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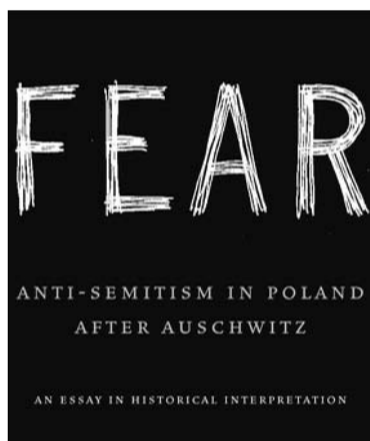
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Public employees ranging from doctors to coal miners are engaging in labor disruptions on a scale that Poland has not seen since the Solidarity movement 20 years ago.

Karolina Nowak
STAFF JOURNALIST

Public employees ranging from doctors, nurses and teachers to coal miners are either threatening or actively engaging in labor disruptions on a scale that Poland has not seen since the Solidarity movement 20 years ago. They are demanding higher salaries and pensions – and in the case of doctors and nurses, medical-service reform.

Miners at the Budrynk coal mine in the Silesian town of Katowice are in their 40th day of an underground protest and hunger strike.

They want their salaries raised to the same level as miners in the Krupinski mine near Zory. Both operations are government-owned.

In a dramatic move, wives of the protesters traveled to Warsaw to try to talk with Deputy Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak. He declined to see them.

Last Friday teachers from around Poland demonstrated in Warsaw. They want their salaries increased a whopping 50 percent. To press their demand, they are threatening to strike during May, the month that the na-

tional comprehensive examination is given to high school seniors.

A threatened doctors and nurses strike is the labor disruption that worries politicians and the public the most. On Monday, Prime Minister Donald Tusk met with doctors and other medical specialists in a so-called White Summit. But no decisions were reached.

Because Poland has a free press now, the protesters are making their cases with the public in ways that would have been impossible during Communist times. They are on radio and television. And they are in many newspaper stories.

Polish law gives workers the right to strike. But there are exceptions, and public employees are one of them.

The Trade Union Act of 1982, which grew out of the Solidarity movement, guarantees workers the right to strike. Legislation passed in 1991 strengthened that right.

Article 19 of the 1991 act says that not everyone is entitled to strike, however.

It prohibits strikes by police, employees of prosecutors' offices and courts, custom workers and other government workers.

It also prohibits strikes that could endan-

ger people's lives or health – which would apply to doctors and nurses.

The pay-raise demands of doctors and nurses threaten to make the government's health-care budget crisis worse.

The Ministry of Health says public hospitals and clinics are 10.1 bln zloty in debt. The National Health Fund gave some hospitals more money at the end of 2007, but it is expected to be used up quickly.

Central Statistical Office figures show that tax revenue pays for only 69 percent of medical care. Patients have to dig into their pockets for the other 31 percent – or 24 bln zloty.

Because of the enormous cost of medical care, the government is entertaining ideas for privatizing more health-care tasks.

Doctors and nurses at private facilities would be able to take part in labor negotiations with their employers rather than blocking streets in Warsaw, as public-sector health-care employees have had to do.

Two of the health-care privatization ideas the government is considering are supplementary health-care insurance and dividing the National Health Fund into smaller units that could compete with each other.

The doctors' and nurses' protests have made politicians and the public aware of the shortage of health-care employees in Poland. Many have opted for higher-paid work abroad.

Poland could import doctors and nurses from countries that pay less – such as Ukraine.

But that approach carries with it many problems, including a long time frame for a foreign doctor being certified to practice in Poland.

To start with, many Ukrainian doctors make almost as much as Polish doctors – so many would not want to come.

In addition, it would take 18 months for the average Ukrainian physician to obtain the documents he would need to practice in Poland. Part of that involves proof of his Ukrainian medical degree.

A Ukrainian doctor would also have to pass a Polish-language examination.

Only after dealing with all these requirements would Ukrainian doctors be able to take the additional medical courses that would allow them to practice here. They would also have to complete an internship and pass a national medical examination.



REGIONAL NEWS

Nine Canadians charged in global child porn probe

Nine Canadians have been charged in an ongoing global child sex abuse investigation prompted by the discovery of a 2006 video depicting sisters being raped by their father, police said late last week.

Almost 100 Canadians who corresponded by email with the videographer, an Italian national arrested last year, are also being investigated, said police.

"The evidence indicates that those in possession of this material did not find it accidentally," said Superintendent Earla Kim McColl, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

"They sought it out, they previewed the samples, they paid in advance and they waited for a password to download the videos."

The probe, labeled Operation Koala, started in Australia where authorities in 2006 discovered a video of the rape of two girls, who were 9 and 11 years old, performing oral sex on each other and being raped by their father. The video was traced to Belgium and the man in the video was arrested.

Thereafter, the investigation led to an Italian videographer with a private studio in Ukraine, where he produced 150 videos.

Menno Hegemeijer of Europol told reporters the videographer had "documented the sexual exploitation of underage girls, some barely school age," and sold the videos online.

"This offender also provided the opportunity for others to special order videos to their specifications. Some traveled to the studio to watch the abuse recorded live or participate in it for an additional fee," he said.

After going through 50,000 emails between the videographer and his customers worldwide, Europol identified some 2,500 buyers of his pornography, including 100 in Canada.

Twenty-one Ukrainian victims, aged 9 to 16, were also identified. (AFP)

Czech town treating neo-Nazi march like natural disaster

A controversial neo-Nazi march has driven a town in the western Czech Republic to adopt crisis planning on a scale used for natural disasters, a local councillor said late last week.

Karel Paleček told news agency CTK that Saturday's scheduled march in Pilsen, population 170,000, is being treated on the same scale as catastrophic flooding in 2002 and a severe storm in January 2007.

The rally - expected to draw hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of extremists - coincides with the 66th anniversary of the beginning of Jewish deportations from the town by Nazis. Neo-Nazis tried to march in Prague's old Jewish quarter in November 2007, coinciding with the anniversary of a notorious Nazi-era pogrom against Jews. Police prevented that march from going ahead. (AFP)

Sweden, Czechs worried about EU's future power sharing

Sweden and the Czech Republic, which are due to hold the EU's rotating presidency in 2009, voiced concern late last week about power-sharing arrangements under the bloc's new Lisbon treaty.

The treaty, which foresees a two-year president while also maintaining a rotating presidency for running business, is due to enter force as soon as EU states ratify it, which would be by the beginning of 2009 at the earliest.

"The new treaty will be disruptive for the whole environment," Swedish state secretary for European affairs Hakan Jonsson told a conference in Strasbourg. The rotating presidencies "will be a nightmare for us, because it is such a changing time," Jonsson said. Once EU members ratify the treaty, the new president will have to be bolted on to the bloc's existing institutions.

"We need to ensure a balance between the permanent president and the six-month presidency," said Czech Vice Prime Minister in charge of European Affairs Alexandr Vondra.

The new two-year president is one of the main innovations of the Lisbon treaty, which the bloc's leaders signed last month in the Portuguese capital and which is supposed to streamline the EU's main institutions.

The treaty is supposed to replace the EU's constitution, which was abandoned after French and Dutch voters rejected it in referendums in mid 2005. (AFP)

Ukraine requests next step to NATO membership

Ukraine has officially asked NATO to accept it into the alliance's Membership Action Plan (MAP), a precursor to full membership, at a summit in April, the presidency said late last week.

Ukraine is counting on "a positive response at the next Ukraine-NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008," read a letter signed by President Viktor Yushchenko and recently-appointed Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. The letter, which was also signed by parliamentary speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk, was released Wednesday by the presidential administration. The request "is not targeted against third countries and aims at the future accession of Ukraine into NATO," read the letter, which was addressed to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

A referendum will be held in Ukraine before any final decision to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the letter said.

Despite Yushchenko's enthusiasm for the project, opinion polls show a majority of Ukrainians remain opposed to membership, echoing the opposition of their Russian neighbors.

Ukraine is a key transit route for Russian natural gas to the EU and has had strained relations with President Vladimir Putin's Kremlin since the 2004 Orange Revolution, led by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. (AFP)

Last Polish WWI veteran dies at 105



Troops in WWI.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Poland's last surviving World War I veteran, Stanislaw Wycech, has died at the age of 105, his family announced late last week.

Wycech passed away in his sleep last Saturday evening, his daughter-in-law Zofia Wycech told AFP.

Worldwide, there remain only two dozen veterans of World War I.

Wycech was born into a family of Polish independence activists in June 1902 near Warsaw, in what was then the western edge of the Russian empire which, along with Germany and Austria, had carved up Poland in the 1790s.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, Poles were drafted by the three empires: more than two mln served and 450,000 were killed.

Jozef Kos, who died last year aged 107, was the last confirmed imperial conscript from Poland, having been called up by Germany in mid-1918.

Kos's death had left Wycech as the only remaining Pole to have seen service during the war, according to Polish military authorities.

Wycech had been too young for the draft, but

in 1915 became a messenger with the Polska Organizacja Wojskowa (POW), or Polish Military Organization, an underground movement seeking freedom for the country. In February 1917, he was admitted to the POW's "adult" wing, which until July that year did not actively oppose the German forces that had driven out the Russian army.

"To be a soldier was an honour," Wycech recalled in an interview with AFP two months ago. He was also like countless youngsters across Europe, in that his imagination was fired by tales of historical heroics.

In his case it was the Nobel Prize-winning Pole Henryk Sienkiewicz, whose "Trilogy" recounts Polish battles in the 17th Century.

"In 1910, the Trilogy was serialized every week, and all those tales of warriors had an influence on young people," said Wycech.

"We had enemies on all sides. I wanted to free our fatherland!"

Wycech took part in his first armed action on Nov. 10, 1918, disarming units of the collapsing German army.

In the West, World War I usually evokes images of the trenches of France and Belgium,

where fighting halted on Nov. 11, 1918.

But in Poland the date simply marks the official date of independence, not the end of bloodshed: in 1918-1920 Poles battled for territory with Germans, fought Ukrainians and Lithuanians and, at the gates of Warsaw, stemmed an invasion by Bolshevik Russia.

Wycech joined the newborn Polish state's army in November 1918, was demobilized after falling sick with typhoid, but was called back in 1919 to fight the Bolsheviks.

He was given indefinite leave from the army in November 1920 so he could complete his education.

During World War II, Wycech's teenage experience provided valuable lessons, as he worked as a resistance courier. He also took part in the ill-fated 1944 Warsaw uprising against the occupying Nazi Germans.

After the Soviet army took over, the non-Communist Wycech was sentenced to death in 1945 and 1947 on trumped-up charges but saved by his brother, who had ties to the new regime.

Later in life, he worked in the demolition business and carved tombstones.

U.S. shield should be part of European system

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Prime Minister Donald Tusk said here late last week he wants Polish elements of a proposed U.S. anti-missile shield to be part of a wider European and NATO defense system.

"It is very important for us, and I speak for the Poles, that the question of defense systems including anti-missile systems would be in the final perspective a part of the complex NATO, European and Euro-Atlantic defense system," Tusk said in a joint press conference with his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico.

Slovakia's leftist premier, who has opposed U.S. ambitions to widen its anti-missile defense shield to former Soviet satellites Poland and the Czech Republic, said he had not changed his opinion on the issue. Tusk said he did not try to change Fico's stance on the controversial shield, which Russia strongly opposes and considers a grave threat to its national security.

"I do not see any reason to convince anybody about what the Americans should install in Poland and how. Every country will decide on its own according to its own citizens' opinions," he said.

Tusk, recently installed as Poland's premier following October elections, was making his first official visit to neighboring Slovakia since taking office.

He and his ministers have moved away from former premier Lech Kaczynski's undiluted support for the U.S. proposal. Tusk has called for increased security guarantees from Washington in exchange for hosting elements of the shield.

Washington wants to install 10 interceptor missiles in Poland by 2012, as well as associated radar stations in the Czech Republic, to ward off possible missile attacks by so-called rogue states, notably Iran.

During Tusk's visit, the two premiers also discussed road transport links and energy cooperation. The Polish premier was later due to meet with Slovak President Ivan Gasparovic and parliament speaker Pavol Paska.

Companies may receive national bailout

Kinga Rodkiewicz
STAFF JOURNALIST

All Polish small- and medium-sized enterprises that want to gain foreign certificates may receive a national bailout. The government will reimburse the costs of consultative offers as well as the preparing and translation of the technical documents, the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* reports.

Businessmen who operate on the foreign markets know that having the valid certificates improves the position of the company and its prestige. In some countries, Polish certificates aren't in force; in such situations a company has to have a foreign certificate to legally function abroad.

"Having the certificates that are valid on the foreign markets is an indispensable condition of exporting anything on those markets," said Malgorzata Starczewska-Krzysztozek, a director from the Department of Economic Analysis PKPP Lewiatan. "A certificate can be a great advantage for small and medium companies as a guarantee of a product's high quality."

According to the new Ordinance of the Councils of Ministers, the financial support is available only for companies in small and medium categories. They also have to fulfill other conditions. The most important is to not exceed the limit for de minimis help.

De minimis help is provided under European Commission regulations. Small amounts of government aid to enterprises are judged not to significantly affect trade or competition in the Common Market. Such amounts are regarded as falling outside the category of state aid that is banned by the EC Treaty, and they can be awarded without notification to or clearance by the EC.

If an enterprise has received 200,000 euro or more in de minimis aid in three years from a state or semi-state agency, it will not be eligible for a training subsidy for foreign certificates.

Financial support for a foreign certificate will be given only when the company supplies documentary evidence of all its costs, especially for: consultative offers, preparing and translating technical documentation, transport and insurance of the samples, examining, and finally for the issuance of a certificate. Half of the costs can be reimbursed by the government. However during one year's time, a company cannot collect more than 50,000 zloty. Experts say there is also a need for financial help to obtain information about export possibilities to foreign markets and the list of certificates that are required abroad.



Malgorzata Starczewska-Krzysztozek, a director from the Department of Economic Analysis PKPP Lewiatan.

Asterix fans get world premiere of French blockbuster

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Polish film fans will trump their counterparts in France who are eagerly awaiting the world premiere of the new French blockbuster "Asterix at the Olympic Games," its distributors announced early this week.

The new adaptation of the adventures of the eponymous comic book hero will be released in Poland this week, but is only due to hit French screens on Jan. 30.

"We insisted that the film be released in Poland earlier than elsewhere for scheduling reasons," said Ewa Gorska, spokeswoman for the distribution company SPI International.

"We believe Jan. 25 is the best release date," she said, without elaborating.

The film is the third screen adaptation of the comic book series launched at the end of the 1950s by author Rene Goscinny and artist Albert Uderzo. The comics conquered the globe and have been translated into more than 100 languages.

"Asterix at the Olympic Games" is loosely based on the 1968 comic of the same name, which was the 12th in the long-running series about the diminutive Gaul, his portly sidekick Obelix and their magic-potion-fuelled fisticuffs with the Roman army.

Costing 78 mln euro (\$113 mln), it boasts a cast including rising star Clovis Cornillac as Asterix, plus more globally-recognized names such as Gerard Depardieu as Obelix and Alain Delon as Julius Caesar.

But movie buffs hoping to catch a glimpse of their French screen idols in Poland will be disappointed: none are expected at the Warsaw premiere.

"The only actors due to attend the first screening here are the Polish ones who dubbed the film," said Gorska.

They include Daniel Olbrychski – whose four-decade career credits include the 1979 Oscar-winning movie "The Tin Drum" – who provides the Polish voice of Delon.

Chief rabbi comments on "Fear"



Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich with President Lech Kaczynski.

Joanna Zabierek
STAFF JOURNALIST

A debate is scheduled today (Jan. 24) at Jagiellonian University in Krakow on the controversial book "Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz" by Jan Tomasz Gross.

The book claims to be a study of postwar Polish anti-Semitism. The book relates how Poles from all segments of society persecuted Holocaust survivors and accuses Polish Catholic Church leaders and Communist officials of refusing to use their influence to stop the pogroms, massacres and plundering of the Jews.

Author Gross, 60, is a controversial American historian of Polish Jewish origin. He was born in Warsaw and was expelled from Warsaw University after a student protest. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1969 and is now a professor at Princeton University.

Since the release of "Fear" by the publishing house ZNAK, the book has caused an uproar and provoked many conflicting

opinions in Poland.

The book has been criticized by Catholic leaders, including the Krakow archbishop, Stanislaw Dziwisz, who said "Fear" has awakened anti-Polish and anti-Semitic demons and doesn't adhere to historical truth.

The chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, says the book doesn't say anything new and shouldn't spoil the Christian-Jewish ecumenical dialogue. He emphasized that we live in a free country, so one may publish such books and others may disagree.

"It is a very ticklish subject for me," Schudrich said. "The only duty we all have is to regret. Many Jews were killed after the war. It is a tragedy. But who did it and why he did it – it is a question to be answered by historians."

"There is only one judge in our tradition – God. He decides who is guilty and who is not," Schudrich added.

Jan Zaryn of the Institute of National Remembrance – an organization set up to

examine Nazi and Stalinist crimes in Poland – says that Gross's book regurgitates the view of Poles as anti-Semites. Zaryn adds that the book is not filled with historical fact and analysis, as Gross claims, but is "speculation and stereotypes."

In an interview on Polish Radio, Zaryn referred to the book, "After the Extermination" by Marek Chodkiewicz, which has a different point of view. Chodkiewicz says the murders of Jews during the postwar period were simply criminal acts and not racially motivated.

Gross himself claims to be objective and following historical truth. He is not surprised by the discussions about his book, but he is astonished by the outrage in some circles of Polish society. The most surprising issue for him is the possibility of being sued by the Prosecutor's Office in Krakow for insulting the Polish nation.

Gross says that unlike many people in Poland, he wants to see not only the positive aspects of national history, but some difficult moments from the past as well.

Monster lorry jam chokes Polish-Ukrainian border

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A 30-kilometer (48-mile) queue of lorries jammed a key Polish border crossing into Ukraine early this week as understaffed Polish customs services failed to keep up with traffic on the Schengen border point.

"There is currently a 60-hour wait to cross the border. Customs agents are taking holidays, some are even quitting their jobs over low wages," regional Polish customs spokeswoman Anna Siemieniuk told AFP.

Fourteen people including several customs agents working at the Dorohusk crossing were detained by police in January on allegations of corruption, Lublin police spokeswoman Anna Smarzak told AFP Tuesday.

Lorry drivers frustrated by the huge border delay and the lack of toilets and other sanitary facilities blocked the border for several hours on Thursday, likely sparking the monster queue, Siemieniuk said.

"There are currently more than 1,600 lorries waiting on the Polish side to cross over to Ukraine and more vehicles are joining the queue. We have a maximum capacity for processing 500-600 vehicles in 24 hours," she explained.

A Polish lorry driver quoted Tuesday by Poland's TVN24 news channel said it was his fourth day stuck in the huge jam. Customs and border checks along Poland's eastern border were beefed up on Dec. 21 last year, when the country was one of nine EU newcomers to join the Schengen zone, which comprises 24 European states.

Schengen zone states drop border controls among themselves, but are bound to toughen controls on their borders with non-members.

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EU lawmakers pass credit directive

THE KRAKOW POST

After six years of negotiation, EU lawmakers have passed the heavily disputed consumer credit directive.

It gives Europeans the same rights and harmonizes information standards across the EU, enabling consumers to compare offers when looking for loans. For Poland, the directive may result in the repeal of the Anti-Usury Act of 2005.

"When Polish consumers have the opportunity to access credit offers abroad, the natural consequence will be repealing the Anti-Usury Act," Jerzy Banka of the Association of Polish Banks told the Polish Press Agency (PAP).

The Anti-Usury Act limits the consumer interest rate to quadruple the security rate of the National Bank of Poland. Violation of the act can lead to two years of imprisonment or a fine.

Supporters of the act say it provides special protection for consumers.

However, some financial experts say the act hasn't been useful for consumers because it doesn't protect them before real exploitation takes place.

According to the new EU directive, lender-borrower contracts could be made by Internet or mobile phone. The directive also standardizes information provided to consumers when signing contracts, making it easier to compare the total cost of loans by using an annual percentage rate of interest (APR) as a basis for calculation.

The new rules approved by the EU Parliament on Jan. 16 are intended to harmonize the 800 bln euro consumer credit market and open it up to EU-wide competition. The directive will apply to personal loans ranging from 200 euro to 75,000 euro but does not cover mortgages or charge cards.

The EU Council is now expected to adopt the legislation in the weeks to come. The act gives EU members two years to implement the directive into national law. This means that in 2010 all Polish consumers will have the opportunity to obtain credit in any EU country.

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REGIONAL NEWS

Slovakia halts EU challenge over CO2 emissions

Slovakia's government decided late last week to halt its legal challenge to a European Commission order to cut its carbon dioxide emissions after a compromise was reached, an official said.

The commission has agreed to increase Slovakia's carbon dioxide emissions quota from 30.9 to 32.6 mln tons, according to the Ministry of Environment in Bratislava.

"We considered the 1.7 mln (tons of carbon dioxide) as a compromise," said Peter Visvader, Environment Ministry spokesman.

The European Commission had at first slashed the emissions quota by about 25 percent to 30.9 mln tons. Slovakia originally demanded an annual allocation of 41.3 mln tons.

Slovakia had filed its legal challenge in February 2007, arguing the new quota was threatening economic growth and failed to take into account the fact that it must use more fossil fuel after two nuclear reactors at its western Jaslovské Bohunice plant were shut down.

Brussels is charged with approving national governments' bids for carbon dioxide allocations as part of the second stage of its move to curb emissions of one of the main gases held responsible for global climate change. (AFP)

Slovak government to keep airport state-owned

The Slovak government decided late last week to finance the development of Bratislava airport with public funds, excluding the possibility of a joint venture with a private company.

"The Slovak government decided unanimously ... that for the airport we will go by our own forces," Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico told a press conference.

"There was a lot of interest for the Bratislava airport, it would have been easy and lucrative to sell it. But we want to develop state property and not to get rid of it."

Transport Minister Lubomir Vazny said he had been in favour of a joint venture but supported the final decision.

"I think we can manage the finance problem (...) It will have no impact on Slovakia's ambition to enter the eurozone next year," Vazny added.

The project should cost around 2.8 bln koruna (85 mln euro, \$127 mln) in a first stage from 2008 to 2010 and 1.1 bln koruna in its second phase, from 2010 to 2013, according to the transport minister. Slovak officials had raised the possibility of a joint venture with a private investor, in which the state would have retained a majority interest, after opposing plans by the previous government to privatize the airport.

Bratislava's state-owned airport handled 2.02 mln passengers in 2007, a 4.5 percent increase over 2006, when passenger traffic rose 40 percent from the previous year. (AFP)

Former Czech president Vaclav Havel hospitalized

Former Czech president Vaclav Havel, who led the 1989 overthrow of the Czechoslovakian Communist regime, has been hospitalized with heart problems, an aide said late last week.

The 71-year-old playwright, who was president of Czechoslovakia from 1989 and then president of the Czech Republic following the country's break-up in 1993, was rushed to hospital on Saturday night, the CT television channel said.

He had been due to take part in a lunchtime round-table discussion on CT on Sunday.

Havel's personal secretary, Jakub Hladik, said "I spoke with him this morning and he was feeling fine." But Hladik said that the ex-president had cancelled all engagements for several days.

On Friday, he is due to appear at the Prague premiere of a film documentary about his political career.

The hero of the 1989 Velvet Revolution which gave Czechoslovakia independence from Soviet domination, Havel became a moral figurehead for his country around the world although his political fortunes at home fared less well as the years wore on. He has also been diminished by repeated health scares, including an operation to have a cancerous tumour removed in 1996 and a perforated intestine which required emergency surgery to save his life in April 1998. (AFP)

Poultry culled at Ukraine farm hit by bird flu

Workers on Saturday killed all chickens from a private battery farm in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, where a new outbreak of the deadly H5N1 bird flu virus had been discovered, officials said.

"Today at 14:45 Kiev time (1245 GMT), rescue workers have finished the destruction of 25,000 birds' bodies in private farm Lobzenko, where an outbreak of bird flu had been disclosed," Igor Krol, spokesman for Ukraine's Emergency Situations Ministry, told AFP.

Disinfection of the area where the birds had been kept would continue for the next two or three days, he said. Ukrainian officials on Friday confirmed the bird flu virus was found in dead chickens from the battery farm in the village of Rivne and placed the Crimea in quarantine, banning bird hunting and strengthening veterinary controls.

No other cases of bird flu were found in the Crimea and officials believe it was eliminated. (AFP)

Poland faces slow, healthy growth



Prime Minister Donald Tusk outlines plans for slow but steady economic growth.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Despite a slowdown, Poland should continue to enjoy robust growth this year but the government must keep watch on rising inflation and labor shortages, the International Monetary Fund said Monday.

"We believe that the outlook for Poland's economy is fundamentally very strong," se-

nior IMF official Paul Thomsen told reporters as he presented the preliminary findings of a routine assessment by the global financial institution.

But gross domestic product (GDP) growth this year is likely to dip to "about 5.0 percent" compared to 2007, as a weakening global economy tempers exports and dents what have been record levels of foreign investment,

he said.

Authorities have forecast a growth rate of 5.5 percent for this year.

Thomsen said investment will remain healthy, sustained in part by increasing EU funding. Poles' disposable income and consumption will continue to grow, given added impetus by tax changes due this year.

Poland has enjoyed several years of solid

GDP growth, notably since the former Communist country joined the EU in 2004.

In 2004, output increased 5.4 percent, then dropped to 3.5 percent in 2005, before climbing to 5.8 percent in 2006. Official statistics for 2007 have not yet been released but the forecast is 6.4 percent.

"We believe that for the recent recovery to translate into sustained, high economic growth over the medium term, the government and the authorities will need to meet a dual policy challenge," said Thomsen.

Warsaw will need to "contain inflationary pressures through tight fiscal and monetary policies, while at the same time making sure that the recovery does not stall in the face of resource constraints, in particular labor shortages," he said.

Inflation has been climbing steadily in recent months in Poland.

In December, the year-on-year rate hit 4.0 percent, up from 3.6 percent in November, 3.0 percent in October, and 2.3 percent in September, according to official data. Inflation for 2007 averaged 2.5 percent, compared with 1.0 percent in 2006.

Inflation in 2008 is likely to run "well above" 2.5 percent, said Thomsen.

Poland's growing labor crunch has been fuelled partly by the exodus of more than a mln job-seeking Poles to other EU member states, notably Britain and Ireland.

"The rapid increase in employment, together with emigration, has now mostly absorbed the labor market slack, reflected in real wage growth well in excess of productivity gains and in real appreciation as measured by unit labor costs," said Thomsen.

"Boosting the labor force holds the key to long-term growth prospects," he added, noting Poland's low level of work-force participation, notably among people aged over 50.

The government needs to tighten rules on early retirement and disability benefits, as well as cut taxes for low-income Poles and reform the country's special pension scheme for farmers, he said.

However, such changes will be "politically and socially sensitive," he acknowledged.

Neo-Nazis driving Poles out of Loknitz

Iwona Bojarczuk
STAFF JOURNALIST

The German town of Loknitz has become a bedroom community for Poles working 18 kilometers away in the Polish city of Szczecin - but neo-Nazis are trying to drive the Poles out of Loknitz.

About 200 Poles have settled in Loknitz, a town of 3,000 only 11 kilometers from the Polish border, largely because housing is a bargain.

They can buy an apartment there for 3,000 zloty per square meter, compared with 6,000 or more in Szczecin.

But neo-Nazis have vowed to chase them back into Poland.

Recently some Poles woke up to find their cars damaged. The vandals smashed the windshields of six cars and tried to smash windshields in three others.

They ripped off the cars' Polish license plates, crumpled them and left them on the tops of the cars, said police officer Joachim Rosenfeld of the nearby town of Pasewlak, who investigated the case. The damage was estimated at 8,000 euro.

Police questioned two suspects but released them for lack of proof.

Although there was no direct evidence that the vandals were neo-Nazis, Poles think they were - because neo-Nazis have engaged in a lot of other anti-Polish activity in recent months.

Mayor Lothar Meistring decries the situation, but notes that "there is more than 20 percent unemployment in the region." In such a case, some people are sympathetic to extremist groups, he said.

Some of the Germans who resent the Poles may not realize that about 85 percent work in Poland rather than take jobs that could go to Germans.

In any case, the mayor said the extremists will not get away with hate-mongering. "We will not allow our relations with Poland to be ruined because of the excesses of a few blockheads," he declared.

That attitude has made the mayor enemies. Someone recently scrawled on the wall of his home: "Watch out, friend of Poles!"

Other signs of anti-Polish feeling were the words "Poles out of Loknitz" on the wall of another building and someone setting afire the doormat outside a Polish family's home.

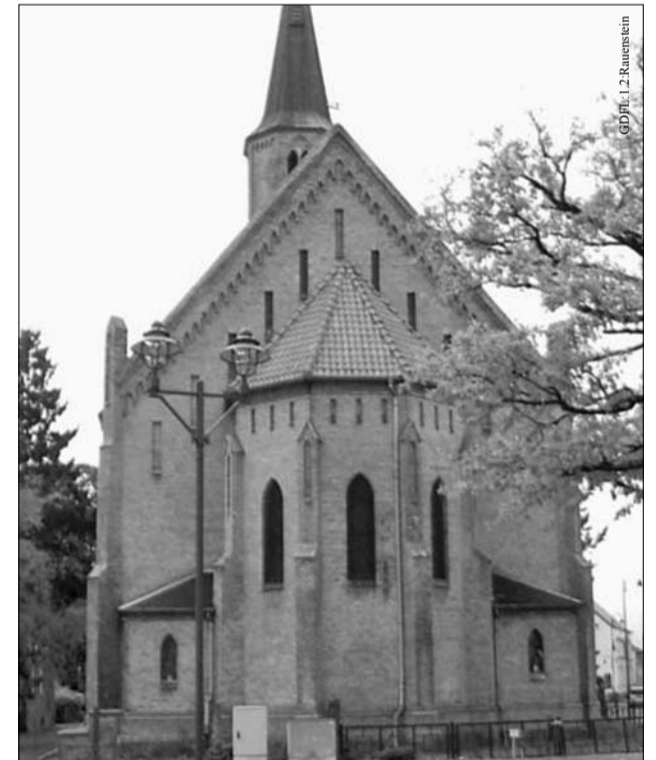
Polish families also have had their doorbells rung in the middle of the night, and have seen neo-Nazi leaflets threatening to harm Poles settling in Germany.

In addition, "German children have beaten and spit on my children," said a Polish woman.

"They are taught this in their homes," said one of the men whose cars were damaged, the owner of a fish smokehouse. "Their parents set their children against us."

He said he plans to return to Poland because of the intimidation and because Germans are boycotting his business. "I will close my business and move somewhere else," he said.

Neo-Nazis want to see the return of the policies of Adolf Hitler. They also want to see the German-Polish border redrawn. They resent the fact that Germany lost much of its Polish territory after World War II.



Evangelic Church in Loknitz.

Club relegated for corruption

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Polish first division club Widzew Lodz will be relegated to the second division from next season because of corruption, the Polish Football Federation (PZPN) confirmed late last week.

Widzew Lodz will also start the season with a six-point deficit and a 35,000 zloty (9,780 euro, \$14,350) fine. The club admitted bribing referees during 12 games in the 2004/2005 season, but will be appealing the severity of the punishment, their president Boguslaw Sosnowski said.

Widzew Lodz are presently 13th in the Polish league.

Five other clubs have already been relegated as part of the anti-corruption crackdown in Polish football. Seventeen people, including referees and PZPN officials, received suspended prison sentences last December.



Teachers protest for wage hikes



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Thousands of teachers from across Poland marched in the capital Warsaw late last week demanding the country's new liberal government raise wages in elementary and secondary education.

Brandishing banners with slogans such as "We want to work, not vegetate" and "Where's the miracle promised in our wallets?" the protesters demanded a meeting with Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Organizers said 12,000 teachers took part in the demonstration, the largest since Tusk took office in November after his Civic Platform defeated the conservative-nationalist government of Jaroslaw Kaczynski in a snap election.

Tusk's party campaigned on promises of creating an "economic miracle" in 2004 EU entrant Poland that would benefit all,

similar to the spectacular growth in fellow EU member Ireland.

The Education Ministry has proposed a 200-zloty (55-euro, \$80) wage hike, but the teacher's union wants 600 zloty for junior staff and 11,000 zloty for senior staff. Teachers are among the worst paid public sector employees in Poland, with maximum gross salaries for senior teachers running under 2,000 zloty per month. Salaries for public sector nurses and physicians are comparably low.

Tusk's government has become the target of several groups of public sector employees. Health service staff have also staged protests demanding wage rises in recent weeks.

Coal miners from the southern Polish Silesian coal basin have staged underground protests, while their wives lobbied for wage hikes in Warsaw.

Protesters lift border blockade in Ukraine

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ukrainian demonstrators have lifted their block of a crossing point on the border with Poland erected to protest Warsaw's stricter new visa rules, local authorities said late last week. The blockade by some 500 local Ukrainians in the country's western Lviv region was lifted, regional border guards said.

Established over demands to allow Ukrainians living near the Polish border to cross the frontier without visas, the barrier was removed following rumors that special forces would be sent in, one protester said.

But another demonstrator, Mykola, warned the issue was far from over.

"If the agreement with Poland isn't signed between now and Feb. 1, 1000 people will

be here," said Mykola, who imports Polish goods into Ukraine.

Ukraine, which has abolished its visa regime for EU citizens, is negotiating a deal with Warsaw to allow Ukrainians living near the border to travel visa-free.

Kiev hopes to sign an agreement during the February visit to Ukraine by Poland's new Prime Minister, Donald Tusk.

After joining the Schengen zone on Dec. 21 with nine other EU members, Poland toughened its visa requirements for Ukrainians who had previously obtained the documents easily and free of charge.

The change has particularly hurt Ukrainians in the west, where many people are involved in cross-border trade and black-market work with their richer neighbor.

Poland debates ratification of convention

Iwona Bojarczuk
STAFF JOURNALIST

Rapid breakthroughs in biology, medicine and genetic engineering have led many governments to recognize the need for legal and ethical regulations guaranteeing that these sciences do not violate people's rights or dignity.

One kind of regulatory approach is a multinational bioethical convention saying what countries should and should not do in biology, medicine and genetic engineering. Europe has such a convention, which the Council of Europe signed in 1997.

Poland took part in the deliberations that led to the convention and signed it in 1999.

But parliament has yet to ratify it. With little opposition to the convention from members of parliament, and with the Roman Catholic Church having no problem with it, the Tusk government is moving to try to get it ratified. It will ask a panel of experts to study the convention. If the experts have no problem with it, the government will ask parliament to ratify it.

Poland has already adopted some of the convention's regulations. For example, it has laws governing organ and tissue transplants.

However, it has not passed laws on many other issues the convention deals with.

An example of an issue that the convention covers but that Polish law does not is in-vitro fertilization, or fertilization of a human egg in a laboratory setting. The convention requires a legal contract on the procedure between the company that provides the reproductive cells and the medical facility that carries out the in-vitro fertilization process.

The full name of the convention is: "The convention of the protection of human rights and human dignity against abuses of biology and medicine." The overarching principle of the convention is: "The interest and the good of human beings must prevail over the interests of society and science."

Besides in-vitro fertilization, the convention covers medical experiments on humans, transplants, genetic manipulation and the treatment of human fetuses, egg cells and sperm cells.

As soon as a nation's parliament ratifies the convention, it becomes law in that country.

There is little or no opposition to the convention in the Polish parliament.

Church leaders say Poland needs regulations on what science and medicine ought to be able to do and not do with

respect to human beings.

Both Archbishop Jozef Zycinski of Lublin and Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz of Krakow have said it is too dangerous to leave issues such as cloning to the consciences of physicians and scientists. Regulations are needed, they say – and the convention would do that.

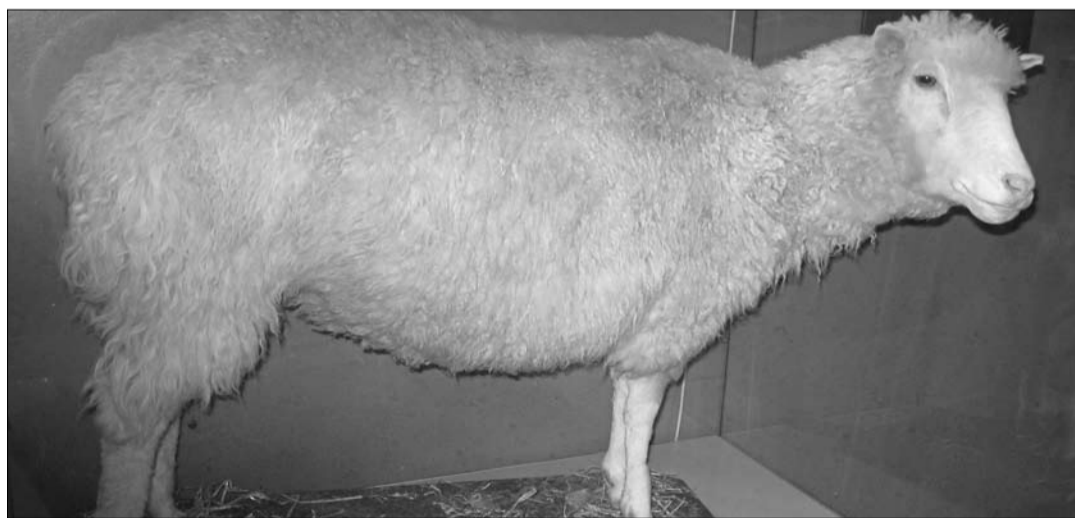
"Now nothing is regulated," said Krakow Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz.

Jaroslaw Gowin, the deputy leader of the ruling Civic Platform Party, said he will assemble a panel of experts to look into whether the convention covers all of the bioethical issues that Poland needs to address. If the experts say it does, the government will move toward ratification.

"Poland must prepare itself for ratification of the bioethical convention because there exists a scandalous 10-year delay," he said. "It is high time that Poland took a decision on this issue."

Rafal Grupinski, a key aide to Prime Minister Donald Tusk, said Tusk wanted an expert appraisal of the consequences of Poland ratifying the convention.

Grupinski noted that "the convention does not cover such touchy issues as abortion or euthanasia" so Poland could pass laws on those subjects without being in conflict with the convention.



Dolly's remains as exhibited in the Royal Museum of Scotland, first mammal to be cloned from an adult somatic cell.

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REGIONAL NEWS

EU, Ukraine resolve final obstacle to WTO membership

The EU and Kiev have resolved the final obstacle to Ukraine's bid to join the WTO, paving the way for the country's membership of the free trade body, the European Commission said late last week.

EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson and Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Hryhoriy Nemyrya struck an agreement in London late Wednesday on Ukrainian reductions in export duties on some raw materials.

"The agreement clears the way for the final approval by WTO members of the terms of Ukraine's accession," the EC said in a statement.

"Following ratification of the accession agreements, Ukraine will become a member of the WTO," it added.

The 27-nation EU is the Ukraine's largest trading partner, taking 25 percent of the country's exports in 2006 and providing 42 percent of its imports, according to the EC.

Following the agreement in London, the EU's executive arm said that it would now launch negotiations with Kiev for a "comprehensive" free-trade agreement. (AFP)

Belarus sentences journalist over Mohammed cartoons

A journalist in ex-Soviet Belarus was sentenced late last week to three years in prison for printing cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, his former editor told AFP. Alexander Sdvizhkov, 49, was sentenced after being found guilty of breaking laws against inciting racial or religious hatred, according to Alexei Karol, editor of the now defunct newspaper *Zgoda*. Charges were first filed against Sdvizhkov, the weekly's deputy editor, in February 2006 after he took the decision to print the cartoons. In any event, the cartoons were never published as *Zgoda's* management blocked distribution. But prosecutors started proceedings and closed down the title in March 2006. The cartoons were copies of those that sparked demonstrations across Europe after publication in Denmark's *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper in 2005. Sdvizhkov fled to Russia, but was arrested on his return in November 2007.

The government in Belarus, situated between Russia and the EU, is frequently attacked by human rights organizations and Western governments as repressive. Under Islam conventions, portraying images of the Prophet is considered blasphemous. The OSCE's representative for media freedom sharply criticized the sentence.

"In 21st-Century Europe, it is shocking to see an editor arrested, tried behind closed doors and punished beyond any acceptable limits only for reprinting cartoons produced elsewhere and that have been published everywhere," the OSCE's Miklos Haraszti said in a statement.

"Persecution of journalists for trying to inform the public on important issues is a misuse of hate speech laws. In fact, the Belarus government has used the international controversy around the cartoons as a pretext to eliminate a critical voice from public life," he added. International media watchdog Reporters Without Borders said: "It is highly likely that this was just a pretext for punishing an opposition journalist. The circumstances of his arrest reinforce that interpretation." (AFP)

Canada may deport Ukrainian for war crimes

Canada's Supreme Court late last week refused to grant a new appeal to an elderly Ukrainian former Nazi who for years has fought extradition to Italy. The high court did not explain its ruling on Michael Seifert, whom Italy is seeking to have serve a life term for murdering and torturing prisoners at a Nazi transit camp in the country's north in 1944-1945. Seifert, who has lived in Canada since 1951, maintains he is innocent of the crimes at the Bolzano camp. He was convicted in Italy in absentia in 2000.

In Canada, a British Columbia court in 2003 said he should be extradited to Italy. The ruling was upheld the following year by another provincial court. The high court's decision in theory clears the way for Seifert's extradition. (AFP)

Internet course for priests



Iwona Bojarczuk
STAFF JOURNALIST

Krakow's Roman Catholic archdiocese will offer an online course beginning next month aimed at helping priests deliver more effective sermons.

The move to Internet teaching of sermons comes at a time when more priests are using computer-based tools to deliver their messages from the pulpit. These tools include multimedia presentations. Twenty-five priests in Poland and abroad will be able to take the semester-long course, which will last until summer.

Krakow's Saint Stanislaw Publishing House is producing the multimedia materials for the course.

Although the cost of the course is relatively high – 800 zloty – many priests are eager to sign up, the archdiocese says. Those who pass the final examination will receive a certificate signed by Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz of Krakow.

Today's sermons should be short, concrete and vivid, which is easier said than done. That's why the archdiocese decided on the course.

The students will not only write their sermons but record them so instructors can hear their delivery. The instructors will give them feedback on the sermons' content, including how well they are communicating what the priest wants to say, and on the priests' speaking skills.

Students will receive multimedia training aids and be able to get online advice from such sermon experts as Father Edward Staniek of the Pope Theological Academy in Krakow.

"Nowadays we are facing a new challenge – how to evangelize using modern means of communication," Father Staniek said.

In the future, multimedia presentations that include pictures will play a greater role, he said.

"The more pictures we have, the easier it will be to evangelize," he said. He noted that over the centuries many artists have painted pictures of Biblical events and people, especially Jesus.

These works could be used to help deliver the messages of sermons, he said.

After all, he said, "the greatest painting masters were great theology masters as well."

Father Robert Necka, the spokesman for the Krakow archdiocese, agrees with Father Staniek that more and more priests will be delivering multimedia sermons.

Some Krakow priests are already doing so, including Father Jacek Stryczek, who often preaches to medical students.

Father Krzysztof Podstawka, director of the Single Mothers Home in Lublin, said the Internet is a great tool for priests. "A priest's education cannot end after graduation from the seminary," he said.

"Sermons are a huge challenge for a priest," and they should be delivered in ways that today's church-goers can relate to, Father Podstawka said. That suggests multimedia.

In a day when people's attention spans seem to be short, a sermon should last no longer than 15 minutes, he said. The core of the message can be delivered in a few sentences, he added.

Coal-fired Poland in fighting mood over EU emissions rules



Belchatow power station.

THE KRAKOW POST

Coal is king in Poland, the EU's top producer, and Warsaw is poised for a fight to keep burning as much as possible in power stations, feeding its economy despite the pollution.

Sitting on an estimated 140 years' worth of coal reserves, Poland is on tenterhooks ahead of Brussels' announcement Wednesday of final proposals for how the EU's 27 member countries will have to shoulder the burden of slashing 20 percent of the bloc's greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

"We hope the European Commission is taking into account the fact electricity production in Poland remains and, unfortunately, will remain based on coal burning, which is a polluting technology. That's a Polish specific, and there's no getting away from it," Environment Ministry spokeswoman Elzbieta Strucka told AFP.

Poland, which has a population of 38 mln, generates 96 percent of its electricity in power stations fired by coal, much of it from the country's still-plentiful Silesian reserves in the south.

In contrast, the proportion in neighboring Germany is 60 percent, and in France, 10 percent.

Coal miners were the aristocrats of Communist Poland's working class and despite losing some of their privileges since its collapse in 1989 they still remain influential and command both respect and fear among politicians when they hit the streets with protests.

"Poland won't be in a position by 2020 to make significant changes to this dominant technology," said Wladyslaw Mielczarski, an expert from the European Energy Institute think-tank.

The 2004 EU entrant currently lacks the financial resources to upgrade to less-polluting fossil-fuel power stations nor is it ready to launch a program for the construction of nuclear plants, said Mielczarski.

"Poland also lacks the right conditions to be able to develop wind power and hydraulic plants," he added.

Alternative energy sources and energy-saving programs nonetheless represent the

country's best chance to change tack fast, according to Andrzej Kassenberg, head of Poland's Institute for Sustainable Development.

"The Communist era left us with an industrial base that wastes an incredible amount of energy. But whenever we've actually done a real economic calculation of the costs, and shut down or upgraded the most polluting plants, Poland has achieved real results," he stressed.

Poland was able to more than meet its Kyoto Protocol obligations to curb emissions of carbon dioxide – one of the main gases held responsible for global climate change – largely thanks to the closure of a swathe of polluting, Communist-era industrial behemoths during market economy reforms after 1989.

The country's emissions are now 32 percent lower than in 1988 – surpassing the required six-percent cut – despite a tripling of the number of vehicles on the road amid growing wealth since the fall of communism.

But the EU's executive body, the EC, wants Warsaw to do even more.

In March 2007, the Commission gave Polish heavy industry a carbon dioxide emission quota of 208.5 mln tons for 2008-2012, almost 27 percent lower than Warsaw had requested.

Like several other ex-Communist EU nations which joined the bloc in 2004, Poland complained that Brussels' calculations had failed to take into account the needs created by rapid growth – the country's economy is expanding by around six percent a year, keeping Poland near the top of the EU table.

As a result, Warsaw last year launched a lawsuit at the European Court of Justice to contest its quota.

"Poland has growing energy needs and should have the right to a higher quota," said Environment Ministry spokeswoman Strucka.

With producers required to buy pollution permits under the EU's carbon-trading system if they want to exceed their quotas, the ministry is forecasting electricity prices could balloon by 18 percent by 2012.

Poland receives poor rating in economic report

Kinga Rodkiewicz
STAFF JOURNALIST

The Heritage Foundation and *Wall Street Journal* have prepared their annual Economic Freedom Report. Poland has no reason to be proud. According to the 2008 Index of Economic Freedom which covers 162 countries and 10 specific freedoms – such as trade freedom, business freedom, investment freedom and property rights – Poland was far down the list at No. 83.

All of the other "post-communistic" countries, including Bulgaria and Romania, ranked higher than Poland.

Experts say Poland's low position is the result of obstacles to investment, a high level of corruption and insufficient protections for private ownership.

The report analyzes economic freedom in five geographic regions: Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The top 10 most economically free countries are: Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, Chile, Australia and Great Britain. The bottom positions on the list: North Korea, Cuba, Turkmenistan and Libya.

"The European region enjoys moderate growth and inflation," the report says, "but has been plagued by higher unemployment rates than it should naturally endure because the welfare state economic model promoted by some as socially 'superior' has failed to generate more employment opportunities year after year."

The Index of Economic Freedom is also important because it links human rights and economic freedom.

"Citizens in nations that are built on greater economic freedom enjoy greater access to ideas and resources, which are the forces that let all of us exchange, interact and participate in an increasingly interconnected world," the Heritage Foundation says on its web site. "Access, another form of freedom that has practical promise, is an important transmitting mechanism that allows improvements in human development and fosters better democratic participation."

In comparison to the last year's report, Poland improved its position on the chart by three places.

The government with Donald Tusk as prime minister has promised – after the elections – to reduce the tax burden and to propose a flat-rate tax. If it will result in higher economic freedom in Poland, we will see the results in the next report.

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Internet access in Poland among worst in OECD



Michal Wojtas
STAFF JOURNALIST

Even though 2007 brought a major breakthrough in the Polish broadband Internet market, it's still among the worst developed in Europe. However, the end of the government communications monopoly of TP S.A. gives hope to Internet users in Poland for lower prices and better quality.

Last year Polish Internet users for the first time were given a choice of broadband suppliers as the government ordered TP S.A. to rent its infrastructure to other companies willing to enter the market. The action was essential for competition, because France Telecom owns most of the Polish cable and optical-fiber networks.

The changes came as a result of work done by the Office of Electronic Communications led by Anna Strezynska. Given the power to regulate the market, she has used her authority to set rules and guidelines for the companies and to achieve her main goal: lower prices for telephone and Internet connections in Poland.

At the beginning of 2007, two TP S.A. competitors from the telephone market – Netia and GTS Energis – also became Internet providers. As clients of the former monopoly TP S.A. were permitted to cancel their contracts without financial penalties, tens of thousands switched to the new suppliers.

Swedish Netia was more successful and now provides broadband connections to 210,000 customers. Cable TV operators Multimedia Polska and UPC have 190,000 and 265,000 clients respectively. The three biggest mobile phone operators combined supply Internet for 550,000 laptop or palm-top users.

But they still cannot match TP S.A., which has nearly 2 mln customers. Competition on the broadband market has benefited customers, but Poland is still far behind countries with the best Internet access.

According to the 2007 Communication Outlook of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Poland is ranked 26th of 30 countries because of its low broadband infrastructure and high prices.

While average broadband transfer speed in the OECD countries was 13.7 megabits per second, in Poland it was as low as 4.2. The Communication Outlook survey did not include all positive effects of the changes on the Polish market in 2007, as it was published in November.

The number of computers per Polish household remains low, which hampers network infrastructure development. According to the Polish Central Statistical Office, 54 percent of households have a computer, while only 30 percent have broadband access to the Internet.

PM picks new security chief



Jacek Cichocki

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Prime Minister Donald Tusk early this week announced he had nominated an expert on the former Communist bloc as his security coordinator, after the previous postholder stepped down.

Tusk said he had picked 36-year-old Jacek Cichocki as secretary of state for security issues.

Cichocki's job involves coordinating the work of the various arms of Poland's intelligence services on behalf of the prime minister.

Cichocki is a specialist on the global energy sector.

From 2004-2007 he was also at the helm of a state-funded Center for Eastern Studies, a think tank which analyses the political, economic and social situation in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Cichocki was nominated following last week's resignation for unspecified personal reasons of Pawel Gras, 43, who remains a member of parliament for Tusk's liberal Civic Platform.

Dell opens second Euro assembly plant



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

U.S. personal computer giant Dell early this week announced it had inaugurated a new 200-mln-euro (\$290-mln) factory in the central Polish city of Lodz.

The site is the second assembly plant opened in Europe by Dell, which already has a factory in Ireland, and will employ 1,200 people.

The Lodz plant will be "one of the most advanced in Europe," Dell said.

Dell said that its subcontractors were set to invest a further 53 mln euro in the area.

The factory will assemble products including the "Latitude" and "Inspiron" computers and will enable the company to shave two days from its current delivery times, Dell said.

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REGIONAL BIZ

Poland's LOT buys 12 Embraer-175 planes

Polish flag carrier LOT said late last week it had signed a contract with Brazilian aircraft maker Embraer to buy 12 ERJ-175 medium-haul planes.

The deal, the cost of which was not revealed, also includes an option to purchase a further 12 aircraft from the Embraer stable, LOT said.

The first 12 82-seat ERJ-175s will be brought into service between 2009 and 2012 and are intended to replace the company's ERJ-145 aircraft.

LOT said the contract also allowed it to take delivery of four ERJ-190 or ERJ-195 aircraft in place of the final ERJ-175s. The ERJ-190 and ERJ-195 have 102 and 112 seats respectively. In a statement, Embraer's vice-president Mauro Kern said the deal would make LOT Europe's largest user of the Brazilian company's planes. The Polish airline has four ERJ-175s, 10 ERJ-170s and 11 ERJ-145s in its medium-haul fleet, and 15 long- and medium-haul aircraft from U.S. giant Boeing and 13 regional planes built by the French-Italian company ATR. LOT is a member of the Star Alliance, steered by Germany's Lufthansa. In the first three quarters of last year, LOT made a net profit of 143 mln zloty (40 mln euro, \$59 mln), an increase of 66 percent on the same period in 2006. (AFP)

Poland, Eureko seek settlement in PZU battle

Poland announced late last week that it had begun talks with Dutch-based group Eureko to try to settle a long-running dispute over leading Polish insurance company PZU.

During a meeting in Warsaw, Treasury Minister Aleksander Grad and representatives of Eureko officials agreed that they wanted to "find an amicable solution" to nearly nine years of jousting over the Dutch group's stake in PZU.

The two sides have agreed to set up a task force that will set down the rules and timetable for further negotiations, a treasury statement said.

In 1999, Eureko bought a 30-percent stake in PZU for 3.1 bln zloty, then worth some 694.5 mln euro. Its stake has since risen to 33 percent minus one share but Eureko insists it is entitled to a further 21 percent under the terms of the privatization contract. Poland's treasury currently holds a 55 percent controlling stake in the vast company.

A string of Polish governments from both the left and right have fought Eureko's bid to take majority control of PZU, provoking a protracted legal battle for control over Central Europe's largest insurance company. (AFP)

Visa customers in Central Europe hit by ATM glitch

Visa said late last week that a glitch in its transaction system in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary had left an unspecified number of customers with duplicated withdrawals on their accounts.

"The transaction error occurred on Tuesday morning when there was a duplication of ATM transactions," Visa Europe spokesman Simon Kliene told AFP.

Kliene confirmed the problem was noted in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

"Customers could have been charged on more than one occasion for each withdrawal," Kliene confirmed.

A late week edition of *Dziennik* daily described the experience of one of its editors, whose name was not released.

"On Monday he withdrew 50 zloty [15 euro, \$20]. Yesterday he checked his account balance. It turned out the system duplicated the withdrawal 17 times. In effect his balance dropped by 850 zloty," *Dziennik* said.

Kliene did not disclose how many customers had been affected by the glitch, nor the total number of Visa customers in the three countries affected.

"We know where the fault exists," Kliene said. "The key thing now is to work with banks to rectify the problem."

The Visa spokesman categorically ruled out the malfunction was the result of an attack by hackers.

"No, absolutely no way is this the work of hackers," he said. "We've never been the victims of an attack - we have the most robust security in place." In Poland, customers of MultiBank, mBank, Citibank, Toyota Bank and Poland's leading state-controlled bank PKO BP were affected, according to *Dziennik*. Visa Europe apologized to cardholders in Poland, in an official statement obtained by AFP. (AFP)

Inflation hits 4.0 pct in December



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Poland's inflation rate continued its steady rise in December to hit 4.0 percent, up from 3.6 percent in November, official figures showed early this week.

On a year-on-year basis, inflation rose 3.0 percent in October, 2.3 percent in September and 1.5 percent in August.

On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.3 percent in December from November, the national statistics office said.

Inflation for 2007 averaged 2.5 percent, compared with 1.0 percent in 2006, it added.

Keeping annual average inflation below the current EU-set benchmark rate of just under 2.0 percent is a key criteria for countries seeking to adopt the euro.

Poland has said that a switch from its currency, the zloty, to the European single currency is still at least four years away as it tries to meet other criteria including reining in its budget deficit.

Poland cuts 2007 deficit to almost half of forecast



Ministry of Finance in Warsaw.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Poland slashed its state budget deficit last year to almost half the forecast figure, the Finance Ministry said late last week, marking a crucial step towards EU targets and adopting the euro.

The 2007 deficit was around 16.9 bln zloty (4.7 bln euro, \$7.0 bln), compared with the 30 bln zloty projected in the 2007 budget, said Deputy Finance Minister Elzbieta Suchocka-Roguska.

Two weeks ago, Suchocka-Roguska had estimated the 2007 deficit would be less than 19 bln zloty.

The 2007 budget had forecast that the overall public deficit, which includes the deficits of the state, as well as local authorities and the health service, would amount to 3.7 percent of gross domestic product, substantially exceeding a 3.0-percent target for eurozone membership.

The deputy minister did not say what the actual public deficit now represents in terms of total economic output.

However, a ministry official told

AFP: "Given that the state budget deficit is the principal source of the public deficit, we estimate that the latter could be below 3.0 percent of GDP."

The EU's executive body, the European Commission, had estimated that the ratio would fall to 2.7 percent in 2007, rising again to 3.2 percent in 2008 and 3.1 percent in 2009.

The 2007 budget had been approved by Poland's previous government, led by the conservative and euro-receptive Law and Justice party.

The 2008 budget, recently passed by the business-friendly and euro-philic Civic Platform administration which took office in November, forecasts a deficit of 27.09 bln zloty, or 3.2 percent of GDP.

The new government predicts GDP growth of 5.5 percent in 2008. The economy grew 6.4 percent in the third quarter of last year on a 12-month comparison.

Under the Maastricht Treaty which created economic and monetary union, and laid down obligations and conditions for EU members to adopt the single currency, a public

deficit should not exceed 3.0 percent of output. When Poland joined the EU in May 2004, its fellow members gave it until 2007 to bring its deficit into line with the 3.0-percent benchmark.

The Stability and Growth Pact, which reinforces this discipline for countries in the eurozone, requires the public accounts to move into surplus in the medium term. The public deficit covers central government, social, and local authority budgets.

In joining the EU, Poland became bound to work towards achieving criteria for membership of the eurozone which, with the accession on Jan. 1 of Cyprus and Malta, now has 15 members from the 27 countries in the EU. The main targets concern inflation, interest rates, currency stability and containment of the public deficit and debt, together with independence of the central bank in managing monetary policy.

While euro adoption is the priority for the new government, Finance Minister Jacek Rostowski has said a switch from the zloty to the single currency is at least four years away.

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Real estate prices continue to rise



Kinga Rodkiewicz
STAFF JOURNALIST

High property prices in Poland are prompting many developers to try and renegotiate their purchase contracts.

If the renegotiation is rejected, developers sometimes just break their contracts and pay fines to the property owners.

"Actually, many developers have broken agreements, paid the fines and bought land somewhere else," said Jacek Bielecki, a director of the Polish Association of Developers. "It is a clear business calculation. The situation should persuade property owners to reduce their prices."

According to Bielecki's view, land prices have been rising very quickly because of speculative capital, especially

Spanish. "Actually this speculative capital is now pulling out of Poland, so there is no reason for such high prices," he told the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*.

Experts emphasize that any decrease in property prices will not be a large one.

"Everything depends on location and the property's use," Kacper Zaka of the DI BRE Bank told *Rzeczpospolita*. "Land for building houses, especially in the suburbs of big cities, is still very popular. That's why I won't predict a big price decline in this category."

However, many developers have walked away from signed contracts. The latest example was in Poznan, where Triton Development withdrew from an agreement to buy 6.8 hectares near Lake Malta. The company

planned to build a hall, a hotel, a shopping center and some apartments. Triton promised to pay 40.9 mln zloty for this ground. According to a statement from the company, Triton withdrew from the project after a profitability analysis came up short.

"There are markets like those in Poznan or Katowice where property owners haven't noticed a break in the market. They still demand high prices and that's why we have the failed transactions," said Henryk Feliks, a vice-director of the development company GANT. "On the other hand, in many Polish cities like Warsaw, Krakow and Wroclaw, we can see lower prices than in 2007."

If the exorbitant land prices start to fall, that will be good news for those who plan to build a house.

Gov't changes stance on business



THE KRAKOW POST

Prime Minister Donald Tusk has announced many changes in government's attitude towards business. The most important is to increase economic freedom for Polish companies.

The number of controls should be shrinking and the accounting becoming much simpler.

"I would like to be a prime minister who understands better than my forerunners that true economic success and the wealth of Polish people are born in the companies, not in politicians' offices," Donald Tusk said at a meeting with employers.

Tusk's Civic Platform Party received great election support from businessmen because the party promised to lower taxes and seek a unified tax for all companies.

Tusk has thanked Polish businessmen for creating 1.5 mln jobs and has promised to change the stereotypes connected with businessmen.

One proposal is to introduce the presumption of innocence to business operations.

"In daily practice now, a businessman has to prove that everything is legal," Tusk said. "A businessman – according to a definition – is an honest person and has good will. The

presumption of innocence is an important element of bringing back bilateral trust in the great economic game."

As a consequence of this trust, the government wants to reduce controls. According to Civic Platform, regulations have become the politicians' tool to control the Polish economy.

Another proposal of the new government is to reduce the minimum initial capital required for public limited companies to 25,000 zloty and for joint stock companies to 250,000 zloty. These would be 50 percent reductions.

Another important issue for employers is to accept the euro as the Polish currency. Civic Platform, before taking power in 2007, announced that Poland should be using euro between 2010 and 2013.

Convergence criteria (also known as the Maastricht criteria) are the standards for EU member states to enter the third stage of European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and to adopt the euro. The four main criteria are connected with inflation rate, government finance, exchange rate and long-term interest rate.

According to the prime minister, Poland will adopt the euro as soon as it fulfills all criteria.

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E-studies for local foreigners



Urszula Ciolkiewicz
STAFF JOURNALIST

The idea of studies via the Internet is nothing new. Plenty of Warsaw schools have e-learning in their offerings. However, they are now discovering a new target – young Poles working abroad.

More and more new schools are offering master's titles to students whose only visits to a school building come at exam time. And soon it will become possible to take exams anywhere in the world.

The Polish Japanese Institute of Information Technology offers e-studies that don't differ much from the traditional ones – they just take place on the Internet. Professors meet their students in person twice a year, during the exam sessions.

The learners are in contact with the lecturers thanks to e-chats on the Internet.

One of the merits of e-studies is that they are much cheaper than the traditional ones in classrooms. They also are convenient for disabled people, as well as for those who live permanently abroad. According to education specialists, e-exams for Poles who live and work, for example, in London will soon become a common practice.

What do the students think about e-studies?

"This is a very good idea," says Marta from Warsaw University. But they will miss some of the highlights of campus life. "What about the student dorms and the parties every weekend?" she asks.

E-studies commence in Warsaw.

Warsaw Stock Exchange hit by slump



Warsaw Stock Exchange.

Michal Wojtas
STAFF JOURNALIST

The new year has been anything but happy for Polish investors. The Warsaw Stock Exchange has been hit by the worst plunge in two years. During the last two weeks, shares have fallen by 15 percent on average.

WIG index, the most important indicator for all Warsaw shares, fell from 55,521 on Jan. 2 to 46,204 on Jan. 16, which for most investors became known as Black Wednesday.

After stocks went slightly up on Thursday and Friday, the plunge continued after a weekend break. On Monday, WIG fell to 44,509, causing more panic among share owners.

The Warsaw exchange is following a worldwide down trend, even though the Polish economy is in good condition, especially when compared to the U.S.. Poland's economic growth forecast for

2008 is 5.5 to 6 percent, while the U.S. prediction is just 1.8 percent. But last week's pessimistic statement by U.S. Fed chief Ben Bernanke on the state of the American economy also influenced investors' expectations in Poland.

The January slump closed a period of growth on WSE from May of 2003, when the WIG was around the 15,000 level.

Those who began investing then or even during the last two years are mostly still on the plus side.

The main casualties of the stock decline are the newcomers who put their money into mutual funds in the last 12 months. They have already lost much of their funds in 2008 and have started panic money withdrawals in some cases. According to the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 bln zloty of the 145 bln in Polish mutual funds has been withdrawn.

Most experts say that it's far too late

now to be selling shares that already have lost much of their value. Their advice is rather to wait it out until the stock exchange begins to rebound. But even they are unsure when that will happen.

Most market consultants now expect the stock charts to flatten for more than half the year. The end of 2008 should see the WIG growing again, they say.

This forecast, however, could be adversely affected by international markets, mainly by the New York Dow Jones if the U.S. should head into a long-time economic recession.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy Waldemar Pawlak has appealed to investors to remain calm and has tried to assure them that the Polish economy is not threatened by other stock exchanges around the world.

Pawlak also has pointed to the high level of foreign investment and the internal demand in Poland.

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German civilians killed in revenge

Alicja Natkaniec
STAFF JOURNALIST

An isolated Baltic Sea island was the scene of an ugly chapter in modern Polish history – the revenge killing of dozens of ethnic Germans just after the end of World War II.

The Institute of National Remembrance in Poland has begun trying to discover what really happened on Wolin Island in the harsh winter of 1945 and 1946.

The institute, located in Warsaw, is responsible for gathering documents and information about Polish post-war history and prosecuting war crimes against peace and humanity.

Thick Baltic ice cut off the islands of Wolin and Uznam from the rest of Poland. That meant that would-be victims of any atrocities would be unable to escape. About 22,000 ethnic Germans were living on the islands when the Red Army

occupied Poland. The islands also included a few hundred Poles, mainly officials of newly established Communist institutions.

The Poles included Communist secret police and militia officials burning with a desire for vengeance. And, according to historians, they exacted their revenge. The Institute of National Remembrance said Poles killed more than 40 ethnic-German civilians, and robbed or imprisoned others.

Those committing the crimes drew no distinction between those who had been Nazi soldiers and ordinary ethnic Germans whose families had lived for centuries on Polish soil in such places as Silesia, Pomerania and East Prussia.

With many Poles harboring memories of German brutality during the war, acts of retribution against German civilians were common after the war. In fact, fearing retribution, many Germans fled.

When the ice that had isolated Wolin melted, a Communist official from the nearby mainland city of Koszalin arrived to check out the situation on the island. When he began hearing about the number of atrocities committed against Germans there, he launched an investigation. But the seven Poles who were found guilty received slap-on-the-wrist sentences – a few years imprisonment each.

Communist officials never let the public know about this disgraceful part of Polish history. Many facts about the atrocities are still unknown and that's why the Institute of National Remembrance is looking into the situation.

There are indications that most of the murders took place in a militia building on ul. Piastowska in Swinoujscie that is now a school. Institute staff believe the murder victims may have been buried under what is today an asphalt school playground.



on a historical note...

The Silesian parliament in Katowice.

Krakow film favorite Wajda delights at Oscar pick for WWII-era film



Andrzej Wajda.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Acclaimed director Andrzej Wajda, who has a strong following throughout Poland and in the nation's cultural capital Krakow, said he was delighted early this week at the Oscar nomination for his movie "Katyn," recounting the 1940 Soviet slaying of thousands of Polish soldiers, including his father.

"I'm extremely happy that such a subject has been well received," Wajda, 81, told reporters after learning he was in the running.

"Some said that it wasn't worth delving into history any more. Well it was worth it," he said.

"Katyn" was one of five films to receive an Academy Awards nomination in the best foreign film category.

It takes its title from the forest in the former Soviet Union where many of the 22,500 Polish army officers captured by the Red Army were massacred during World War II.

The film is primarily fictional, but the fact that it is based on real events adds to its emotional pull, Wajda said.

It also uses archive material shot by both the Nazi Germans and Soviet authorities.

Much of the film is set in the southern Polish city of Krakow between 1939 and 1950, and tells the story of the agonising wait of local women

for news of their loved ones.

Wajda's father, Captain Jakub Wajda, was one of the victims of the killings, making the movie a deeply personal affair for the director, who himself fought in the Polish resistance and began his film career in 1950.

The massacre at Katyn and a swathe of other sites came in the wake of Moscow's deal with Nazi Germany to invade and carve up Poland, in 1939.

The Polish officers captured by the Red Army were deemed anti-Communist "counterrevolutionaries" and picked out to be killed by the Soviet NKVD secret police.

The episode remained obscured for a long time, even when the Nazis revealed the existence of the mass graves they discovered in 1941 after they invaded the Soviet Union.

Moscow blamed the Germans for the massacre, and the West remained silent so as not to antagonize the Soviet Union, then a valuable ally in the fight against Hitler.

The subject remained taboo in post-war Poland, which was part of the Communist bloc until 1989.

It was only in 1990 that then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev admitted his country's responsibility.

"Russian cinema-goers will be surprised to

discover things which were covered up or airbrushed from their history," Wajda said.

However, he said he was pleased that the film has not stirred anti-Russian feeling in Poland since its release last September – on the anniversary of the 1939 Soviet invasion.

"Katyn" is considered a serious contender for an Oscar. It competes with Kazakhstan's entry "Mongol," which tells the epic story of the early life of warrior-leader Genghis Khan, and Russia's "12," about a jury deliberating its verdict on a Chechen boy accused of murdering his stepfather. The other nominees are Israel's "Beaufort," about Israeli soldiers based in Lebanon as they prepare to withdraw, and Austria's "The Counterfeiters," a drama based on a Nazi-led counterfeiting operation in the 1930s.

Wajda noted that all five films have a violent, military or historical flavour.

"Maybe people are afraid of a latent conflict in some unexpected part of the globe. Maybe film directors have a premonition," he said.

Wajda has been an unsuccessful Oscar nominee three times, earning picks in 1976 for "Ziemia obiecana" (The Promised Land), in 1979 for "Panny z Wilka" (The Maids of Wilko) and in 1982 for "Czlowiek z zelaza" (Man of Iron).

He won an honorary Oscar in 2000 in recognition of five decades of film-making.

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Mystical minaret near Rynek Kleparz

Monika Stumpo
STAFF JOURNALIST

As you hurry down ul. Długa on your way to the Kleparz Market you might have noticed the building on the corner of Pedzichow. You can see it much better from the other side of the street once the tram passes and you have a clear view of the three majestic towers rising above the otherwise drab apartments.

Your attention is drawn to the center tower, a minaret, the turret from which the muezzin calls Moslems to prayer. This minaret, bearing the Islamic Crescent, is a mystery on top of an otherwise typical building in an overwhelmingly Catholic country. On the wall outside is a plaque dedicated to Ludomil Rayski, a Polish pilot who fought in both World Wars defending not only Poland but Turkey since he was also a Turkish citizen. However, the minaret's story, begins not with Ludomil but with his father Teodor who according to legend at the age of 68 built the

structure for his second wife, a beautiful exotic Egyptian. Perhaps, then, this can be thought of as Krakow's Taj Mahal.

After the failure of the January Uprising of 1863 in Poland, Teodor Rayski emigrated to Turkey, then the center of the Ottoman Empire. At this time the Empire was going through a serious internal crisis. The sharia, or Islamic law, which dictated both spiritual and secular life in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Empire, was conflicting with Turkish nationalistic thoughts that were seeping in from neighboring European countries.

According to Ludomil Rayski's biography "A Flight Towards Bitter Fame" (literal translation of Polish title "Lot ku gorzkiej slawie") by J.S. Latka, the author of many books concerning Poles in Turkey, Teodor Rayski was taken in by a refugee center for Polish and Hungarian revolutionaries that Michal Czajkowski's, had set up. Czajkowski had taken the name Mehmed Sadyk Pasha.

Rayski joined the Ottoman Cossack Bri-

gade organized by Sadyk Pasha to continue the fight against Russian Imperialism. The expanding Russian Empire had declared itself protector of the Christian Orthodox faith and was trying to break up the Ottoman Empire by instigating religious turmoil in the Balkans and Caucasus.

When the Russo-Turkish War broke out in 1877 Rayski joined the newly formed Polish Legion in the Ottoman Army. As the saying goes "my enemy's enemy is my friend."

Teodor Rayski served the Ottoman Empire until his retirement, returning to Poland in 1892 to settle down in Krakow. After all those years Rayski came back as a Turkish citizen, a Moslem and married to Jozefa Syroczyńska, the owner of this apartment building on ul. Długa.

Here the facts dwindle and the legend begins. Supposedly, Teodor Rayski then left for Egypt where he met an "exotic beauty." The story goes that Rayski planned to marry her and he returned home to build the mosque and minaret for her.

We do know that the blueprint for the minaret tower addition was accepted by the city of Krakow on June 7, 1910. It was built by a renowned local architect Henryk Lamensdorf who had designed dozens of other apartments in Krakow. From the attic of the apartment building a staircase leads up to a barrier blocking entrance to the minaret with the Islamic Crescent. Unfortunately, just three years after the city granted the right for the use of the attic as a mosque Teodor Rayski died. After Teodor's death the minaret and mosque lost its meaning. Was there a mysterious Egyptian who came to Krakow to live? In any case the facts show that when Rayski's wife Jozefa Rayska died the apartment was then given over to the city. Lacking utilities, the mosque/attic was not lived in. In the 1950s a tenant transformed the mosque into a livable apartment. He equipped the attic with electricity and water and built a kitchen and a bathroom, destroying the semicircle niche which forms the mirhab. The mirhab is the wall indicating the direc-

tion of the Kaaba which Moslems should face when praying. The only punishment for this destructive renovation was a 300 zloty fine.

The existence of Teodor's Egyptian will probably never be found out. Although, it does seem likely that the minaret and mosque were built for Rayski's personal use, while the apartment definitely belonged to his first wife Jyzefa. It would seem far fetched that this Polish woman would have acquiesced to her husband's wish to build a minaret for a second woman.

Teodor Rayski lived in Turkey for over 20 years and clearly Islam had a profound impact on him throughout the remainder of his life. This tribute to Islam in Krakow reminds us of wars and empires past; of a man's acceptance and conversion to a new religion and his return to his native land.

Teodor Rayski, his Polish wife, the legendary Egyptian beauty and the tower that connects them all are just another element of the historical magic added to the many legends of Krakow.

Promoting corporate responsibility for a responsible Krakow



Krakow AIESEC members.

Adelina Krupski
STAFF JOURNALIST

As part of the AIESEC project "Responsible Krakow," a conference was held on 17 Jan. at the University of Economics, comprising an introductory presentation, a

to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The innovative project aims to spread the CSR strategy through the formation of responsible leaders, aware of their influence on the environment.

AIESEC, the world's largest student organization, developed "Responsible Krakow" in order to promote CSR among businesses and students. Since the idea has yet to catch on in Poland, the focus is on attracting as many participants as possible, to educate them about CSR, and to present them with the possi-

bility of enhanced competitiveness achievable through the operation of a responsible business.

Szymon Konarski, from the public relations agency Krakowian International Consultants, opened the conference with a presentation dealing with the essential points of CSR and the advantages a company can expect once the strategy is introduced.

According to Konarski, the establishment of a responsible business is not a single action, but rather a building process, taken on voluntarily, which requires a system that extends beyond statutory obligation – what a company needs to do to comply with the law.

The CSR approach maintains that, in order to prosper, a business must protect and promote the interests of society by orientating itself with four key areas.

First, an audit should be carried out in order to verify customer satisfaction. Second, the business must ensure that its employees are motivated, by providing them

with benefits such as training, healthcare and bonuses. Next, in offering financial aid, the business helps in fulfilling the material needs of the community.

Finally, investing in new, eco-friendly technologies is one of the many ways in which a business can demonstrate forward thinking while supporting the environment and often reducing waste in the process.

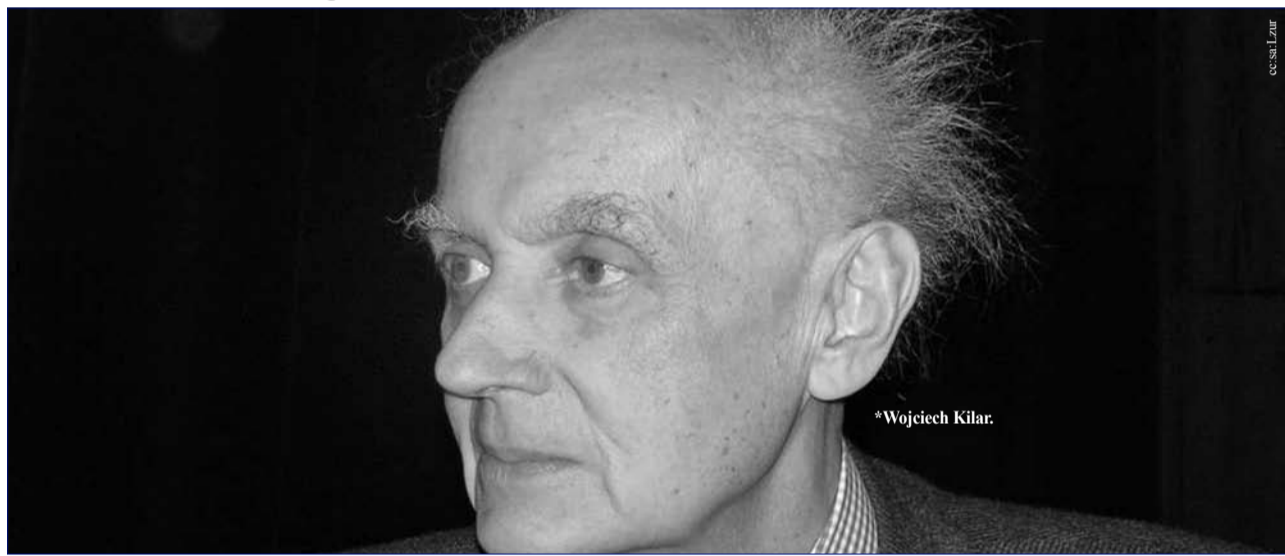
To remain competitive in the global world, businesses need to consider the welfare of their customers, employees, communities, and environment in all aspects of operation. This central aspect of CSR is especially relevant to the world of globalization, which has led to higher expectations on the part of clients. Occurrences of boycotting and the gradual loss of meaning in traditional marketing methods prove that clients now seek more than quality in the product – they look hard at the values of the company. Consequently, companies are searching to find new ways to identify themselves. The presentation also addressed questions dealing with

Cinema"), which presented fine and famous movies.

The screenplay of the concert was created by Stanislaw Zawislinski, author of a book on Kieslowski, called "Wazne, zeby isc" ("The important thing is to go on"). The music will be performed by the Simfonia Cracovia orchestra, directed by Michal Nesterowicz.

Concert info: The event will take place on Friday and Monday, Jan. 25 and 28, at 19:30 in the Krakow Philharmonic, on ul. Zwierzyniecka 1. The free tickets (no more than two per person) can be obtained at the Tourist Information Network (Siec Informacji Miejskiej) office on ul. sw. Jana 2 from Jan. 23. They should be picked up soon as they may not last long.

Remembering Kieslowski at Juliusz Slowacki Theater



*Wojciech Kilar.

Krzysztof Skonieczny
STAFF JOURNALIST

The Juliusz Slowacki Theater will host a concert Jan. 25 of Wojciech Kilar's music, commemorating Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski.

Because of immense interest in the event (the free tickets were gone within two days), it will be repeated three days later, Jan. 28 at 19:30 in the Krakow Philharmonic.

The 1941-born Kieslowski studied direction in the National Film School in Lodz. Among his most famous works are 10 short television films, known as "The Decalogue" ("Dekalog"), and a trilogy he directed in France, "Three Colors" ("Trois couleurs"), consisting of the movies "Blue," "White" and "Red," created between 1993 and 1994.

"Red," was completed supposedly at the peak of his career. It was nominated for the Academy Award in two categories, Best Original Screenplay and Best Director. Nevertheless, he decided that this was his last picture. He did not have much time to reconsider the decision because he died two years later after heart surgery. Apart from his films, Kieslowski left screenplays, most of them written along with his friend, lawyer Krzysztof Piesiewicz, who was also the co-author of "Decalogue" and "Three Colors." They include "Heaven" – a part of another trilogy that included "Purgatory" and "Hell" – which was filmed in 2002 by Tom Tykwer, and included Cate Blanchett as the main character, Philippa. This concert will consist

of pieces of film music by another of Kieslowski's friends, composer Wojciech Kilar. Kilar's works include scores for "Bram Stoker's Dracula" directed by Francis Ford Coppola, and Roman Polanski's movies, such as "Death and the Maiden," "The Ninth Gate" and "The Pianist."

In Poland he is best known for his long-time cooperation with Krzysztof Zanussi, and, among others, with Kieslowski himself, for whom he wrote the music for the 1981 "Przypadek" ("Coincidence").

Hosting the event will be one of Kieslowski's favorite actors, who appeared in nine of the "Decalogue" movies, Artur Barcis, along with Grazyna Torbicka, a television journalist, best known as host of the program "Kocham Kino" ("I Love

KRAKOWPOST.COM

Thousands queue for collector's coins

Michał Wojtas
STAFF JOURNALIST

Anyone on ul. Basztowa late last week had a chance to see something unusual: hundreds of people queued in front of the seat of the regional branch of the National Bank of Poland (NBP).

Some of them were in line even before dawn in order to guarantee themselves the best possible position to buy a newly issued collector's coin with an image of a peregrine falcon.

Some were in line just to sell their place to those who didn't want to wait for hours.

The 20-zloty silver coin was offered for 91 zloty, but still thousands of people wanted to buy it, as it was possible to sell it for as much as 300 zloty right after leaving the bank. Many regard rare coins as a good investment, and some collectors were trying to buy as many falcon coins as possible.

The bank had anticipated a high demand for the falcon coin and a total of 107,000 were minted. Only a quarter of

them were sold by the bank in Poland's biggest cities; the rest went to collectors via specialized trade agencies.

It was not the first time that NBP collector's coins have sparked such a big interest among Poles. In December, a coin issued to commemorate writer Joseph Conrad's 150th birthday produced brawls among the people standing in lines.

And all the fuss is not without reason. For example, a 20-zloty coin with pieces of amber was sold for 57 zloty in 2001, and now its market price reaches 3,000 zloty, even though 30,000 of them were minted.

Coin prices remain high in Poland, although many collectors expect them to slump even before the introduction of the euro to Poland in 2012.

This year, many new coins will go into collectors' hands, as NBP plans to issue 13 new designs.

Among them is a 200-zloty coin to commemorate the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing. The Olympic coin will be issued in April, and its actual price hasn't been decided yet.



Jagiellonian University opens Center for Holocaust Studies



Collegium Novum, the main building of Jagiellonian University.

Adelina Krupski
STAFF JOURNALIST

The Jagiellonian University in Krakow inaugurated its Center for Holocaust Studies on Jan. 17, as the first establishment among Polish colleges to concentrate on the study and research of Jewish annihilation.

Belonging to the Faculty of International and Political Studies, the Center emerged from the expansion of what was previously an office under the Institute of European Studies. Dr Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, director of the new Center, states that, since the year 2000, there has been a worldwide appeal for the commemoration of the Holocaust, which, together with the natural development of the University, led to the formation of the Center for Holocaust Studies.

The objective is to conduct

didactic lessons pertaining to the Holocaust and directly related issues. Consequently, educational materials will be designed to counteract anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and discrimination. The Center aims to spread knowledge on the Holocaust and other genocides through a wide range of methods, such as organized conferences, seminars, gatherings, readings, and lectures. In addition, it plans to produce its own web site, publications, and electronic database.

According to Dr Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, this area of study requires more than the straightforward presentation of dry, historical facts during lectures. The innovative teaching methods employed are appropriate as they allow for the instigation of emotions. Lecturers themselves are also encouraged to participate in workshops and documentary film viewings.

Recognizing its role in Krakow, the Center intends to organize exhibits, which will be fully open to the public.

Another key effort on the part of the Center is the development of partnerships with international and national institutes holding similar characteristics and goals, such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, with which the Jagiellonian University has been collaborating, as well as cooperation with relevant publications and scholarly periodicals.

The Center also plans to guarantee students and lecturers access to existing educational resources in Europe, Israel and the U.S. relating to the memory of the history, culture and annihilation of Jews in Poland, as well as the history and significance of Auschwitz for current and future generations.



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Warm winter, cold beer at Pod Wawelem



Krzysztof Skonieczny
STAFF JOURNALIST

This year's strangely warm winter encourages you to, among other things, take a walk around Planty Park.

If, by any chance, on such a walk you get hungry, there is certainly one place you should take into consideration. Its name is Pod Wawelem—Kompania Kufłowa, and it rests calmly, as the name suggests, near the foot of the Wawel hill.

An old red truck full of beer barrels greets the guests, and seems to warn them that they are about to enter a somewhat different dimension, and then it really happens. Going through the door seems like leav-

ing the 21st Century and entering a slightly postmodern version of the beginning of the 20th.

The interior is designed as what appears to be a slightly humorous tribute to the Austro-Hungarian empire's restaurants. It has several spacious rooms, each one with an original decoration. Parts of the kitchen can be seen through an internal window, showing that the staff has nothing to hide – and, indeed, nothing to be ashamed of.

Even a place seemingly as uninteresting as the rest room has been made with a touch of humor, with witty notes hanging on the walls here and there, advising the guests to “behave silently and with dignity” while inside, or reminding the “guests from

the current Capital” of the “possibility to wash their hands.” For some unknown reason, these notes hang only in the men's room.

And what about the food? The name Kompania Kufłowa (The Beer Mug Company) suggests the most important drink – and indeed, beer is quite cheap and comes in large, two-pint mugs (12 zloty).

The meals are also quite large, and certainly not expensive, with most of the main courses costing from 19 to 30 zloty.

The menu includes mostly dishes from what was the Austro-Hungarian empire, but is not limited to them, so you can choose the plate-size Giant Schnitzel as well as oysters or an Argentinean steak.

Local Rio festival

Iwona Bojarczuk
STAFF JOURNALIST

Krakow is staging its first Carnival this month and next.

Tourism officials hope the event becomes bigger and bigger each year so, it draws throngs of visitors at a time that has traditionally been a tourism dead spot.

Running from Jan. 26 to Feb. 5, Carnival will feature 40 events, including parades, concerts, costume balls and film shows – the same ingredients as the world-famous carnivals in Rio de Janeiro and Koln.

Most events will be free. Free tickets to events in places with limited seating capacity are available at City Information Net locations. City Information Net is a network of offices where tourists receive free information about the city and local cultural events.

“Carnival is a new tourist prod-

uct for Krakow,” said Maja Drexler, deputy director of the Krakow Festival Office. Tourism officials hope it becomes a staple of the city's tourism calendar, she said.

The idea for a Krakow Carnival came from a line on the widely read tourism web site Orbitz.com. “Krakow has a busy social life and a wonderful carnival,” it said.

Krakow actually didn't have a Carnival at the time, but the web site notation got tourism officials here thinking about one.

The “colorful parades, full of splendor,” and the dancing and fireworks may be unable to compete with the Carnival extravaganzas in Rio's Copa Cabana district at first but Krakow's carnival tradition is worth starting, said Grazyna Leja of the Krakow tourism office. She came up with the idea.

Krakow's Carnival will start in Brazilian style Jan. 26, when about

300 KTO Theater actors and actresses ride on parade floats from ul. Florianska to Rynek Glowny (Market Square).

The Cracovia Danza ballet troupe will perform Carnival dances at the Grotoska Theater. Carnival-themed movies will be shown at the Sfinks movie theater.

Krakow will celebrate Fat Thursday – a staple of other cities' Carnivals – Jan. 31.

In the Catholic tradition, Fat Thursday is the last day before Lent and a day of feasting.

Carnival-goers can watch couples in costumes of royalty dancing a waltz at Maly Rynek (Little Square). Krakow's confectioners will supply the spectators with free doughnuts.

Carnival organizers plan to make it more spectacular each year.

This year's event will just be a preview of things to come, said Agnieszka Gilarska, head of the Festival Office.

“The custom of the Carnival celebration was derived from an ancient feast which was aimed at restoring order in the world,” Drexler said.

Although Krakow's Carnival does not have that ambitious a goal, “it will surely offer positive energy for the entire year,” she said.



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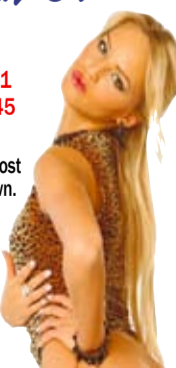
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