

Institute of National Remembrance

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A guide to the history of Poland 966-2016

Poland's history as a nation and a country commenced in 966 when she became Christianised. Her history is extraordinary and difficult, yet it proves that

the Master of History is guiding her in the right direction. Poland is a land that throughout the last 1050 years has given the world and the Church saints, dis-

tinguished leaders, great scientists, excellent artists, and from which emerged the unifying "renewal of the face of the earth" which Pope John Paul II invoked from the Holy Spirit.

We were first a medium-sized state of the first Piasts, who had to fight for their place among their neighbours. We were a small kingdom of Władysław Łokietek (Władysław the Short), just getting itself established and reunited after a period when the Polish lands were fragmented into separate principalities. We were a powerful Jagiellonian state, and a major actor in European politics. We were the

Commonwealth of the Two Nations, full of self-esteem and pursuing their own unique governance model based on freedom and religious tolerance. And we learned the bitter taste of subjugation, demise and erasure from the continent's map. We had a rump Duchy of Warsaw, full of hopes for rebuilding the old glory. At the Congress of Vienna, Poland was divided among the occupying powers that did not ask the Poles for their opinion. This story, as a result of the tragic years of World War II, would repeat itself in Yalta a century later. Today, we are again a medium-sized European country, a country with the experience of a laborious economic reconstruction after a period of communist enslavement. In such dramatically divergent circumstances, Poles were shaped primarily by a gene of freedom passed down between generations – the ethos of a free state of free citizens, a society which does not give up its dream of sovereign statehood and keeps on fighting. Originally intended for World Youth Day held in Kraków in 2016, A Guide to the History of Poland was an introduction to learning more about Poland. And, I am sure, it can still do that.

Karol Nawrocki

President of the Institute
of National Remembrance

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A GUIDE TO THE

HISTORY

of

POLAND

