

The place of Wielkopolska in Europe

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Wielkopolska is among Poland's largest regions in terms of area, population and economic potential. Its today's area of nearly 30,000 km^2 makes it the country's second largest region, surpassing Albania and nearly the size of Belgium. Its population of 3.3 million exceeds that of Latvia falling slightly short of those of Ireland and Lithuania.

Wielkopolska leads in an attractiveness ranking of Polish regions based on a wide range of criteria. It is a leader in growth, foreign direct investment and investor attractiveness. The region's capital Poznań (population of 566,000) is home to factories of such multinational corporations as Volkswagen, Bridgestone-Firestone and Beiersdorf.

The region enjoys a strong economy with massive growth potential. Its total Gross National Product (Poland's GNP is 9.1%) and per capita income are Poland's third largest.

Wielkopolska is Poland's most investment-oriented region boasting the country's lowest rate of unemployment. Over 57 percent of its population inhabit urban areas. The region's capital city prides itself on its strong academia (it is home to approximately 120,000 students). Wielkopolska's local governments maintain close ties with many European regions and towns. The Region maintains a Regional Information Office in Brussels. Its Poznań International Fair is an institution recognized Europe wide.

Wielkopolska is situated in Western Poland in the middle course of the Warta River. Poznań lies half-way between Berlin and Warsaw (both capitals is 300 km away). The region is particularly significant historically. It is the original cradle of the Polish state. Gniezno and Poznań were Poland's capitals in the Middle Ages.

A landmark event in Polish and European history was the Gniezno Congress of March 1000 during which Saint Adalbert's tomb was visited by Emperor Otto III, a former friend of this martyr bishop. The Convention marked Poland's acceptance into the club of European nations. The symbolic bestowal to Boleslav the Brave of a diadem and Saint Maurice's spear by the Emperor is considered to have marked the birth of Poland as an independent and sovereign state. Soon afterwards, Poland proclaimed the establishment of its first Catholic metropolis with a capital city in Gniezno.

The tradition of the Gniezno Congress as an event of spiritual and political importance was picked up in the late 20th century. Some of these regularly-held conventions were attended by the presidents of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Poland.

By the 18th century, Wielkopolska became Poland's strongest regional economy. This culturally diverse province was home to strong German and Jewish communities. Following the second partition of Poland in 1793, Wielkopolska became a part of Prussia (for some of the time existing as the Grand Duchy of Poznań). After the successful Wielkopolska Uprising of 1918 and in the aftermath of World War I and the Versailles Conference, Wielkopolska was reintegrated into the restored Polish state.

In an effort at national and economic confrontation with the occupying Prussia, Wielkopolska residents developed their unique ethos. Its key feature is particular care for thrift and pragmatism. Other distinctive attributes of the local residents are hard work, good work organization, frugality, care for tradition and staunch local patriotism. Wielkopolska inhabitants have developed their own dialect and customs. They are open to innovation and prepared to face the challenges of the global economy. For centuries, Wielkopolska played a pivotal role in transferring Western European culture into Poland.

As stated in its growth strategy through 2020, the region's strongest assets are its strategic location between the Eastern and Western Europe, highly educated people, the multifunctional Poznań metropolis, extensive protected areas and undeteriorated environment, a very active population, well-educated labor, a diverse and dynamic economy, research and development potential and well-developed infrastructure (motorways, airport). ■

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