.

**Polish Canadian Heritage Day** (Calgary, Alberta) A celebration of Polish Canadian Heritage Day, including artistic and musical performances and presentations of Polish culture. The event usually takes place in June and includes celebrations of Polish heritage.

## Polish Canadian organizations:

### Canadian Polish Congress

The Canadian Polish Congress (KPK) was formally established in 1944 on the initiative of the organizations comprising the Federation of Polish Associations in Canada. It is a federation that coordinates the activities of its constituent organizations and associations across Canada.

### W. Reymont Foundation in Canada

Union of Poles in Canada, the oldest Polish Canadian organization. The Foundation is registered

as an educational and charitable organization. The foundation allocates educational scholarships and grants for students of Polish descent, and also helps Polish schools and organizations. It has also supported the Department of Polish History at the University of Toronto, the Polish Theatre in Toronto.

### Polish Women's Federation of Canada

The Federation's statutory goal is to serve the Polish community and the Polish nation by keeping families Polish, strengthening ties to Polish culture and helping fellow countrymen in need. The organization also works to preserve Polish historical and cultural heritage in Canada. It maintains close cooperation with Canadian women's organizations.



# Lesson 30

## Biography

This lesson will prepare you for how best to present yourself to the Consul in order to obtain a Pole's Card. We will introduce the different stages of the interview, characteristic vocabulary and likely questions. We will also help you learn how to answer them.

The strategy for a successful Pole's Card interview is divided into four stages:

- I. Self-presentation: that is, telling about who you are, where you come from, what you do professionally
- II. History of your "Polishness": that is, telling about your ancestors and the cultivation of Polish traditions in your family.
- III. Presentation of yourself and your interests.  
At this stage you need to describe your family and your future plans related to Poland.
- IV. Motivation, or an answer to the question why you are applying for Pole's Card.

## I. Self-presentation: who are you, where are you from, what is your profession?

Examples of questions could be as follows:

A

**Proszę się przedstawić** (Please introduce yourself)  
**Jak się Pani/Pan nazywa?** (What is your name?)  
**Proszę podać Pani/Pana godność.**  
(Please state your dignity - meaning introduce yourself in very formal way)

Answer in simple terms:

**Nazywam się/ Mam na imię...** (My name is ...)  
**I am...** (Jestem...)

B

**Kim Pani lub Pan jest z pochodzenia?**  
(Who are you of origin?)  
**Jakie ma Pani lub Pan obywatelstwo?**  
(What nationality do you have?)  
**Obywatelem jakiego państwa jest Pani lub Pan?**  
(What country are you or a citizen of?)  
**Jaka jest Pani lub Pana narodowość?** (What is your or your nationality?)

This is a basic question in any interview. When answering, we must remember that nationality and citizenship are quite different concepts. Therefore:

**Jestem obywatelką/obywatelem...** (I am a citizen/citizen of...) **Ukrainy/ Białorusi/ Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki/ Kanady/ Brazylii/ Argentyny/ Australii,** (Ukraine/ Belarus/ United States of America/Canada/Brazil/Argentina/Australia,)  
**ALE! Jestem też Polakiem lub Polką!**  
(**BUT!** I am also Polish!)

C

**Ile ma Pani/Pan lat?**  
(How old are you?)  
**W którym roku Pani/Pan się urodził/a?**  
(What year were you born?)

Example of the answer:

**Mam ... lat.**  
(I am ... years old.)  
**Urodziłem/łam się w roku...**  
(I was born in the year...)

**D****Skąd Pani lub Pan jest?***(Where are you from?)***Skąd Pani lub Pan przyjechała/ł?***(Where do you or Mr. come from?)***Gdzie Pani lub Pan mieszka?***(Where do you live?)***Example of the answer:****Przyjechałam/łem z... /Jestem z...***(I came/am from... / I am from...)***Mieszkam w...** nazwa miejsca*(I live in... the name of the location)***Moje miejsce zamieszkania to...***(My place of residence is...)***E****Gdzie się Pan/Pani urodził/a?***(Where were you born?)***W jakim mieście Pan/Pani się urodził/a?***(What city were you born?)***Example of the answer:****Urodziłem się w..., ale mieszkam w...** jeżeli miejsce zamieszkania różni się z miejscem urodzenia.*(I come from... I was born in..., but I live in... - if your place of residence is different from your place of birth.)***F****Czy Pani/Pan mieszka w Polsce na stałe?***(Do you live in Poland permanently?)***Gdzie Pani/Pan mieszka?***(Where do you live?)*

This question arises especially when the conversation takes place in Poland and not in the country of permanent residence. Depending on the situation, you can answer:

**Mieszkam w Polsce od... lat.***(I have been living in Poland for... years.)***Nigdy nie byłem/byłam w Polsce.***(I have never been/were in Poland.)***Całe życie mieszkam w...***(I have lived in... all my life.)*

## II. The history of the “Polishness” of your ancestors and your own story about the cultivation of Polish traditions in the family circle - this is the second stage of the interview.

Below are sample questions:

**A****Jakie ma Pani/Pan pochodzenie?***(What is your origin?)*

The answer must emphasize Polish ancestry:  
**I have Polish ancestry!**

**Jestem w połowie Polką/Polakiem, w połowie...***(I am half Polish/Polish, half...)***B****Gdzie mieszkali Pani/Pana przodkowie?***(Where did your ancestors live?)***Skąd pochodzi Pani/Pana rodzina?***(Where did your family come from?)*

Since this question always comes up during the interview, we recommend finding out as much as possible about your family's origin before the interview takes place. The answer can start with the words:

**Moi przodkowie pochodzą z...***(My ancestors come from...)***Moja rodzina pochodzi z...***(My family comes from...)***Moja polska rodzina mieszkała w...***(My Polish family lived in...)*

- **Worth knowing!**  
For a reminder of numbers and figures, we recommend that you read the table below, and write down all the dates related to your self-presentation in Polish, learn how to pronounce them and memorize them:

	1-10	11-19	20, 30...100	100, 200...1000
<b>1</b>	jeden	jede - <b>naście</b>	-	sto
<b>2</b>	dwa	dwa - <b>naście</b>	dwa - <b>dzieścia</b>	dwie - <b>ście</b>
<b>3</b>	trzy	trzy - <b>naście</b>	trzy - <b>dzieści</b>	trzy - <b>sta</b>
<b>4</b>	cztery	czter - <b>naście</b>	czter - <b>dzieści</b>	cztery - <b>sta</b>
<b>5</b>	pięć	pięt - <b>naście</b>	pięć - <b>dziesiąt</b>	pięć - <b>set</b>
<b>6</b>	sześć	szes - <b>naście</b>	sześć - <b>dziesiąt</b>	sześć - <b>set</b>
<b>7</b>	siedem	siedem - <b>naście</b>	siedem - <b>dziesiąt</b>	siedem - <b>set</b>
<b>8</b>	osiem	osiem - <b>naście</b>	osiem - <b>dziesiąt</b>	osiem - <b>set</b>
<b>9</b>	dziewięć	dziewięt - <b>naście</b>	dziewięć - <b>dziesiąt</b>	dziewięć - <b>set</b>
<b>10</b>	dziesięć	-	sto	tysiąc



**C**

**Czy w miejscowości, skąd pochodzi Pani/Pan rodzina, mieszkali Polacy?**

(Were there any Poles living in the village where your family is from?)

**Czy te tereny były kiedyś zamieszkiwane przez Polaków?**

(Was this area once inhabited by Poles?)

If yes, then it is worth indicating in such a case that:

**W tej miejscowości od zawsze/również mieszkali Polacy.**

(Poles have always/always lived in this locality.)

**Te tereny zawsze były zamieszkiwane przez Polaków.**

(These areas have always been inhabited by Poles.)

**D**

**Kto w Pani/Pana rodzinie był Polakiem?**

(Who in your family was a Pole?)

**Kiedy i gdzie urodzili się Pani/Pana przodkowie?**

(When and where were your ancestors born?)

**Jakiego wyznania był/ła Pana/Pani przodek/przodkini?**

(What religion was/are your ancestor(s) of?)

The answer must be clear:

**Mój dziadek był Polakiem.**

(My grandfather was Polish.)

**Moja babcia była Polką.**

(My grandmother was Polish.)

**Moi pradziadkowie byli Polakami.**

(My great-grandparents were Polish.)

**On/ona urodził się/urodziła się we wsi...**

(He/she/it was born in a village....)

**Moja babcia była katoliczką.**

(My grandmother was a Catholic.)

**Moi przodkowie byli wyznania katolickiego.**

(My ancestors were of the Catholic faith).

Naturally, you can say that you do not know what religion your ancestors were, nevertheless, this is another piece of information that is worth getting before the interview.

**E**

**Jakie dokumenty świadczą o przynależności od narodowości polskiej?**

(What documents are the proof of belonging to Polish nationality?)

It is very important to know the Polish names of the documents that are the basis for applying for Pole's Card. These may include:

- **Akt urodzenia.** (Birth certificate)

- **Akt małżeństwa.** (Marriage certificate)

- **Akt zgonu.** (Death certificate)

- **Księgi gospodarcze.** (Business records)

- **Akt naturalizacyjny.** (Naturalization act)

- **Spisy ludności/mieszkańców.**

(Censuses/census of residents)

- **Książeczka wojskowa.** (Military booklet)

**F**

**Kim był Pana/Pani przodek z zawodu?**

(What was your ancestor by profession?)

Examples of the answers:

**Moja babcia pracowała jako...**

(My grandmother worked as a...)

**Mój dziadek był... rolnikiem/ inżynierem/ muzykiem...** (My grandfather was ... farmer/engineer/musician....)

**G**

**Jakie polskie rodzinne święta i tradycje kultywowane są w Pani/Pana domu?**

(What Polish family holidays and traditions are cultivated in your home?)

**Czy Pani/Pana rodzina obchodzi polskie święta i tradycje?**

(Does your family celebrate Polish holidays and traditions?)

To be able to fully answer this question, we recommend repeating lessons number 23-26 of our COURSE.

Examples of the answers:

**Moja rodzina obchodzi Boże Narodzenie według kalendarza katolickiego...**

(My family celebrates Christmas according to the Catholic calendar).

**Podczas Wigilii (24 grudnia) spożywamy świąteczną wieszę i kładziemy siano pod obrus...**

(During Christmas Eve (December 24), we eat a festive supper and put hay under the tablecloth...)

**Podczas świąt Wielkanocnych obowiązkowo jemy żurek i przygotowujemy koszyk wielkanocny do poświęcenia...**

(During Easter, we dutifully eat sour soup and prepare an Easter basket to be blessed...)

**H**

**Jakie polskie obyczaje występują w Pani/Pana rodzinie?**

(What Polish customs are found in your family?)

Examples of the answers:

**U pradiadka na drzwiach wejściowych do domu zawsze było napisano kredą: K+M+B, zmieniał się tylko rok...**

(At my great-grandfather's house there was always chalk written on the front door of the house: K+M+B, only the year changed...)

**Świętujemy Dzień Flagi Polskiej, wywieszając ją przed wejściem do naszego domu rodzinnego...**

(We celebrate Polish Flag Day by displaying it in front of the entrance to our family home...)

**Uczę swoje dzieci śpiewać polskie kolędy...**

(I teach my children to sing Polish carols...)

## I

**W jakim języku mówi Pan/Pani w rodzinie?**

(What language do you speak in your family?)

**Czy Pana/Pani przodkowie mówili po polsku?**

(Did your/your ancestors speak Polish?)

**Czy Pana/Pani przodkowie uczyli dzieci mówić po polsku w domu rodzinnym?**

(Did your ancestors teach your children to speak Polish in the family home?)

**Suggested answers options:**

**W domu mówimy po polsku oraz po...**

(We speak Polish at home and in...)

**Moi przodkowie zawsze mówili między sobą po polsku.** (My ancestors always spoke Polish among themselves.)

**Nauczyłem/łam się języka polskiego od mojego dziadka/mojej babci...** (I learned Polish from my grandfather/my grandmother...)

**Język polski jest moim językiem ojczystym.**

(Polish is my mother tongue.)

## J

**Jakie miejsca związane z Polską lub historią Polski znajdują się w Pani/Pana mieście/regionie?**

(What places related to Poland or Polish history are located in your city/region?)

**Example of the answers:**

**W Kijowie znajduje się pomnik Jana Pawła II...**

(In Kyiv there is a monument to John Paul II...)

**W Brześciu znajduje się Zamek Brzeski - historyczna twierdza...**

(In Brest there is Brest Castle - a historic fortress...)

**W Chicago znajduje się znana, polska dzielnica - Jackowo...** (In Chicago there is a well-known Polish neighborhood - Jackowo...)

**W Rio de Janeiro znajduje się Klub Polski - miejsce spotkań polskiej społeczności...**

(In Rio de Janeiro there is the Polish Club - a meeting place for the Polish community...)

## III. Presentation of your family, your own interests and plans related to Poland.

### A

**Czym Pani/Pan planuje zajmować się w Polsce?**

(What do you plan to do in Poland?)

**Czy widzi Pani/Pan swoją przyszłość w Polsce?**

(Do you see your future in Poland?)

Answers should focus on the aspect of integration into Polish society, deepening your Polishness. We recommend not to bring up topics related to income issues.

**Chcę zwiedzić Polskę...**

(I want to explore Poland.)

**Chcę pokazać swoim dzieciom polskie muzea i opowiedzieć o polskiej historii...**

(I want to show my children Polish museums and tell them about Polish history...)

**Planuję związać swoje życie z Polską...**

(I plan to tie my life to Poland)

**Chcę integrować się z polskim społeczeństwem oraz dążyć do bycia częścią lokalnej społeczności.** (I want to integrate into Polish society and strive to be part of the local community.)

### B

Before the interview, we recommend you repeat the vocabulary connected with family relationship names.

Once you are asked to talk about your family you can answer as follows:

**Moja rodzina to...** (My family is)

**Mam męża/żonę, dzieci...**

(I have a husband/wife, children...)

**Mieszkam z rodzicami/dziećmi/u krewnych...**

(I live with my parents/children/relatives...)

**A short recap: what we call the different members of the family:**

- **Matka, mama** (Mother, mum)

- **Ojciec, tata** (Father, dad)

- **Córka** (Daughter)

- **Syn** (Son)

- **Rodzic, rodzice** (Parent(s))

- **Babacia** (Grandmother)

- **Dziadek** (Grandfather)

- **Wnuk, wnuczka** (Grandson, granddaughter)

- **Brat** (Brother)

- **Siostra** (Sister)
- **Rodzeństwo** (Siblings)
- **Kuzyn, kuzynka** (Cousin)
- **Ciotka, ciocia** (Aunt, auntie)
- **Wujek** (Uncle)
- **Bratanek, bratanica**  
(Nephew, niece - on brother's side)
- **Siostrzeniec, siostrzenica**  
(Nephew, niece - on sister's side)
- **Mąż** (Husband)
- **Żona** (Wife)
- **Małżeństwo** (Married couple)
- **Małżonek** (Spouse - men)
- **Małżonka** (Spouse - women)
- **Narzeczonzy, narzeczone** (Fiancé, fiancée)
- **Panna** (Miss)
- **Kawaler** (Bachelor)
- **Teść** (Father-in-law)
- **Teściowa** (Mother-in-law)
- **Zięć** (Son-in-law)
- **Synowa** (Daughter-in-law)

## C

**Jak Pani/Pan spędza swój czas wolny?**

(How do you spend your free time?)

**Czym Pani/Pan zajmuje się na co dzień?**

(What do you do on a daily basis?)

**Example of the answers:**

**Moje hobby to...** (My hobbies are...)

**Lubię uprawiać sport...** (I enjoy doing sports...)

**Moją pasją jest... na przykład czytanie książek, podróżowanie** (My passion is... for example, reading books, traveling)

**Uwielbiam na co dzień robić...**

(On a daily basis I love doing...)

When answering these questions, you should find out more about Polish culture - cinema, literature, art, famous Polish figures from the world of sports or science and weave this information into your answer. We recommend lessons 20-22 of our COURSE.

## D

**Kim Pan/Pani jest z zawodu?**

(Who are you by profession?)

**Jestem z zawodu...** (I am by profession...)

**Pracuję jako...** (I work as...)

## E

**Czy był Pan/Pani kiedykolwiek w Polsce?**

(Have you ever been to Poland?)

**Jakie miasta/zabytki Pan/Pani zwiedzał/a?**

(What cities/sites have you visited?)

The answer depends on your experience. For example:

**Byłem/łam w Polsce ... razy... w ... roku.**

(I have been to Poland ... times ... a year.)

**Mieszkam w Polsce od...**(I have lived in Poland since...)

**Nigdy nie miałem/miałam okazji zwiedzić Polski, ale mam to w planach...**

(I have never had the opportunity to visit Poland, but I plan to do so...)

Note:

You should be prepared for such a conversation, and learn more about Polish cities and historical monuments. We also recommend lesson 4 of our COURSE.

## IV. Why are you applying for a Pole's Card?

A

**Dlaczego Pan/Pani ubiega się o Kartę Polaka?**  
(Why are you applying for a Pole's Card?)

**W jakim celu Pan/Pani chce uzyskać Kartę Polaka?**  
(For what purpose do you want to obtain a Pole's Card?)

The answer must be clear:

**Ubiegam się o Kartę Polaka, ponieważ:**  
(I am applying for a Pole's Card because):

- **chcę potwierdzić swoją polską narodowość i dać tę możliwość moim dzieciom.**

(I want to confirm my Polish nationality and give this opportunity to my children.)

- **chcę, żeby moje dzieci i potomkowie mieszkali i rozwijali się na ziemi swoich przodków.**

(I want my children and descendants to live and develop in the land of their ancestors - in Poland.)

- **chcę mieć udokumentowane potwierdzenie mojej „polskości”, a Karta Polaka jest takim potwierdzeniem.**

(I want to have a documented confirmation of my “Polishness,” and the Karta Polaka is such a confirmation.)

B

**Dlaczego wcześniej nie ubiegał się Pan/ubiegała się Pani o Kartę Polaka?**

(Why didn't you apply for the Pole's Card before?)

**Dlaczego po tylu latach od wprowadzenia ustawy chce Pan/Pani mieć Kartę Polaka?**

(Why do you want a Pole's Card after so many years since the introduction of the law?)

**Czemu teraz podjął Pan/podjęła Pani decyzję o uzyskaniu Karty Polaka?**

(Why have you now made the decision to obtain a Pole's Card?)

In this case, it is worth thinking individually about the reasons for your decision, nevertheless, the following answers are very often given:

- For citizens of post-Soviet countries, since the possibility of obtaining a Pole's Card appeared back in 2008, the answer may be:

**Chcę uhonorować pamięć swoich przodków, którzy odeszli w ostatnim czasie.**

(I want to honor the memory of my ancestors who passed away recently.)

**Pracowałem/łam za granicą i nie mogłem/łam się**

**tym zająć, ponieważ byłem/łam daleko od domu.**

(I was working abroad and couldn't take care of it because I was far from home.)

**Nie miałem/łam wystarczających dokumentów, ale teraz je uzyskałem/łam i chcę mieć potwierdzenie mojej „polskości”.**

(I didn't have enough documents, but now I have obtained them, and I want to have confirmation of my „Polishness”.)

- For citizens of other (non - post-Soviet) countries, the answer may be the following:

**Do 2019 roku Kartę Polaka wydawano tylko dla obywateli krajów postsowieckich.**

(Until 2019, the Polish Charter was issued only for citizens of post-Soviet countries.)

**Dopiero teraz dowiedziałem/łam się o zmianie ustawy dotyczącej Karty Polaka, dlatego chcę potwierdzić swoją przynależność do Narodu Polskiego.**

(Only now I found out about the change in the law on the Pole's Card, so I want to confirm my belonging to the Polish Nation.)

**Nie miałem/łam wystarczających dokumentów, ale teraz uzyskałem/łam i chcę mieć potwierdzenie mojej „polskości”.**

(I did not have sufficient documents, but now I have obtained and want to have confirmation of my “Polishness.”)

C

**Co dla Pani/Pana oznacza przynależność do Narodu Polskiego?**

(What does belonging to the Polish Nation mean to you?)

Possible answers:

**Przynależność do Narodu Polskiego to między innymi** (Belonging to the Polish Nation means, among other things):

- **posiadanie polskich przodków...**  
(having Polish ancestors...)

- **kułtywowanie polskich tradycji i obyczajów...**  
(cultivating Polish traditions and customs...)

- **zainteresowanie polską historią i kulturą...**  
(having interest in Polish history and culture...)

- **zaangażowanie w działalność społeczną na rzecz polskiej mniejszości narodowej za granicą...**  
(involvement in social activities for the Polish national minority abroad...)

- We recommend reading exemplary Biographies of persons who have obtained a Pole's Card and follow our tips.

We wish you a successful and effective interview!

# Your Path to the **Pole's** Card

An Ebook  
for participants  
preparing for  
the Pole's Card  
interview

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