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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Poland - Country of shifting borders and difficult history** | [http://chain.eu/img/1.gif](javascript:mt(1,1,44342)) [http://chain.eu/img/h.gif](javascript:mt(13,2706)) [http://chain.eu/img/pijl.gif](javascript:mt(1,1,44350)) | | Poland, as many countries, had great times when was the biggest country in Europe, and a very bad when it ceased to exist. The borders of the country were shifting from west to east and from south to north by hundreds of kilometers following the armies. (1) (2)    http://chain.eu/userpics/1509975297.png    A country that changed its territory so much, wasn’t from the very beginning ethnically homogenous. Not only borders but also the fate of other people, sometimes very faraway, influenced the history and character of the country. The guards of our first prince were the Vikings from Scandinavia and the first chronicler to mention the Polish state under the rule of prince Mieszko I, was a diplomat and merchant from the Moorish town of Tortosa in Spanish Al-Andalus, traveling along the trade routes leading eastwards to Kiev and Bukhara, known under his Arabic name of Ibrahim ibn Yaqub. In the summer of 965 or 966 Jacob made a trade and diplomatic journey from his native Toledo in Moslem Spain to the Holy Roman Empire and Slavonic countries.  The first extensive Jewish emigration from Western Europe to Poland occurred at the time of the First Crusade in 1098. The Jews, encouraged by the tolerance, settled throughout Poland. Later in the XVth century Poland attracted another wave of immigrants as the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, as well as from Portugal, Austria, Hungary and Germany.     |  |  | | --- | --- | | http://chain.eu/userpics/1509978930.jpg*Synagogue in Zamosc* | http://chain.eu/userpics/1509979860.jpg *Bima -Synagogue in Łańcut* |     The word Poland is pronounced by Jews as Polania or Polin (hebr. פולין), these names for Poland were interpreted as "good omens" because Polania can be broken down into three Hebrew words: po ("here"), lan ("dwells"), ya ("God") and Polin into two words of: po ("here") lin ("you should] dwell"). The "message" was that Poland was meant to be a good place for the Jews. In later centuries up to 80% of the Jewish world population lived in Poland. Indeed, with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Poland became the recognized haven for exiles from Western Europe; and the resulting accession to the ranks of Polish Jewry made it the cultural and spiritual center of the Jewish people.    **Destruction**  The population of Jews in Poland, which formed the largest Jewish community in pre-war Europe at about 3.3 million people, was all but destroyed by 1945. Approximately 3 million Jews died of starvation in ghettos and labor camps, were slaughtered at the German Nazi extermination camps or by the *Einsatzgruppen* (death squads). Between 40,000 and 100,000 Polish Jews survived the Holocaust in Poland (2)    **Multi-ethnicity**  Although the concept of an ethnic minority is mostly used with regard to the modern period, historically, Poland has been a very multi-ethnic country. Early on, the influx of Jewish and German settlers was particularly notable, forming significant minorities, or even majorities in urban centers. After the *Polish-Lithuanian union* of mid-14th century and the *Union of Lublin* (6) (7) formally establishing the Commonwealth in 1569, Lithuanians and Ruthenians constituted a major part of the Commonwealth populace.(3) As a consequence of religious persecution, the Dutch, Scots, English and Germans arrived in Poland at the beginning in the first half of the 16th century and later. Before World War II, a third of Poland's population was composed of ethnic minorities.  After the war, however, Poland's minorities were mostly gone, due to the 1945 revision of borders, and the Holocaust. Under the *National Repatriation Office*, millions of Poles were forced to leave their homes in the Kresy (eastern part of the country incorporated into the Soviet Union) region and settle in the western, former German, territories. At the same time approximately 5 million remaining Germans (about 8 million had already fled or had been expelled and about 1 million had been killed in 1944-46) were similarly expelled from those territories into the Allied occupation zones. Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities found themselves now mostly within the borders of the Soviet Union; those who opposed this new policy (like the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the Bieszczady Mountains region) were suppressed by the end of 1947 in the *Operation Vistula*.    **Connections and changes**  Mentioning Jewish merchants, known as *Radhanites* and the expelled Jews from Spain after 1492 the connection between Muslim Spain and Poland was underlined. It may be surprising but the bonds and influences between so distanced countries and Al-Andalus existed and were quite strong. People were moving and are moving constantly, leaving their traces around the Globe. Poland for many years has been one of the most homogenous countries, but a very significant influx of Ukrainians (there are almost 2 mln in 2017 - one more million than in 2016) is changing country’s character…(9)    ----  1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66y49BnxLfQ>  2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Poland>  3 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Poland>  4 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Righteous_Among_the_Nations>  5 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_minorities_in_Poland>  6 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lublin>  7 [www.lublin.eu](http://www.lublin.eu)  8 www.polin.pl  9 http://www.strefabiznesu.pl/wiadomosci/a/dodatkowy-milion-ukraincow-do-pracy-w-polsce-najwiecej-na-mazowszu-slasku-i-w-wielkopolsce,12255736/ | | | Tadeusz Sulek  [Other articles by this author](javascript:mt(25,6702)) | | | [Main](http://chain.eu/?a=886)  [Project](javascript:mt(2))  [Magazine](javascript:mt(3,1))  [Albums](javascript:mt(4)) |