Twenty five years ago, Poles voted communist authoritarianism out of power in the elections of June 4, 1989, and momentous changes swept through Central and Eastern Europe. To mark this occasion, the international Lech Wałęsa Solidarity Prize was awarded for the first time in Warsaw on June 3. It went to Mustafa Dzhemilev, the leader of Crimean Tatars. On the following day the President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski marked the 25th anniversary of Poland’s liberation from communism. The ceremony was by many distinguished guests including Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper and US President Barack Obama.

"No freedom without Solidarity"—this was the chant known to everyone in Poland 25 years ago. As a result of the now famous Round Table negotiations of April 1989, which were held between the democratic opposition (the "Solidarity" Independent Self-governing Trade Union led by Lech Walesa) and the communist authorities, pluralistic parliamentary elections were organized for the first time in Poland since the end of the Second World War.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper visited Warsaw where he joined other world leaders to celebrate the Polish Day of Freedom. He announced that a Canadian Armed Forces contingent will participate in Exercise SABER STRIKE 2014.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of free Poland, the first ever international Lech Wałęsa Solidarity Prize was presented in Warsaw on June 3. The award went to Mustafa Dzhemilev, the leader of Crimean Tatars. Among other contenders were human rights activists from ten countries.

Polish President Bronisław Komorowski and U.S. President Barack Obama on Tuesday in Warsaw declared increased defence spending. Komorowski wants to see Poland’s military spending at 2% of GDP while Obama will ask Congress for $1 bln to support allies in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Ministers, Canadian Members of Parliament, numerous representatives of the diplomatic corps and Canadian business leaders, as well as media and Polish members celebrated the 25th anniversary of free elections in Poland during the Freedom Gala in Ottawa. Minister for Employment and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney, who is a great friend of Poland, was the guest of honour. Monday night started with the screening of Andrzej Wajda’s film “Wałęsa. Man of Hope”. The film, which presented the history of Poland’s fight for freedom, received a standing ovation from the audience. During the ceremony Mr. Waldemar Jarocki, an Ottawa resident and former member of the “Solidarity” Union in Radom was honoured with the Cross of Freedom and Solidarity awarded by the President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski. During the Gala, guests were treated to several Polish promotional films, a MFA presentation on 25 years of Freedom and an exhibit titled, “1989. The End of the System,” by Karta Center, as well as various Polish delights, including pierogi, chicken in bison grass vodka and kremowki cakes, which were relished by John Paul II.

“It was Poland, from which in 1989, the avalanche of events began that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall and then the USSR” explained Poland’s Ambassador to Canada Marcin Bosacki. „We, Poles, are proud of the input to this change. But we are also proud of what we have achieved since.” „Now, after only 25 years, export increased 20-fold to over 200 bln dollars. For the first time in centuries we are catching up with Western Europe.”

“Let there be no mistake, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the destruction of the Iron Curtain, the liberation of the peoples of the captive nations of Central and Eastern Europe happened in large measure because of the brave and courageous leadership of the Polish people.” exclaimed the Minister for Employment and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney during his address at the ceremony.

“Poland as we see it today is beyond anything we could have dreamt in 1989” said former President of Poland Lech Wałęsa in his recent interview for CNN, adding that „Solidarity lost a couple of battles, but we won the war for democracy and freedom.” He also stressed that „we who destroyed communism should now provide an example and inspiration for the entire world.”
A recital by Jan Lisiecki, an outstandingly talented Polish-Canadian pianist, marked the start of the Polish Freedom Gala, organised in the prestigious Great Concert Hall in Toronto on June 23. The gala ceremony, was a part of Canadian celebrations to commemorate the 25 anniversary of Poland’s partially free elections, which were held in Poland on June 4, 1989. The recital by Jan Lisiecki received a standing ovation from the audience. “Chopin Etudes performed by this very talented artist are becoming sound very simply and naturally. It is an absolutely sensational CD” – advertised John van Driel, director of Classic FM, leading classical music station. During the ceremony Mr. Zbigniew Belz, former member of “Solidarity” Union in Gorzów Wielkopolski, persecuted and arrested in 1980s, who lives today in Toronto, was honoured with the the Knight’s Cross of the Order of Rebirth of Poland awarded by the President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski.

“I would like to invite you to listen to an incredible story. Story of a country, which in a quarter of century, in less than a generation, transform itself from poverty to be the best example of European success, even more – to be one of European leaders. – said Ambassador of Poland to Canada, Marcin Bosacki, during his speech – 25 years ago my country set a clear goal: to be anchored in the West and to be at the heart of Europe again. To achieve that we knew we must be not only brave, but also smart and strong.”

“All of us in the house of commons, all of us in the senate of Canada, all of us across this country join together with all of you tonight in celebrating 25 years of success” – told Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Christopher Alexander. “Canada and Poland have remained the closest of friends, the most committed of allies, and advocates for freedom and service for peace,” he added.
Polish Anniversaries

15 years of Poland's NATO membership

On 12 March 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary became full members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. On the occasion of this event’s 15th anniversary, we would like to recall Poland’s path to NATO. Diplomatic efforts and negotiations concerning Poland’s accession to NATO were possible thanks to the historic events in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. Poland and its Army have changed significantly. Those efforts are continued also now. Since August 2012, when Poland’s President Bronislaw Komorowski announced the defense modernization initiative, the air and missile defense system has been in the limelight, becoming the buzzword on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet, the scope of the modernization effort is far more complex, and comprises of four distinct pillars: strengthening the armed forces, naval force modernization program (with total spending of 3 bln USD by 2030), further strengthening of the air force (introducing an Advanced Jet Trainer system and a new helicopter fleet) and consolidating the defense industry, which should play a vital linchpin in the modernization effort.

10 years of Poland's EU membership

We have been very good at seizing the opportunities that EU membership has created – this is the clear message of the MFA report “10 years of Poland’s EU membership.” It has been presented by the Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Minister Radoslaw Sikorski on April 29. Poland has evolved from a country that tended to view the Union through the prism of national interests into a country that is increasingly assuming responsibility for the European project. Poland’s international prestige has increased, the country has become part of the EU decision-making centre, we are respected by other Member States, and enjoy the reputation of a predictable and responsible partner that effectively pursues its interests in Brussels. EU membership has boosted our economy. Poland’s fundamental social and economic indicators have greatly improved over the decade. Although there are still some challenges to overcome, Poland’s 10-year EU membership has been a great success.
During his trip to Poland to participate in official celebrations marking 25 years of Freedom in Poland and first free elections of June 4th, 1989, the Prime Minister of Canada met with the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. They discussed excellent Polish-Canadian cooperation and the situation in Ukraine. PM Tusk stressed that “in the Western world I do not find another partner who would understood so well Ukrainian problems and was so sensitive to the situation of Ukraine, as the Prime Minister of Canada. For Poland, Ukrainian issue is a fundamental matter for our security. We have identical views on the situation in the region and the situation in Ukraine, this is a good sign for the entire international community”. At the same time, the Polish PM expressed his gratitude for Canada’s support: “Canadian engagement is one of the most important, is a good example and a symbol of our cooperation”. In turn, Stephen Harper reassured Poland about a strong NATO alliance explaining “It’s not just the provisions of the treaty… it’s not just symbols and words of support but also a bigger than ever before presence of both the assets, equipment and personnel.”

Polish FM Annual Address

At the end of April, Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, John Baird, came to Poland with his first official visit. Canada’s chief of diplomacy and his Polish counterpart, Radoslaw Sikorski, discussed the current situation in Ukraine and possible actions that could be taken in order to stabilize ongoing riots and aggression running rampant. They also discussed September NATO summit in Wales, and bilateral economic cooperation. Both ministers agreed that Poland and Canada will support democratic changes in Ukraine. Therefore, they signed the Statement of Principles Between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development of Canada for Coordinated Engagement in Ukraine and Eastern Europe.
Past Events

Jan Karski recognized as Hero of Humanity by the Parliament of Canada

On the occasion of the centennial of Jan Karski’s birth, the Canada’s House of Common’s unanimously passed a motion to recognize Jan Karski as Hero of Humanity. The motion was delivered on May 15 by Hon. Jason Kenney, Minister for Employment and Multiculturalism “Jan Karski, at great risk to his own life, gave voice to the voiceless by speaking out for the Jewish victims of Shoah and stood firmly against evil”. The Ambassador of Poland Marcin Bosacki expressed his appreciation of this resolution: “it is good to know that Poland – and humanity – can count on a friend like Canada, a nation that always stands for freedom, peace and human dignity. Today, by honouring Jan Karski, you proved that again.” Jan Karski was a Polish diplomat who during World War II was an eyewitness to the Holocaust and a courier for the Polish Underground State.

Celebrations in memory of Pope John Paul II

Ottawa honoured the canonization of John Paul II with a number of events. A special exhibit was held at the Ottawa University “Pope John Paul II. Poland’s gift to the world,” which presented the life and contributions of the Polish Pope, preceded the official celebrations that took place on the last day of April at the Parliament of Canada and the Notre-Dame cathedral. The official meeting at the Parliament gathered many guests, including: Deputy Speaker of House of Commons Joe Comartin, ministers Jason Kenney and Chris Alexander, head of the Canada-Poland parliamentary friendship group Władysław Lizoń, special guests from the Catholic University in Lublin, members of the parliament, and representatives of Polish organizations from Ottawa and Windsor.

Poland’s New Golden Age discussed at Carleton University

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of Poland’s successful economic and political transformation, the Embassy of Poland in Ottawa and the Centre for European Studies at Carleton University hosted Dr. Marcin Piątkowski, Senior Economist at the World Bank Office in Warsaw. Dr Piątkowski presented an analysis of economic history of Poland, as well as, a promising perspective of Poland’s economy future, which was described in his research as “Poland’s New Golden Age.” and he supported his assertions with several undeniable facts, stressing that the Polish economy has never been so strong since the 16th century. By avoiding the recession in 2012 and a rapidly growing GDP per capita have guaranteed that by 2030 Poland will achieve “around 80 per cent of the Western European level of income, the highest in the country’s history.” At the same time Dr. Marcin Piątkowski noted that this can happen only if the Polish state continues converging with the West.
Edmonton celebrated Poland’s freedom

The celebration held at the Polish Hall on May 31, 2014 gathered Edmontonians together to mark 25 years of Poland’s Freedom. His Excellency Marcin Bosacki, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Canada, delivered a keynote speech, stressing the significance of the events from a quarter of a century ago. The event was hosted by the Canadian Polish Congress in collaboration with the Honorary Consulate for northern Alberta. Close to 200 special guests came together to mark the occasion. A number of representatives from the legislative and judicial orders of government joined active Polonia leaders in the province. Representatives of Ukrainian and German provincial associations were also present.

Memorial to the Victims of Communism

On May 30, the Tribute to Liberty fundraising dinner was hosted at the Toronto Congress Center. Donors and distinguished guests included: Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who was the keynote speaker, as well as significant Canadian politicians, the representatives of the Board of Directors of the foundation i.e. Peter van Loan, Joe Oliver, Stella Ambler, as well as Władysław Lizoń, MP, Ambassador of Poland to Canada Marcin Bosacki, Ukrainian Ambassador Vadym Prystaiko, the representatives of business elites with various national minorities including Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish diaspora. All funds raised on Friday evening will be used for the financing of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Ottawa. Many distinguished guest added lustre to the celebration.

Changes in the Polish presence in Montreal

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland has decided to change the class and move the seat of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Montreal, as well as sell its current main building on 1500 Avenue des Pins Ouest. The Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Montreal will henceforth be located in the existing building of the Trade and Investment Promotion Section at 3501 Avenue du Musée. These changes will take place by July 31, 2014.

Book-crossing in Vancouver

Nearly 100 of works of Polish literature are already available in a variety of locations of Metro Vancouver! Thanks to the platform www.bookscrossing.com book lovers can not only exchange free books, placing and finding them in designated points, but they can also follow the path traveled by a book thanks to a sticker with a unique number, which is recorded on the bookcrossing website. English-language versions of the works of Polish literature have been already placed in a variety throughout locations of Metro Vancouver!
Looking for a perfect place to live, an excellent academic center or a spot for a romantic outing? In any case, your destination should be Toruń. Situated in the central part of Poland, upon the Vistula river, Toruń has about 200,000 inhabitants. The town was founded in 1233 by the Teutonic Knights. For centuries, it had been an important commercial and political center. Its unique gothic architecture contributed to the designation of Toruń’s Old Town on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The most precious examples of this exceptional style are the St. Johns’ Cathedral and the Town Hall, although the whole Old Town complex in general deserves attention. One of the most crucial buildings is the Nicolaus Copernicus House, as Toruń is the birthplace of this renowned Polish astronomer. The spirit of Copernicus is present in many spots in Toruń, including the Planetarium, where all enthusiasts of astronomy can watch spectacular shows which reveal the secrets of the universe. You cannot leave Toruń without tasting its gingerbreads – famous Toruń sweets, produced by the oldest confectionary in Poland, Fabryka Cukiernicza Kopernik, which has been manufacturing gingerbreads since 1763. Theatre and music lovers will also find Toruń extremely appealing, since they can indulge in the International Violin Festival, the International Puppet Theatres Festivals, and many others. Nevertheless, Toruń is not only a great place for sightseeing, it also comprises an important administrative center that is one of the capitals of kujawsko-pomorskie voivodeship. The town is also a home for a few higher schools, including the most important one - Nicolaus Copernicus University, the biggest university in northern Poland, with over 31,000 students. Sports fans should undoubtedly be keen on Toruń’s speedway club – Unibax Toruń, ranked among the best teams in Poland, which trains at one of the most modern stadiums in the world. Toruń, as well as a few surrounding communities, constitutes a subzone to the Pomeranian Special Economic Zone, which centers mostly around the electronics industry.
Do you know who is the founding father of the whole oil industry? You probably never heard much about Ignacy Łukasiewicz, one of the most important figures of his time. Łukasiewicz was a Polish chemist, pharmacist, and petroleum industry pioneer. He is well-known for building the first oil refinery in the world. He was born in 1822 in Zaduszniki to an impoverished noble family. Łukasiewicz started working in a pharmacy where he developed his chemistry skills. He then studied at the Jagiellonian University, he managed to pass all his university exams except pharmacognosy, which prevented him from graduating. Finally, in 1852 Łukasiewicz graduated from the faculty of pharmacy at the University of Vienna. He went back to work in the same pharmacy. During his work there, he made a really important invention which was a construction of the modern kerosene lamp. After that achievement, his career evolved surprisingly fast. In 1853, he introduced the first modern street lamp in Europe. This invention had a huge influence on modernizing cities. Moreover, in the same year, he designed special lamps for a local hospital, which helped illuminate emergency surgical operations. His other achievements included the construction of the first world modern oil well in 1854. The most important came in 1856, when he built the first oil refinery in the world. Later he build another one. The oil refineries were located near Gorlice and Jasło, in south eastern Poland. Through these accomplishments, Łukasiewicz, distinguished himself as one of the founders of the modern petroleum industry. In the following years, he opened several other oil wells with the assistance of local merchants and businessmen. He never wanted to have a monopoly on the oil sector. Because of his achievement and his way of doing business, he was elected to the Sejm. In 1877, Łukasiewicz organized the first Oil Industry Congress and also founded the National Oil Society. He died in 1882 in Chorkówka, and he was buried in a small cemetery next to a beautiful gothic church that he had financed. Apart from being a successful chemist, he was also a revolutionist and independence activist. After becoming a wealthy man he supported small companies and financed many projects, which helped modernize the country. Łukasiewicz was a generous man who wanted all the best for his fatherland, he shared with his riches. He also shared his positivistic ideals by helping young people to achieve proper education. Moreover, he was one of the most prominent philanthropists in the region. Thanks to his support, Polish economical development increased significantly.
A TV campaign promoting Poland abroad was launched on 3 June under the motto “Polska. Spring into new.” The campaign, coordinated by the MFA, is referring to changes that have occurred in Poland since 1989 using the occasion of three happy Polish anniversaries: 25 years of freedom, 15 years of NATO membership, and 10 years of EU accession. The idea behind the TV spot was to show the extraordinary energy that Poles have, which helped them to successfully transform the country, rather than emphasize Poland’s tourist attractions. Hit the links to see how Poland has changed in the last quarter century.

“Story of a secret state” is Jan Karski’s bestseller. Karski was a brilliant, young Polish lawyer, who planned his future within a diplomatic world. When the war broke out he became a member of the Polish underground. He experienced cruelty at its most extreme. Being smuggled into the Warsaw ghetto, he witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust. As an emissary of the Polish Underground State, he collected reports from other witnesses and set out on a brave journey across occupied Europe to bring the dreadful news to the world. President Roosevelt heard him out, but hardly believed his narrative. Another high-ranking official, Felix Frankfurter, although Jewish himself, told Karski: “I’m not calling you a liar. It’s just that I have difficulty in believing you.” In desperate frustration, Karski wrote this book to convey a detailed message on what he had seen with his own eyes. It deserves its bestseller status, not only because it is a great historic document, but also because it is a gripping story to read. Published first in 1944, the story has just been reedited.