

Timeline: The History of the Polish American Congress

Part I: 1944-1980

- **May 28-June 1, 1944:** The Polish American Congress is founded at a massive rally in Buffalo, New York. Some 2,600 delegates from Polish American communities around the country take part in this significant event of World War II.
- **1945:** Following President Franklin Roosevelt's return from his conference at Yalta with British Prime Minister Churchill and Soviet leader Stalin, Charles Rozmarek, President of the PAC, and the other members are among the first in America to publicly denounce the Great Power agreements on Poland and Eastern Europe as a betrayal of the US reasons for participating in the World War
- **1946:** Rozmarek angrily denounces the handling of thousands of Polish displaced persons throughout western and central Europe by UN authorities and calls for immediate changes after observing the conditions in Germany and France. While in Paris, Rozmarek calls for free elections in Poland to determine the country's future.
- **1948:** The PAC lobbies successfully for special Congressional legislation signed by President Harry Truman that leads to the admission of 140,000 Polish displaced persons, war victims and veterans of the Polish armed forces in Western Europe to settle permanently in the US.
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- **1949:** The PAC backs the creation of Radio Free Europe as a voice of truth to the peoples of communist-enslaved Eastern Europe.
- **1952:** A special Committee of the U.S. Congress strongly endorsed by the PAC investigates the murder of more than 14,000 Polish Army officers at the beginning of World War II in the Soviet Union.
- **1957:** Following the collapse of the Stalinist regime in Poland in 1956 and its replacement by a new, seemingly reform-minded Communist regime headed by Wladyslaw Gomulka, the PAC backs a U.S. government foreign aid initiative aimed at weaning Gomulka away from Moscow's authority. Immigration to the U.S. is renewed, enabling thousands of Polish families to be reunited in this country.
- **1960:** Eisenhower is the first U.S. President to speak at a meeting of the Polish American Congress when he addresses the fifth PAC convention in Chicago. Senator John Kennedy, the Democratic Party's presidential nominee, also speaks to the assembly. In later years, Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton will all address the Polish American Congress or its leaders on issues pertaining to PAC concerns.
- **1964:** The PAC endorses President Lyndon Johnson's policy of "Building Bridges" to "peacefully engage" the peoples of Eastern Europe and to encourage the democratization and independence of the entire region, from Soviet domination.
- **1969:** The first formal dialogues between the PAC and leaders of the American Jewish community begin in an effort to create new understanding and communication between two peoples who lived together in Poland for seven centuries until the Nazi occupation and devastation of Poland and their ruthless annihilation of the Jewish people
- **1975:** The PAC endorses President Gerald Ford's signing of the international treaty on security and cooperation in Europe in Helsinki, Finland. Among other things, the "Helsinki Accords" legitimize a set of human rights for the people living under Communist rule in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe.

- **1980:** The forming of the Solidarity Trade Union Movement in Gdansk in August in a time of extreme economic and political crisis brings an immediate PAC endorsement for the union's cause under the leadership of President Mazewski and Vice President Kazimierz Lukomski, a veteran observer of the Polish scene and a member of the World War II era Polish Combatants' Association. The PAC, working in cooperation with Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Advisor, urges the United States to pressure the Soviet Union against intervening in the crisis and calls on the Polish government to negotiate responsibly with Solidarity. The initial confrontation subsides.

Part II: 1981- 1994

- **1981:** PAC sponsored efforts begin to raise money and materials to meet the needs of Poles suffering in an economy near collapse. The PAC Charitable Foundation initiates its work for Poland by delivering medical goods in short supply to Poland. In December, after Poland's military suppresses Solidarity and proclaims martial law, the PAC backs American sanctions against the U.S.S.R. and the Polish state
- **1982:** The PAC in cooperation with Mr. Witold Plonski of Brooklyn wins substantial funding from the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities for its proposal to create a national "Consortium for Humanities and Arts Programming". Over the next five years, Plonski's Polish American Committee in the Humanities sponsors several hundred lectures, conferences and cultural exhibitions around the US dealing with the Polish and Polish American experience. This is the most successful effort in history to enlighten the American public and Polish Americans about Poland's past, its culture and political experience.
- **1984:** President Reagan meets with PAC leaders at the White House on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising. There he reaffirms his administration's support for the policy known as the National Endowment for Democracy and endorses the creation of a Polish agricultural foundation proposed by the Catholic Church.
- **1987:** The PAC wins Reagan administration termination of economic sanctions against Poland, a position in accord with the thinking of Pope John Paul II and Solidarity leader Lech Walesa.
- **1989:** In November, the PAC greets Lech Walesa in Chicago where he receives a hero's welcome. The PAC goes on record in lobbying for economic assistance proposals to Poland advanced by President Bush and the U.S. Congress. The first result of these efforts is passage of the "Support East European Democracy Act of 1989" which commits more than \$800 million to help Poland in its transformation into a democratically governed society with a free market based economy.
- **1990:** PAC successfully lobbies President Bush for full U.S. support to international confirmation of the permanence of Poland's western border with the reunited Germany, something that is crucial to the future stability of central Europe.
- **1991:** The disintegration of the Soviet Union follows upon a failed last-ditch attempt in August by old guard Communist leaders to reverse Gorbachev's reforms, although Gorbachev himself is soon swept aside by Russia's elected President, Boris Yeltsin. Poland, the vast Solidarity movement, and the Roman Catholic Church all played major roles in helping bring about this incredible international development
- **1992:** The PAC plays a leading role in the activities of an historic congress of Poles from more than fifty countries (including the states of the former Soviet Union) that takes place in Krakow, Poland under the auspices of the *Wspolnota Polska* association. The congress is among other things, a great family reunion occurring in a Poland at last free and independent. President Lech Walesa, Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka and Cardinal Jozef Glemp are among the Polish dignitaries who address the congress. An "American Agenda" is unanimously approved by the delegates to the eleventh national PAC convention in Washington in October. Accordingly, the Congress commits itself to giving renewed and vigorous attention to building broad knowledge and respect for Poland's history and culture in this country and the advancement of worthy Polish

American nominees to every level of government responsibility in America. The task before the PAC is to put this agenda into effect.

- **1994:** President Moskal, Vice President Wojcik, Treasurer Dykla and a delegation of Polish American Congress leaders play key roles in two meetings of Americans of Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Slovak heritage that are held with the top leaders of the United States government including President Bill Clinton and Vice President Albert Gore. The meetings held in Milwaukee and in Washington, D.C. are themselves the direct result of a massive and unprecedented PAC campaign aimed at mobilizing Polish Americans and their friends to pressure the Administration to back NATO membership for Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. More than 100,000 letters and postcards and countless thousands of telephone calls and telegrams deluge the White House in an unprecedented display of PAC strength and resolve.

Part III: 1995-2009

- **1995:** The PAC backs voter registration efforts in the Polish American community and responds to a tragic fire in Gdansk, Poland by sending special supplies to the many burn victims.
- **1996:** During the presidential campaign, the PAC strongly urges the candidates to support Poland's entry into NATO and immigration reform, and affirming America's commitment to the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. A major ally is Congressman William Lipinski of Illinois.
- **1997:** President Clinton moves forward Poland's admission into NATO; the PAC acts effectively on behalf of Polish flood victims and on immigration reform.
- **1998:** The national ancestry question is retained for the 2000 census through PAC efforts.
- **1999:** The admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into NATO is approved by all sixteen members of the Alliance. PAC members take part in the celebrations in Washington. A U.S. Congressional Caucus on Central and Eastern Europe is created through PAC efforts.
- **2000:** The PAC effectively fights for justice against the policemen involved in shakedowns of Polish immigrants in Chicago.
- **2001:** The PAC Charitable Foundation raises \$125,000 on behalf of the victims of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11.
- **2002:** The PAC defends thousands of Polish students who are victims of errors in the management of the J-1 visa work/travel program to the US. The PAC is invited by the Speaker of the Polish Senate to participate in the Polonia Advisory Council and also takes a lead role in the Council of World Polonia under National Executive Director Les Kuczynski. Barbara Borzuchowska Andersen of the Washington, DC office introduces an internship in the Nation's Capital for Polish American university students.
- **2003:** The City of Chicago settles a lawsuit brought by the PAC over the unfair gerrymandering of the city's Polish American community.
- **2005:** Frank J. Spula becomes president of the PNA and the PAC following the death of President Moskal. He is still President of PAC today.
- **2006:** The PAC's Washington, D.C. office begins offering a number of programs in the capital to present the Polish American contribution to the U.S.
- **2007:** The PAC inaugurates its Medal of Freedom and honors Casimir Lenard as its first recipient. Senators Barbara Mikulski of Maryland in 2008 and George Voinovich of Ohio in 2009 are recipients of the PAC's highest recognition.
- **2008:** The PAC passes an amendment to its by-laws prohibiting collaborators with communist regimes from holding office in the organization. This action reaffirms the PAC's historic position as stated in its by-laws. Annual "Polish American Congress Days" begin to be held in Washington

DC and state capitals across the country. President Spula travels to Poland to reaffirm the PAC's close ties with the Polish government.

- **2009:** PAC remains active in working closely with the US Administration and legislators on several legislative initiatives, to include resolutions celebrating 90 years of US-Poland diplomatic relations; commemorating 20 years since the round table talks and first free elections in Poland; urging the Postal Services to issue a stamp honoring Matt Urban; recognizing 6,135 Poles recognized by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations" for helping their Jewish neighbors during WWII; recognizing 70th anniversary of the beginning of WWII as well as Soviet invasion on Poland; proclaiming Casimir Pulaski to be an honorary citizen of the United States posthumously, to name a few. PAC holds in Chicago its first National Conference, entitled "The Polish American Community in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities" designed to bring together representatives of the Polish American Community nationwide and to initiate a discussion about the future of the Community.
- **2014** - an electronic newsletter – "*Your Voice in America*" starts to be published
- **2016** - the PAC held its first-ever national meeting outside of the United States in Rzeszów, Poland attending the prestigious "2016 Forum Polonii Amerykańskiej" (Forum of American Polonia) held July 25-30, in Rzeszów, Podkarpacie Region – this meeting helped Polish Americans who traveled to Poland the opportunity to hear firsthand all that Poland is doing to continue its efforts to be a strong business and tourist center in Europe.
- **2017** - PAC develops a robust internship program giving Polish American students an opportunity to advance their knowledge about issues concerning Polonia, Poland and the region of Central and Eastern Europe, helping to advocate for the interests of Polish Americans on Capitol Hill, as well as honing their professional skills related to policy and communications work among other fields – the internship attracts undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students from all across the United States, and it is also popular among Polish Americans studying in Poland;
- **2018** -
 - PAC launches new website at the old domain www.PAC1944.org, and additional social media pages, such as Instagram and LinkedIn; the PAC National Office began implementing new digital communication strategies;
 - PAC leads in organizing a coalition of groups opposed to moving Andrzej Pitynski's Katyń Monument from Exchange Place in Jersey City. The National PAC Office continues to work together with this coalition to make Exchange Place a public pedestrian pathway, FREEDOM PLAZA NORTH, to prevent further efforts by real estate development companies to try to move the Katyn Monument.
 - PAC is a major partner with the United States sponsored World War I Centennial Commission;
 - Press releases are being routinely sent to media outlets to inform American and Polish American citizens of matters of importance to the Polish American community (i.e. in 2018, to help celebrate and commemorate the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining its independence, releases were prepared to inform media outlets and their subscribers as to the importance of November 11, 1918 in Poland's history);
- **2019** –
 - PAC National Office persuades the other member organizations of the Central and East European Coalition to organize in-Congressional District visits by CEEC delegations of constituents to show members of Congress that the CEEC is not just an inside the Beltway talking shop; we have political power, the votes of our numerous constituents, in the country.
 - PAC National Office builds a more effective and efficient communication effort with staffers on the Capitol Hill on both the Democrat and Republican side for advocacy purposes.