



The Kingdom of Poland, the Grand-Duchy of Lithuania, Princedoms of Ruthenia and the Ukraine, Duchy of Prussia and the Protectorates of Moravia, Bohemia and Silesia

King: Władysław IV

Population: 15,000,000 est

Capital: Warsaw (pop: 200,000 est) - The so-called Jewel in the East is a bastion of culture and the most beautiful city in Europe thanks to Władysław IV. Serves as the location of the Sejm, the Royal Palace, and a major military base due to its position on the Vistula River

Government: Parliamentary monarchy with broad suffrage (based on land possession) and effective power, except in wartime when the King assumes broad control of the government. Even the non landholders of Poland have rights, such as habeas corpus, during peacetime.

Economy: The Polish economy is a story of uneven development. Moravia, Bohemia and Silesia are the major centres of industrial activity for Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw is a thriving metropolis equal culturally to all but Paris in Western Europe while Krakow is home to a world renowned university with a thriving arts and literature scene. At the opposite extreme is the Polish east which has lawless and flirts with famine in all but the best years. Swedish tolls on Polish trade in the Baltic have all but crippled those parts of the country that sold their goods overseas.

Culture: Identification with the Polish state is strong outside of the East and in Polish Germany. The upper and middle classes speak Polish as a matter of course and are strong supporters of the state. Orthodox Christians are subject to vicious persecution which is the cause of the instability in the East. Polish Germany is broken into small states which each have a Diet and enjoy considerable autonomy. The German identity might be distinct but German nationalism is a weak force in Poland (for now).

Religion: Catholic (Roman rite) - Poland has remained loyal to Rome in no small part due to its good historical relations with France and its utter hatred of Sweden. The Church is not altogether influential however and the tithe sent to Rome is slight.

Regions:

Poland - The most influential part of the Empire with a good mix of industry and agriculture. Warsaw is the heart of the Empire and a major cultural and administrative centre.

Lithuania - Ruined in the last war with Sweden and still not much better. Nobody cares about it except those living there and the nobles stuck with estates there. The area is plagued by 'bandits'.

Ruthenia - The province is a staging ground for raids into Russia and Rome and the military presence keeps the 'bandits' manageable.

Bohemia: The industrial hub for Central and Eastern Europe. Prague is a major centre of music and claims most of the best composers of the last century.

Germany: Well defended due to the threat from England and Sweden. Moderately wealthy but the Swedes make life difficult.

Army: The largest in Europe, Poland focuses on fortresses and attrition warfare. With her large population, Poland can afford to fight, take heavy casualties, and then fight again. Polish Hussars have a well-deserved reputation of aggressive tactics and have achieved admirable success against foreign artillery positions.

Navy: The Swedish capture of Riga dealt a major blow to the Polish navy, in a battle where Poland lost over three quarters of its navy and most of its officers. The recovery has been slow since. An arsenal was created at Gdansk, and the Polish navy has created some frigates for coastal defense, but the sad truth is that the navy is poorly funded and suffers from a lack of prestige and expertise.

Threats:

- Swedish raids
- Rebellious Orthodox Christians
- Bandit attacks in the east
- Poverty in Lithuania

History:

The modern Kingdom of Poland could be traced to the union of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Jadwiga, crowned King of Poland despite her gender, birthed the union after she married Jogaila, the last pagan ruler of Europe, on the condition he and his subjects converted to Christianity. Rechristened as Władysław II, he and Jadwiga established a powerful empire, expanding their frontiers in all directions. The ascent of their daughter, Elisabeth, as sovereign, preserved the union and would continue the expansion of Poland, capturing the city of Minsk. The defeat of the Teutonic Order and the focus of the Holy Roman Empire on matters to the west would ensure that Poland could develop in peace. The Jagiellon dynasty saw their members gain the thrones of Hungary and Bohemia, and many nobles were content with Poland's hegemony in the east.

Perhaps living for so long without a threat saw the nobles wonder why they needed high taxes and a monarch that could interfere in their affairs. The failed expedition of King Alexander I in 1614 (who saw himself as a successor to the conqueror Alexander) to take Kiev and his subsequent death gave the Sejm, long powerless, the ability to dramatically increase their authority as they debated between several royal claims to the throne. Sigismund Jagiellon, Lord-Protector of Bohemia, was crowned King, but only after he agreed to a document agreeing to renounce absolutism in favor of "Golden Liberty", giving the nobles greater independence from the crown. For thirty years, Poland saw its revenues decline sharply, and its unity

weakened, as nobles conspired with and warred with their neighboring powers. It would be in 1641 though that the Great Northern War began between Poland and Sweden, where Sweden, with a smaller but well organized army, crushed the Polish forces, exacting a large tribute and territories. Poland signed a peace and some nobles attempted to rebuild, but others formed a fifth column of sorts, working with Swedish agents to help splinter the nation in exchange for ensuring their estates would remain unmolested and in their control if Sweden took control of the territory.

The remainder of the 17th and early 18th century saw continued Swedish interference in Poland, and even aggression from the Dominions, Sweden's sometime ally. In 1711 though, Poland's destiny would change with the death of King Sigismund II. By this point in time, Polish nobles had divided into two camps; the Swedish, mostly composed of nobles in the north fearing for the value of their estates, and the Polish faction, those determined to see the end of the backslide of Poland. Sigismund had left only daughters, and his eldest, Anna, was the rightful heir to the throne. The Sejm was called to crown a new King and the Swedish faction agreed to give Anna the throne if she agreed to marry the King of Sweden, forming a union between the two countries. This would safeguard Poland from future raids, but the Union faction was outraged and begged her to reject it.

Anna had a simple response for the Swedish faction. She killed them. She killed them all. She declared she would not be bound by the Golden Liberties and when Sweden, distracted by another war, attempted to send troops to Poland, but Anna was able to defeat their forces at the Battle of Kaunas, breaking Sweden's hold over her country. Anna was crowned Queen regent (a title she insisted on), and reigned over Poland for the next thirty years in peace. She encouraged the arts, sciences, and industry during a much needed reprieve from the Swedish invasions, but ensured that the next war Poland would be defended. Her son, King Władysław III would win against Sweden in 1746, taking the Duchy of Courland, and used a newly built navy to contest control over the Baltic and Swedish Estonia until the next war in 1763, when Sweden captured Courland and destroyed the Polish fleet at Riga.

Poland would try and fail to recapture the Duchy among other territories in the Twelve Years War, but would fail. Following the war, the prestige of the Jagiellon dynasty was at a low point once more; rebellions among the noble army officers forced King Jan IV to agree to restore the Sejm and many of the noble's liberties.

Now, Poland has recovered from its wars and rebellions, though not all is easy. Banditry is still rife in the east; Sweden and Rome nip from both sides. But the Polish Army is the great defender of the nation, and with liberty assured, the people are ready to fight against the invaders. Onwards!