

## Poland and Canada: an outline of common history

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Poland and the Dominion of Canada were first established in June 1919 and transacted out of the Polish Embassy in London. During the World War II, on March 22, 1942 the Polish Government-in-Exile opened its legation in Ottawa. It was raised reciprocally to the level of Embassies on April 29, 1960.

A new chapter in bilateral contacts was initiated with the completion of Round Table Talks in Poland, which spearheaded the transition to democracy and re-established Polish sovereignty. The leader of the Solidarity Trade Union, Lech Walesa paid a visit to Canada in November 1989 paving the way for the Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who visited Canada on March 27, 1990. These two meetings of the leaders of new democratic Poland with their Canadian partners became a cornerstone of active, multidimensional and fruitful cooperation in years to come. The highlights of Polish-Canadian political dialogue were the official visits of President Lech Walesa in September 1994 in Ottawa and of Prime Minister Jean Chretien in Warsaw in January 1999.

Prior to diplomacy there were, as always, human contacts. The Poles first immigrated to Canada in large numbers by mid-XIXth century settling around Barry's Bay and in Waterloo co. On., and now constitute one of the largest ethnic minorities living in every province and territory of Canada. Hundreds of Poles contributed to the welfare and prosperity of Canada, but they have never abandoned a link with the motherland generously contributing to the struggle for independence in 1918-1920, and enlisting to fight in the Polish Armed forces during the last World War, when Poles and Canadians were brothers-in-arms and fought to liberate large parts of Northern Europe. After 1945 many thousands of Poles settled in Canada and assisted in forming a vibrant and lively Polish-Canadian community boasting of 270 different organizations. Its umbrella structure, the Polish Canadian Congress

takes prominent part in many discussions related to position of the Polish diaspora in the world.

Poland is a member of WTO, OSCE, OECD as well as the founding member of the UN. It shares with Canada a distinction of providing large number of peacekeepers in the hotspots of today's world: the Middle East, the Balkans, and Afghanistan. Since 1953 Polish soldiers have participated in over 40 peace operations providing 43 000 men in arms, policemen and civilian workers. Poland became a member of NATO in 1999 and is grateful to Canada for its part in supporting this membership and ratifying it as the first among the partners of the Alliance on Feb. 2, 1998. Poland remains Canada's largest economic partner in Central & Eastern Europe with the annual trade turnover of over 400 million CAD. Both countries signed a number of agreements to facilitate business: Foreign Investment Protection Agreement, Double Taxation Agreement, Air Transport Agreement, MOUs on Environmental Protection, Health Matters, Housing Development, as well as one between CIDA and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on International Aid. In order to boost further contacts Poland organized its First Co-Operative National Exhibition in Montreal in 2001 with exhibits by more than 100 Polish companies.

Polish exports to Canada have doubled since 1997 and the turnover shows a pattern of growth and diversification. Currently over 140 Canadian companies enjoy benefits of trading in Poland. They include such well-known names as Bombardier, Pratt & Whitney, and McCain.

Foods.

The bond, which links our countries, is strong and lasting. It is based on friendship, common values and responsibility for peace and stability worldwide.