Poland Briefing Paper

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**Introduction**

The delegation of Poland to the Amsterdam Meetings regarding Forging a Future Europe has the responsibility to represent the people of Poland to the best of its ability and secure the future of Poland as a nation.  Our history is a tumultuous one, our very presence as a nation has been threatened countless times and we have been invaded many others.  There are many problems facing our nation and our main goal won’t be to rescue the dream of European Federalism like our Western European partners, rather the sovereignty and well-being of Poland and the Polish people.

**Key Points**

1. Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe and the Ukraine
2. The Refugee Crisis
3. Economy
4. Future European Integration
5. EU interference in domestic affairs
6. Corruption
7. Climate Change
8. Greece

**Background**

Humans have lived in the area known as Poland for hundreds of thousands of years, however the great Polish state was founded around 1,000 AD.  Our fortunes have contrasted greatly, from being the largest European state west of Russia to being engulfed by surrounding empires and not having a state from 1795 until 1918.  Although the exact borders of Poland have shifted throughout history, we have always been between the shores of the Baltic Sea and the Carpathian Mountains to the south.  The Slav tribe of Poljane occupied an extensive area in central Poland around the River Warta.  They were the people of the plane and the Slav language they spoke is the source of modern-day Polish.

The first Polish state was under the control of the family of Piast, and Duke Mieszko I was the first king in 963. He also accepted Roman Catholicism in 966 as the official religion of the kingdom, a crucial date as it is the beginning of the main religion in Poland.  The Piast family ruled until 1386, after which point Wladyslaw II of the Jagiellonian dynasty was crowned king of Poland.  The Jagiellonian dynasty continued until 1572.  In 1569, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was established with the Union of Lublin, with the countries having the same parliament and king, but separate armies and legal codes.   This Commonwealth had multiple religions and was multi-ethnic, quite contrary to modern day Poland.  It was also surprisingly democratic, with a king elected to the throne by Polish nobles.

In 1648, after a rebellion of Ukrainian Cossacks, Poland began its long decline from a sovereign state due to foreign invasion and over extension of its border.   In the 17th Century, the Swedes and Russians both invaded Poland.  This decline continued in the 18th century, with Poland being systematically divided up until there was nothing left.  Prussia, Russia and Austria continued to invade Poland and take chunks of it, including Poland’s access to the Baltic Sea, until eventually an independent Polish state ceased to exist in 1795.  The Russian part of Poland was made into the semi-independent Kingdom of Poland, with the Russian Tsar as the monarch and a Polish government and army.  However, in 1830, after a rebellion, the Polish government was suppressed and Poland was incorporated into the Tsarist Empire.  It was during this time that many Poles emigrated to either France or the United States.  Another rebellion in Russian Poland was crushed in 1863, but that was a turning point for the nation.  Before the 1863 rebellion, Poland was basically a feudal country with the polish nobles, szlachta, but after the rebellion it became modern. While serfdom was outlawed in Prussian Poland and Austria Poland in the beginning of the 19th century, it wasn’t until right after the rebellion of 1863 that Russian Poland outlawed it.  In addition, manufacturing became commonplace in the more cosmopolitan cities and railroad lines began to run through Poland.  Another key change during this time period was the role of the Catholic Church in politics, it assumed the role of the rallying-point for Polish nationalism. The struggle between Germany and Poland became characterized as the Protestant nation versus the Catholic nation. Other political movements developed like the Nationalist League, the Polish Socialist Party and the Christian Democrats.  This period between the 1863 rebellion and the First World War was key to the development of the Polish state, because instead of rebelling, the Polish people focused on the economic and social development of the nation, which in turn made it a viable modern-nation state. It was also during this time that the occupying powers, especially Russia, tried to assimilate Poland by making Russian the official language, but the Polish people’s yearning for a nation didn’t change.

 It was during World War I that the issue of a nation for the Poles came to a head.  The three occupying powers, Russia, Germany and Austria, all went to war with each other, presenting a very good opportunity for Poland to gain its independence.  Poles fought on both sides during the war, and finally in 1918, were granted a nation by the victorious allies.  They had access to the Baltic Sea via the free city of Dansk, splitting Germany in two (and laying the seeds for the invasion of Poland during WWII).  The 2nd Polish Republic fought wars with Czechoslovakia and Russia in its early years and was generally a weak country: President Gabriel Narutowicz was assassinated within his first week in office.  This all led up to the May Coup in 1926, when Józef Piłsudsk, a popular general from WWI and the former leader of Poland, overthrew the elected government and installed a military dictatorship with himself at the head until his death in 1935.  This dictatorship continued until 1939, and it repressed opposition and tried to maintain its neutrality in the face of two extremely aggressive neighbors, the Soviet Union and Germany.

 On September 1st, 1939, our nation was invaded by Nazi Germany and 16 days later the Soviet Union.  This was the beginning of the Second World War.  The British and French came to our aid as a result of the invasion, but they couldn’t help us keep them out.  The valiant Polish people resisted, but a month later, our nation was occupied for 2nd time in a century.  It was partitioned between the Germans and Soviets in accordance to the illegal Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939.  During the 2nd World War, Poland and the Polish people were treated terribly by the Germans and Soviets: millions of innocent Polish civilians (including 3 millions Jews) died as a result of their cruelty.  Our government was in exile in London, under Prime Minister Sikorski from 1939 until the end of the war.  In 1941, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the exiled government signed a treaty ending the war with the Soviet Union.  Poles joined the Soviet Union Army, the British Army and other Allied armies and fought against the Nazis.  However, relations with the Soviet Union turned took a turn for the worse over arguing about borders on Poland’s eastern front. The Katyn Forest Massacre, where thousands of Polish officers were murdered by Stalin’s secret police, caused more disagreements until finally Stalin broke off relations with the elected government of Poland in London.  The Soviet Union then proceeded to try and install a Communist government in Warsaw.  These actions caused the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and other Polish risings to prevent imminent Soviet control over Poland, which were all crushed by the Red Army.  At the Yalta Conference determining the future of the world after the War, the Soviet Union agreed to hold free elections in Poland to determine their future government.  The borders of Poland changed once again, and moved to the west, leaving million of Poles in the Soviet Union.  In an unfair election, the Polish Workers Party won, and thus became a satellite Communist state under Soviet control.  Our great nation was again under the control of a foreign power, and one that imposed extremely harsh and detrimental economic conditions upon Poland.

 For the next 45 years, our nation was under communist and foreign control.  There were few advantages of Communist control, but we did have universal employment, education and health care.  The disadvantages were numerous and outweighed the advantages.  They included price controls, shortages of food, numerous crackdowns and repression.  The economy was a complete mess for a majority of the time under Soviet control.  There were also numerous uprisings against the government and general unrest.  All of this came to a head in the summer of 1980, after a doubling of food prices.  In a shipyard outside Gdansk, Lech Walesa and other workers staged a strike with a set of demands, including the right to form a union.  Finally, after the economic hardship proved too much, the communist government and the workers agreed on the Gdansk Agreement, and workers were allowed to form a union and given other protections unheard of under a Communist government.  The Solidarity National Congress was formed, but the Communist government was determined to fight back and instituted martial law in an attempt to establish control once more.  A stalemate between the government and the Solidarity movement continued for the next few years, until eventually, Glasnost instituted by Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, and the help of the Catholic Church and Polish Pope John Paul II, resulted in talks between the two parties. The talks resulted in free elections allowed in 1989.  The Solidarity Party won a huge majority, and in 1990, Lech Walesa (the leader of the Gdansk strike), was elected President.  Communist and foreign influenced rule in Poland was officially over, the Third Polish Republic was created.  Our nation was back in our hands.

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**Issues**

**Committee on Governance**

Our nation of Poland currently has a well-able and functioning Republic, with a head of state (The President: Andrzej Duda) and a head of government (The Prime Minister: Beata Szydlo), two houses of Parliament (The upper house: the Senate and the lower house: the Sejm) and an independent judiciary.  Our government has changed dramatically since the end of World War II.  We withstood 45 years of communist rule influenced by the Soviet Union at the best times and totally under Soviet control at the worst.  After the parliamentary elections of 1989, a new constitution was agreed on in 1997, marking our complete transformation from a communist country to a democratic capitalist country.  It established the government that we now have in place.  There are several major political parties in our country today.  The ruling party is the Law and Justice party (PiS), a right-wing conservative party.  Our President is a member of PiS, and was elected early in 2015, and our PM, also a member of PiS was elected in parliamentary elections in October.  Our party swept the elections, and becoming the first since the fall of communism to govern alone.  The previous ruling party, the PO, or Civic Platform was a centrist party that had ruled since 2007.  Our party doesn’t have to seriously consider the PO’s stance, or other smaller parties like the Polish People’s Party or United Left, as we don’t have another party in our governing coalition.  One of our objectives at this conference is to make sure that the European Union doesn’t fail; we have a vested economic interest in keeping the Union together.  However, under no circumstances will we consider adopting the euro as our currency or further integration.  As it is, the European Union infringes on Polish sovereignty and is too powerful. Another main objective of the PiS is to keep Poland, Polish and solve the immigration crisis without having to take in refugees.  We also want to counter Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and make sure that under no circumstances will Poland ever have her independence threatened.

Citizens in Poland have complete political and social rights. We constantly rank extremely high on human rights scales.  Suffrage is complete for all citizens above the age of 18. The death penalty is completely outlawed.  Freedom of press and speech among many others are guaranteed in the constitution.  Homosexuality is allowed, but non-traditional marriage is currently not allowed.  Our nation doesn’t have citizenship by birth, and but any person born to at-least one Polish citizen is by descent Polish.  Any EU citizen can work, live and relax in Poland in accordance to EU rules.  These non-citizens enjoy the same rights as Polish citizens, including the right to vote in municipal elections under the terms of the Maastricht treaty.

Recently, the opposition has accused our government of cutting down on the political rights of people and toying with the judicial independence that our nation has.  Our government has passed a law making it more difficult to strike down legislation and we have appointed more judges to the constitutional court.  We also have had to remove several security officers from their positions and tighten our freedom of the media, due to national security concerns.  This new conflict between our ruling party and the opposition, along with the judicial independence our country has, will continue to be a major political point.

We joined the European Union in 2004, as a full member.  We currently are not (and do not ever plan to be) ha part of the currency union.  Our integration into the European project was regarded with much success, and until recently we have enjoyed a very nice relationship with the EU.  Recently however, we are less than thrilled with the European Union.  Their proposal to distribute refugees will never be accepted in Poland.  Furthermore, we are in strong disagreement over Climate Change and Brussel’s increasingly illegal attempts to get us to stop using our natural supply of coal. If the European Union intends to use its Rule of Law mechanism and punish us on the recent developments in our nation, then we intend to explore all of our options in regards to our future in Europe.

Our government strongly believes that there is a democratic deficit in the EU.  We believe that the citizens of the EU, and Poland in particular, must be able to directly elect many more EU officials.  It is a serious concern, and one that our party intends on bringing up and dealing with.

 Our delegation will be representing the Law and Justice Party and will be taking their views on all issues.  We believe that the Polish people have spoken in two consecutive elections, giving us unprecedented authority and a clear mandate to follow our beliefs in regards to internal reform as well as foreign and EU policy.

**Committee on Cross Border Issues**

Our country intends to stay as Polish as possible.  We intend on preventing refugees from the Middle East and those with a difference ethnicity or culture from entering, even if this conflicts with the EU’s Schengen Agreement of cross-border freedom. Under the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS), our government has nationalistic goals such as a securitization of our own border, a wish to control our people how we see fit, the ability to opt-out of EU doctrine we do not agree with, an ability to deal with both Russia and the EU and choose between their conflicting views, and a continued membership within the EU.

We do not like the Schengen Agreement when it would mean Middle Eastern, Muslim refugees would be entering the country.

Poland must have a securitization of borders because – as a Polish people – we do not want migrants. Let Poland stay Polish.

In the eyes of the Polish people, corruption is a prominent issue. However, statistics taken by outside sources proclaim that it has been dropping in recent years and our government is doing everything it can to solve it. Our Central Anti-Corruption Bureau has done a fantastic job in furthering the fight against corruption through public awareness programs and by teaching basic corruption fighting practices to our law enforcement. We must coordinate further between sectors of government.

Poland is in a vulnerable geographic position regarding cross-border issues such as migration and climate change. With a -0.47% immigration rate into our country, we are experiencing a significant effect of brain drain. Well-educated, unemployed youths are leaving Poland for greater opportunities in Western Europe. We are also facing environmental challenges, as we are one of the largest coal producing and coal-burning countries. However, our coal production is one of the few things that allow us to stay economically independent of Russia. We also face the problem of widespread deforestation and soil erosion.

As a member state of the EU, Poland does not wish for more expansion of EU borders. As the largest economy is Eastern Europe, and with our party in power, we have no interest in furthering the EU’s goals of an ‘ever closer union’.

Our entrance into the Schengen Area has made it exponentially easier for traffickers to transport people and arms across borders.  Due to the conflict in Ukraine, the weapons smuggling trade has increased between Poland and Ukraine, with an increase of about 2,000% of weaponry seized after the conflict began. There has also been a sharp increase in munitions smuggling. This must be combatted both on the Polish side and with the Ukrainian border guards, who are accused of often taking bribes. The EU is afraid of criminal gangs gaining more power as the focus is on preventing terrorism.   Money laundering is a huge issue for us.  Evasion of custom duties and taxes is the number one source of illegal funds. Money laundering originating from Russian sources is also an issue, but more pressing is the influence by Asian companies and players.  Human trafficking in Poland is an epidemic. Poland has been ‘classified as an origin, transit and destination country for trafficking.’ People, majority young women and children, are taken across borders to west European nations such as Germany, Belgium and Italy. Men, women and children from around the world have been found in conditions of forced labor, prostitution or slavery. Of the top five countries in the EU with the most victims reported country of citizenship, Poland is the 5th, after Bulgaria, Romania, the Netherlands and Hungary. The numbers of convicted traffickers is extremely low, with France reporting the arrest of up to 577 perpetrators in 2010 while Poland only arrested 20 the same year. This is disproportional as the number of victims originating in Poland is exponentially higher. Victims originating outside of Poland are most often uneducated and unemployed, thus putting them at risk of falling victim to false promises of a better future once they are smuggled into the country. Women are disproportionately made victim to forced prostitution and over forms of sexual slavery due to their inferior economic position in their countries of origin. Children often fall victim to organ harvesting, sexual slavery and forced labor.

Climate Change is an issue we are taking seriously but we are aware of the important role of fossil fuels in our country.  Poland is a massive producer of coal and the largest coal consumer in the EU after Germany. In an economic sense, we oppose the Nord Stream II Pipeline, as it would compromise our country’s energy security. The plan calls for Russian natural gas to be transported directly to Germany, bypassing Poland entirely. In relation to air pollution, Poland has the highest levels of pollution particles in Europe. These particles have been strongly linked to health problems such as strokes, heart attacks, and cancer.

**Committee on Economics**

Poland has the sixth largest economy in the European Union, and the largest economy in Central Europe. Our economy has been growing, and thrived even during the financial crisis. Our GNI (Gross National Income) per capita is $13,360 as of 2014; but our GDP per capita is only 67% of the EU average. In the first half of 2015, our economy grew by 3.4%, the same rate as in 2014, and up from 1.7% in 2013. Domestic demand increased by 3% and remained the main driver of growth. Private consumption continued to benefit from higher disposable income due to improved labor market conditions, relatively strong credit growth in households, and a boost from persistent consumer price declines. Investment was supported by solid corporate profits, increasing confidence, record low interest rates, and final disbursements from the EU’s previous financial budget.

Our government has no interest in adopting the euro, and is setting up many roadblocks to make that process extremely difficult. Poland won’t join the Eurozone until the euro is strong enough to be a more attractive upgrade from their zloty, which right now it is not, and won’t be without Poland in the Eurozone (a catch-22). Our president, Andrzej Duda, has said he won’t consider joining the euro until Polish wages meet “European ones,” a far-off goal.

The fact that the zloty is not tied to the euro often helps increase the competitiveness of our exports, but in the long run, exporters will want to lobby for euro adoption to cut conversion costs and make planning more predictable. Also worth mentioning are Poland’s ties to Russia, which are historical as well as economic. One fifth of Poland’s exports go to Ukraine and Russia, and Poland, like much of Europe, receives a lot of its oil from Russia, and natural gas as well.

The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) says reforms are needed to improve Polish growth rates, and make sure they still improve. Poland can raise productivity by liberalizing the labor market, privatizing state-owned enterprises, removing red tape, and making agriculture competitive. Polish men and women should retire at the same age, and if Poland raised the pension age to 67 by 2030 instead of by 2040 as planned, it could boost female employment by improving childcare and elderly care. Certain laws should be repealed, like one that prevents firms from laying off an employee in the last four years before retirement, this law discourages firms from hiring older people, and other laws have a similar effect.

Participation in Poland’s labor market is limited, and that problem will continue to get worse as the working-age population shrinks. Like much of Europe, birth rates in our country are low, but emigration rates are also high. Our macroeconomic fundamentals are strong, but we should be working to lure back young and talented émigrés who leave in swarms.

We need better transport infrastructure, which would make it easier for workers to commute and would thus make the labor market more flexible. We would like the EU to provide us with more funds to build up our infrastructure. State ownership is a vestige of the communist regime and is working against a capitalist free market. Several hundred relatively large companies still belong to the state: the government tends to declare them “strategic” when in fact they are just successful and high producing and large (ex: Poland’s largest bank PKO Bank Polski, a mining firm KGHM Polska Miedz, chemical producers, the national airline LOT).

We also have a bureaucracy issue. Many government agencies are inefficient and need reworking. Agriculture is subsidized and far too large. KRUS, the farmers’ national insurance system, is a burden on the state and needs reform. We are working to fix these issues. All in all, Poland is in a strong financial situation that seems to be improving every year. It seems hard to imagine that Poland will join the Eurozone in the near future, though at some point they may have to. By then, however, it might be too late, as the Eurozone really needs Poland and burgeoning Central European countries like it to remain sustainable.

**Committee on Security**

We feel threatened by Russia’s military actions in Ukraine. Polish sovereignty, along with the sovereignty of other former satellites, is in jeopardy. In response to Russia’s show of strength, we have increased our defense spending this year by 18 percent. Since Vladimir Putin’s rise to power, our diplomatic relations with Russia have stagnated. Poland believes that a Ukraine free from Russian influence is in the best interest for its security.

In response to the Paris attacks, we have removed our self from the European resettlement program and closed our borders to refugees. While we were initially in favor of taking in refugees, the Paris attacks have changed our position considerably. Poland feels that it cannot go along with the European resettlement program without the guarantee of its security from Brussels, which they cannot provide at this moment. Poland believes that taking in refugees would not be in the best interests of the Polish people and the Polish economy.

Poland is a full member of NATO, which we joined in 1999.  We joined the EU in 2004 and are also a member of the OSCE and OECD.  Poland is in favor of increasing ties with the US and Eastern Europe to help it combat the growing threat of Russian influence. We need to separate ourselves from our terrible Soviet past, and return to our Polish roots. The rise of Vladimir Putin has put our rise as an independent European nation in jeopardy. If the EU is not hard on him in the future, he will look to exercise even more power in Eastern Europe and threaten Polish sovereignty in the region. We really need United States help to assist in security for us, and for the region. Even if they are reluctant to involve themselves in European affairs, they should consider helping us modernize our combat capabilities in the land, air, sea, and cyber domains. In the cyber domain, Poland feels particularly at risk to Russian attack. They have become increasingly at odds with NATO, and have targeted the Warsaw Stock Exchange. If the Americans help us enhance our national military capabilities, it would enable us to more easily hold off Russia in a combat situation until NATO forces could offer assistance. We also need to be completely sure that NATO would come to our aid if Russia attacked us and we activated Article Five of the Washington Treaty.  As many former Soviet satellites have given in to Russian pressure like Belarus, Ukraine and Hungary; Poland needs to uphold its independence. We have been invaded and occupied many times in our history. In the face of increased Russian influence in Eastern Europe, we need strong Western partners to support us and help maintain our sovereignty.

        The energy that Poland has largely consists of fossil fuels. Poland is the second largest coal consumer in Europe behind Germany. It is a major European exporter of coal and many of its plants use coal to boost greater energy production. Poland uses coal and lignite to produce about 90 percent of its electricity. For gasoline, however, we are still heavily dependent on Russian fuel. It is trying to work with other European nations to create a gasoline-sharing program in the event of a distribution disruption, and seeking foreign investment in Eastern Europe to deter a Russian oil monopoly. In recent years Poland has been successful in lessening the Russian monopoly by starting to get oil from the West. However, because Poland gets roughly 60 percent of gas and 90 percent of oil from Russia, they have tremendous bargaining advantage in contract negotiation.  As far as renewable energy is concerned, we are starting to focus on it, setting modest goals for increased usage in wind and hydroelectric power. Poland hopes to continue producing alternative energy and seeks to reach the goals that the Paris Agreement set out last year. We want to do our part in reducing our carbon footprint and move with our EU neighbors towards a cleaner Europe.

**Committee on Immigration**

 The nation of Poland has been, for much its history, an emigration state, a land that native Poles have left due to the difficult conditions that have persisted for much of the twentieth century. The destruction of our country in World War II and the hardships under the following Communist regime provided a heavy incentive for our people to leave our land. As a result, we have no traditional experience with being a migrant-recipient country, given the gaps in the standard of living between the nations to the west and us. The Polish people view immigration into the country as a negative affair, and efforts are currently focused on returnee migrants and those from Eastern Europe, and not the Middle East. As such, Poland should not be made to firm agreement on the distribution of refugees for asylum, given its other priorities and the wishes of the people.

 Our nation of Poland is fiercely homogenous: ethnic minorities, or the non-ethnic poles, make up a rather small part of the population, and much of the country identifies with the Roman Catholic Church. 97% identify as Polish, and 87% are Catholic. A good portion of the Polish people do not support migration, nor do they believe that the country can afford an influx of migrants. In regards to the current continent wide crisis regarding mostly Islamic refugees, Poland stands at a cultural divide due to the homogenous Catholicism of the nation in contrast to the refugees. The immigrants and refugees under concern by the crisis would only be open to jobs the native population would not be willing to do, or they must have some rare competitive quality that the market is looking for. They must also need little financial support: the ones already coming to Poland come prepared. Along with these internal obstacles, the migrants themselves must pass through the application process and must have a valid reason for entering Poland. Our low acceptance rate for applications is due to our concern for the legitimacy of migrants entering our country. Many simply enter so as to get to the Western European states, and many other seem to be for economic, and not political, reasons.

Poland cannot be expected to take upon two jobs at once, and thus must focus on what is on its immediate borders. As a transit nation located on the easternmost border of the European Union, we already process Eastern European immigrants, including refugees, mostly those of Ukrainian or Chechen descent. Poland also plays a part in assisting with refugees, such as with the displacement of Ukrainians due to the Ukrainian crisis. Poland cannot be expected to “share the burden,” with our more experienced immigration neighbors unless we are provided with security guarantees. The promise to take in 7,000 refugees by the previous government, as per the EU quota, will be upheld. However, in the interest of safety, the immigrants will be processed through security checks. The immigrants will only be accepted once their identities are established. Poland currently views the legal foundation for taking in the immigrants as faulty, given the process of identifying the migrants and verifying those that are economic migrants, and those that are refugees. The European Union cannot expect us to take more refugees after the impact of the Paris attacks. The attacks have changed the situation on our immigration policy and on our stance toward refugees. We can expect a surge in migrants, as family members will be able to join the initial 7,000 refugees. The European Union should instead direct aid toward the camps in the Middle East and North Africa, instead of pressure European countries to take them in.

As stated previously, we have little experience with migration, given our conflicted historical status, which would explain our current negative migration rate. While our immigration rate has steadily increased over the years, so too has our emigration rate, thus resulting in the negative migration rate of -.47% that has persisted for years. But it must be emphasized that the homogeneity of the Polish population and the ethnic stability put us in a position where immigration to Poland is not viewed favorably. Ethnic Poles living in Poland do not support migration, as the surveys indicate that a majority of Poles do not want non-Poles in their nation, and others indicate that many believe there are too many migrants in the country. Low migration levels have prevented possible ethnic strife in occurring, but our problem is that people are leaving the country, although incentives have been provided for emigrants to return. That combined with the current Ukrainian Crisis, where hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are now in Poland (not all of whom are political refugees), and we can expect the immigration numbers to rise.

**Committee on Foreign Policy**

After regaining independence in 1989, we have increased our economic reintegration with the Western world. Poland also has been an active nation in advocating for European integration. In 1994, we became an associate member of the EU and then formally joined in May 2004. We became a full member of NATO in 1999.

The downfall of the Soviet Union led to the establishment of seven new sovereign states in Poland’s immediate neighborhood (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia). We have actively participated in good relations with all our neighboring countries. Specifically, Poland has gradually advanced its relationships with Lithuania and Ukraine in an effort to firmly anchor these states to the West.

Because Poland has repeatedly experienced disloyal allies and aggressive powerful neighboring nations, our foreign policy continues to be a struggle. Poland needs strong allies, strong enough to give sufficient military support in times of critical circumstances. This explains our close relationship with the U.S. Also, Poland’s poor attitude towards Russia results in very tense diplomatic relations, which have been constantly worsening since Putin’s rise to power. This is an important factor for the special attention Poland gives to the political emancipation of all its Eastern neighbors: Lithuania, Bearus and Ukraine.  We must be very careful at Russia’s new stance in the world and make sure that we maintain our sovereignty at all costs.  This is why we are so worried at Russia’s actions in the Ukraine and the EU and NATO’s lack of action at such a brazen act of aggression from Russia.  We are extremely worried that if Russia attacks us, a similar stance from the EU and NATO would threaten our very survival.  Russia’s aggression in Eastern Europe is among our highest concerns.  We do not take their action lightly.

The parliamentary elections in October 2015 went down in Poland’s modern history as the most important since the first non-communist government was installed in Warsaw in 1989. Our party, the PiS, won.  Our success has caused unsubstantiated concern at home and abroad. While we support the EU, we are hesitant and cautious of further integration. We have recently suggested a ‘deep reshuffle’ in foreign policy and have made numerous announcements of upcoming ‘defenses of national interests’ against the ‘abusive power of European mainstream’. When coupled with bold comments on the role of history and dignity in the external political agenda, many opponents see us following Victor Orban’s idiosyncratic inclinations.

Poland’s relations with the rest of the EU under Law and Justice will largely depend on their relationship with Germany.  Berlin is both an indispensable leader of the EU and Poland’s key economic and political partner, yet we are worried about increasingly German dominance in the EU and its foreign policy decisions.  We do not forget history easily, especially after being invaded and occupied by Germany many times in our history.

**Committee on Identity and Integration**

During and since World War II, we have been involved in a constant struggle to feel safe, stable and united as a nation. Not only was Poland brutally invaded and occupied by both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, but also it continued to suffer under the hands of the Soviet Union for years after the war ended. The Nazis ranked the Poles as the second lowest racial group in Europe next to the Jews and the Gypsies and consequently more than 6 million Polish citizens, 3 million Christians and 3 million Jews, were killed during the war--a more devastating result than any other European nation. Millions were deported to Germany and Russia or left in the territories taken by the Soviet Union after the war. By the end of the war, our population decreased from 35 million to 23 million, with 90% of its Jewish population being destroyed. Whatever national cultural identity we shared before WWII was completely altered. Poland emerged from the Second World War as an almost completely homogenous society, with 99% of the population being white and 95% being Roman Catholic. The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989–91 led to a complete reorientation of Polish foreign policy. Together with the development of friendly relations with our neighbors, integration into Western political, economic and structure structures, specifically the EU and NATO, became our top priority.  Prior to 1989, the Communist government at times denied the very existence of national minorities in Poland. When minorities were recognized, each acknowledged minority could be represented by only one organization and with one publication. As a result, between 1956 and 1981, there were only six organizations. After 1989, the right to free association resulted in the establishment of nearly two hundred ethnic organizations. Nowadays, national and ethnic minorities constitute about 3.5% of the population, one of the lowest percentages in Europe. The biggest minorities are German, Ukrainian and Belarusian. The smallest are Slovak, Czech, Armenian, Tatar, and Karaim minorities. However, despite Poland being very homogenous, minorities have many rights.

We are a country actively involved in the protection of national minorities. We are a party to a number of international conventions, the most important of which include the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Their status improved significantly in 2005 when the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language came into force. The introduction of language rights related to the use of auxiliary languages in public administration and bilingual topographical signs was a positive development. However, there is a large discrepancy between policy and practice and with a very homogenous population, the migrant crisis and a new government, Poland is a hostile place for immigrants at the moment. We have been criticized for a lack of a strong centralized integration program, and as a result, many immigrants struggle to assimilate and adjust to Polish culture. This can be expected. We have changed our minds on the previously agreed number of migrants Poland was to allow in. After the Paris attacks, we fear that Poles will become guests in their own country and that until security measures increase, our country is not prepared to accept the previously negotiated 7,000 refugees.