



European Council: Republic of Poland

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1 Introduction and Executive Summary

The Republic of Poland is a Central European parliamentary Republic, located to the east of Germany. The terrain is mostly flatland, with mountains in the south of the country. The country itself is divided into 16 administrative states and gained its independence on the 11th of November, 1918. Over 38.5 million people call this country home, most of which live in the 3 big cities, Krakow in the south, the capital Warsaw and Lodz in central Poland. Almost 97 percent of the population are ethnic Poles, of which 87 percent view themselves as Catholic. Poland imports a lot of machinery, most of which comes from its biggest trade partner - Germany [2].

2 Societal and Economic History

Poland's history began in the middle of the 10th century with the formation of the Piast dynasty. By the mid-16th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ruled a vast tract of land in Central and Eastern Europe. During the 18th century, internal disorders weakened the nation, and in a series of agreements between 1772 and 1795, Russia, Prussia, and Austria divided up Poland among themselves. Poland regained its independence in 1918 only to become overrun by Germany and the Soviet Union in World War II. It became a Soviet satellite state following the war, but its government was comparatively tolerant and progressive. Labor turmoil in 1980 led to the formation of the independent trade union "Solidarity" that over time became a political force with over 10 million members. Free elections in 1989 and 1990 won Solidarity control of the parliament and the presidency, bringing the communist era to a close. Poland joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004. These events and shaped Poland into the country we know today: democratic, free market oriented and investing in defense, energy and other infrastructure projects [2]

As the 6th largest economy in the EU, Poland did exceedingly well in the time interval 2014-2017, with GDP growth generally exceeding 3 percent. Due to the observed policy of economic liberation since 1990, Poland is viewed as a business friendly country, with most macroeconomic policies in place. A "shock therapy" program during the early 1990s enabled the country to transform its economy into one of the most robust in Central Europe. During the 2008-09 economic slowdown Poland was the only EU country to avoid a recession, in part because of the government's loose fiscal policy combined with a commitment to rein in spending in the medium-term Poland is the largest recipient of EU development funds and their cyclical allocation can significantly impact the rate of economic growth. In 2016 the general retirement age was decreased and some new tax, tax compliance reforms were passed. [2]

Poland faces several systemic challenges, which include addressing some of the remaining deficiencies in its road and rail infrastructure, business environment, rigid labor code, commercial court system, government red tape, and burdensome tax system, especially for entrepreneurs. Additional long-term challenges include diversifying Poland's energy mix, strengthening investments in innovation, research, and development, as well as stemming the outflow of educated young Poles to other EU member states, especially in light of



Fig. 1: Map of Poland

a coming demographic contraction due to emigration, persistently low fertility rates, and the aging of the Solidarity-era baby boom generation.[2]

3 Political Position

As Poland is a parliamentary republic, the main legislative institution is the bicameral parliament, which is in turn divided into the lower 460- strong chamber Sejm and the upper chamber Senat, consisting of 100 members. Under the Polish Constitution, which came into effect in October 1997, the two legislative entities rarely have joint meetings. In fact, legally there are only 3 reasons why this kind of National Assembly could be called: during the oath of a new president, while declaring a president permanently incapacitated to fulfill their duties, when filing an indictment against the head of State. Although there are three situations where the National Assembly could be called, since 1999 only the first situation has ever come to be realised [3]

The judicial system in Poland is a little more complicated than in most countries, as it plays a big part in the decision making process. Its main institutions include the Supreme Court, the Supreme Administrative Court, the Constitutional Tribunal, and the State Tribunal. The president nominates the First President of the Supreme Court and the President of the Constitutional Tribunal with the Sejm approving such appointments. The judges have the responsibility



Fig. 2: Polish President: Andrzej Duda

of interpreting the Constitution and passing judgments, while the Constitutional Tribunal even has the right consider a constitutional appeal regarding freedoms guaranteed in the Polish Constitution [3] The current executive branch of Polish government consists of President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the Cabinet of Ministers. The current political situation is very unclear. Although the current government represents the political right, there has been some discrepancies between the rhetoric of President Duda and members of ruling party, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), who hold key positions in the current government. One instance of head-butting could be the two bills proposed by members of PiS and later vetoed by the President (see Domestic Policy) [3]

President Andrzej Duda started his political career by joining the now defunct Freedom Union Party, which he left after a year. In 2005 he joined the right-wing PiS and became a member of Sejm in 2011, where he served until 2014. In 2015 Duda decided to join the presidential election, which he very closely won against an old political rival Bronisław Komorowski. During his time as president-elect, he officially left his party to become an independent. He is criticized for showing signs of authoritarianism, such as illegally pardoning convicts before final verdict was reached or giving unconstitutional preferential treatment to his political allies. Nonetheless, his popularity remains high with 72 percent of voters pledging their support. [3]

4 Foreign Policy [1]

Lately, the relations between the EU and Poland have become tense. The coming of this situation has a few reasons, most important of them being Poland's authoritarian tendencies and its support of Hungary. One must know that Hungary has started showing very clear signs of authoritarianism for example the effort to crackdown on non-governmental organisations disguised as an effort towards "transparency" Given this growth of non-democratic behaviour, some member states have begun considering the triggering of Article

7 against Hungary to suspend its voting rights in the European Council. Such sanctions would be a clear and nonpartisan message that the European Union stands for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law over authoritarian power and overwhelming control. Unfortunately a unanimous vote is required for this to pass and Poland's decision to support Hungary has not been taken well by fellow members of the EU. [4]

Another controversial political decision that has not scored Poland brownie points with the EU, is its unwillingness to take in refugees. Duda rejected the European Union's proposal of migrant quotas to redistribute asylum seekers, saying: "I won't agree to a dictate of the strong. I won't back a Europe where the economic advantage of the size of a population will be a reason to force solutions on other countries regardless of their national interests". This was followed by Donald Tusk's (President of the European Council) threats to take the Polish government to court and to apply political pressure through impending sanctions. Eventually former Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz declared that Poland, as an expression of "European solidarity", would take in 2,000 people over the next two years, mainly from Syria and Eritrea (out of 3,700 originally requested) [3]

5 Domestic Policy

In 2015, the Polish people elected a government with populist and nationalist views. This combined with the ruling Law and Justice party's greed for power led them to a full scale political attack on the Supreme Court and other institutions of the Judiciary Branch. The ruling party submitted 3 bills mainly aimed at letting the parliament take control of the political body that hires judges, which would make the judiciary branch of government dependent on the legislative. This sparked 8 days of massive protests, because many Poles knew that the parliament already had power over the Constitutional Court and understood that giving the parliament or rather the ruling party more power over the judiciary system would seriously damage the system of checks and balances. The exact reasons are not known, but President Duda took a stance against PiS and vetoed 2 of the 3 bills, which gave the voters a glimmer of hope. Nonetheless the passing of the 3rd bill leaves much to be desired in the ideal of a democratic and independent Poland [4]

6 Recent Developments

In February of last year Polish President Andrzej Duda signed a bill banning people from accusing Poland of Holocaust atrocities committed by the Nazis and from referring to concentration camps as "Polish death camps".heightening tensions with the United States and Israel, which have criticized the measure. This led to massive political tensions between the 3 countries: Poland's ruling party defends the law by stating that Polish resistance against the Nazis was one of the biggest in Europe. In turn, Israel and the US believe that the law is a the ruling party's bid to win on nationalist sentiments. Other international critics state that it's a limitation of freedom of speech. The tensions seemed to get better after Duda passed the law onto the Constitutional Tribunal to check for legal correctness, but escalated a few days ago over the comments of Yisrael Katz, acting foreign Minister, who said that Poles "suckle antisemitism with their mother's milk" and accused all Polish people of harbouring "innate" antisemitism. The Polish Prime Minister called the comment "unacceptable" and implied that Katz was deeply racist. This escalation led to the cancellation of a summit between the V4-nations (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia) and Israel [5]



7 References

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