

Polish News Bytes

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Our Warsaw Correspondent

Poland and the US have signed a delayed Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) allowing the United States to station its troops and military hardware on Polish territory. Following 14 months of grueling negotiations, the deal paves the way for the installation of US-pledged Patriot missiles and American troops to man on Polish soil as part of a NATO air-defense upgrade plan. SOFA will require American troops to pay taxes in Poland and be tried by a Polish court for any off-base crimes they commit. Last September the Obama Administration reneged on a long-standing pledge to install parts of a missile-shield in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Poland has been the lone beacon of growth in a European sea where other countries hover at or below zero Gross National Product. Poland achieved 1.7% GDP growth in the third quarter of 2009, up from 1.1% in the second quarter of the year, and will probably top the 2% level in 2010. Prime Minister Donald Tusk jubilantly tried to take credit for the results, but the opposition was quick to note that during the crisis most countries' GDP dropped by about six percentage points and slipped into the recession zone. Poland's was higher than the rest at the outset and therefore did not drop below zero level.

The term "Polish concentration camp" appearing in the world media is regularly protested by Polish diplomats and Polonian anti-defamation groups, but despite apologies and occasional retractions, they soon reappear elsewhere. Recently the German Foreign Ministry for the first time intervened and ordered a German public TV channel what had used the term to clean up its act. Polish public television has suggested that Poles should not settle for apologies or retractions but take the offenders to court the way Jews do with Holocaust deniers.

Young Poles between the ages of 16 and 29 constituted the majority of the some 350,000 people that moved to Great Britain in 2008 from the eight ex-communist countries, according to figures provided by the British Office for National Statistics. Unlike the early immigrants who mainly descended on London, the later arrivals began spreading across the country and now only one-third live in the London metropolitan area. But the economic crisis that erupted in 2008 saw a considerable exodus of recent immigrants. Some have returned to Poland, while others have sought greener pastures in Germany, Spain, France and even distant Australia.

78% of Poles are happy with their present jobs, according to a survey conducted by Poland's largest polling organization, CBOS. Only 11% dislike what they are doing and another 11 percent have mixed feelings on the subject. The highest level of job satisfaction was found amongst respondents aged 55-64 as well as university graduates and those who are financially well off. Seventy two percent of Poles describe their work as interesting but only 40% are satisfied with their wages, and 15% would like to change jobs.

Kraków's Royal Wawel Castle, Krakow, has announced a competition for writers and artists to create a comic book inspired by the victory of Polish and Lithuanian troops over the Teutonic Order on 15 July, 2010. It is open to young people aged 16-26 and is part of a large-scale educational project to mark the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald. One of the biggest battles of medieval Europe ended with the victory of King Władysław Jagiełło's forces over the hated Teutonic Knights. Wawel Castle has also announced a competition for an orchestral piece to be performed during the Grunwald

anniversary celebrations on July 15th 15 July, 2010.

Poland's post-communist daily "Trybuna" has gone out of business after struggling 20 years on the free market. A direct successor of "Trybuna Ludu", the official organ of the once-ruling Polish United Workers (Communist) Party, in recent years it lost readership as diehard communists died out and the Internet made increasing inroads into the print-media sector. When Gen. Jaruzelski declared martial law in 1981, "Trybuna Ludu" and the hard-line army daily "Żołnierz Wolności" were the only papers permitted to appear.

Convicted pedophiles and rapists will have their data and mugshot shown on the Internet, if Poland's largest opposition party Law and Justice has its way. The party is drafting a proposal that would make such a procedure mandatory, said the proposal's author, lawmaker Andrzej Dera. At present, such a measure can be ordered by the convicting judge but it is not automatic. The data is to be published at a special website operated by the Ministry of Justice.

Israel didn't want sick Polish Jews, a recently found message by Milwaukee-raised Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir told the Polish government in the 1950s. It was written during the second wave of post-war emigration from Poland (1956-58), when some 40,000 Polish Jews, mainly Holocaust survivors, moved to Israel. "Poland certainly did not intentionally send handicapped and aged people to Israel," said Professor Szymon Rudnicki, the Warsaw University historian who uncovered the letter. He feels it showed Meir to be a cynical politician more concerned about Israeli state interests than people.

Although the swine flu epidemic seemed to be gradually subsiding in Poland, health authorities have predicted an increase following the holiday season which is known for its social contacts and get-togethers. Professor Andrzej Horban, Poland's National Contagious Disease Consultant, warned against the greeting, kissing and hugging that occurs when sharing opłatek (Christmas wafer), ringing in the New Year and visiting relatives and friends. Poles should avoid crowds such as those at Midnight Mass and, if they do go, they should nod rather than shaking hands when exchanging the sign of peace.

Talking musical benches have appeared along Warsaw's historic Krakowskie Przedmieście and surrounding areas in connection with the 200th anniversary of Fryderyk Chopin's birth. The 15 special benches have been installed at various places connected with the composer's life and work in Poland's capital. Each is fitted with an audio device explaining the site's significance in Polish or English and provides a sample of one of Chopin's compositions.

The name "PGE Arena Gdańsk" was worth nearly \$13 million. That was how much the Polish Energy Group paid to rename the Baltic Arena, a modern sports stadium being built for the 2012 European Soccer Championships co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine. The city of Gdansk agreed to sell the naming rights to the stadium in order to cover some of the \$244 million in construction costs. Under the deal, the PGE logo is to be prominently displayed at two locations at the top of the stadium due to be completed in January 2011.

A Jewish Open University is due to be launched in Warsaw in early 2010. The project is essentially a lecture series open to the general public, and everyone over the age of 16 can attend. Participants will be able to learn about the tradition, creativity and social aid by Jews in four modules on the subjects, which will contain extracts from literature, music, culture and philosophy. The Jewish Open University is under the patronage of Warsaw University. More information is available at: mdunin@publicrelations.pl □

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only one bed was assigned to each family regardless of the amount of people. Everybody over 14 years old was forced into hard labor including pregnant women. Prisoners were forced to work in the woods in minus 40 degree weather with nothing but a prayer to keep them going and 400 grams of stale, black bread at the end of the day. Those who were too weak to meet the daily labor requirement were given less food.

After a few weeks most were losing their strength and a typhus epidemic was taking its toll. More and more crosses were marking the graves of the deceased. The beginning of the Soviet-Nazi war saved thousands of surviving prisoners. According to the Sikorski-Majski treaty signed in London on July 30, 1941, Stalin agreed to free all political prisoners and their families from the gulags. General Władysław Anders, who was freed from a prison, organized a Polish Army on the Soviet territory, known as the Second Infantry to fight alongside the Soviet Army against the Germans. Disease ridden and exhausted prisoners, including my father, put on an army uniform and joined the newly formed Polish Army to fight for liberation of Poland. The others who survived rushed to the south of the Soviet Union, mothers with children, orphans and the rest of the survivors, trying to join the transports leaving for Persia (today Iran).

Being in luck, my mother my brother Kazik and myself (my sister Hela died in Siberia) were able to join the last transport. According to statistics, 78 thousand who joined the Anders Army and 38 thousand civilians, mostly children and young adults under 16 years old, were able to leave this "paradise". Unfortunately not everybody managed to leave on time. Stalin halted the transports and the rest of the Poles had to stay in that God-forsaken land. Some were kept prisoners for 6 to 10 years some for the rest of their lives.

The Second Infantry left for the Middle East and orphans, mothers with children and the elderly were placed in DP camps all over the globe including Africa, India, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and Palestine (today Israel). Over there, far away from the motherland, children were growing up in camps, dreaming of going back to a free Poland. My childhood was stolen and I will never get it back. Today, as my generation is getting older, we must tell the world the truth and we must tell the next generations about the suffering of our nation's people. Let us bow and ask God to give them peace in heaven. Let us respect their memory.

This article was translated into the English language by Aleksandra Kaniak, Polish Interpreter/Translator (310) 714-3342. □

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experienced bias. On the other hand, they also are being recruited for federal jobs and invited to participate in conversations with top U.S. leaders as the government finds itself involved in conflicts across the Middle East and the Muslim world.

But Arab Americans -- who make up about 1.5% of Michigan's population, based on the 2000 census -- won't be counted as such in 2010. Census officials say part of the reason was to streamline and shorten the form so that more people fill it out.

Two of the 10 questions will ask about a person's race -- white, black or Asian -- and whether the respondent is Hispanic. Arabs are considered white.

"It's unfair because we are not treated as white in society and by the government, but we also don't qualify as minorities to get the benefits of some programs" such as minority contracts, said Imad Hamad, regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Still, Hamad and other Arab-American leaders are pushing Arab Americans to fill out the census forms because, in the end, they are part of wider communities, which would be adversely affected if there's an undercount.

Whites and blacks are not given the choice to further specify what their backgrounds might be. In the past, one out of six households would receive a long form with 53 questions, one of them asking about ethnic origin.

"We're aware of the problems with the census," Gary Locke, secretary of the Commerce Department, which oversees the Census Bureau, told a crowd of Arab Americans in Dearborn. "But we still need you to participate."

Locke and census officials said the ancestry question will be retained under the American Community Survey, which is done every month. But that survey reaches a much smaller percentage of the population than the full census.

Arab Americans and Chaldeans have varying views on the issue of race, said Andrew Shryock, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. His research showed that religion can affect racial identity, with Arab-American Christians much more likely to see themselves as white than Arab-American Muslims.

The imperfect racial label

Arab Americans and Chaldeans are 10 times more likely to identify their race as "other" as compared with the general population, according to the Detroit Arab American Study, a survey in 2003 of 1,000 Arabs and Chaldeans in metro Detroit.

"I'm often told by Arab Americans that they check 'white' on official forms but do not feel that they are 'white white,'" Shryock said.

In 1997, Mostafa Hefny, an Egyptian-American Detroit resident, filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Office of Management and Budget -- which classified Arabs as white in 1977 -- in order to be classified as black. In the lawsuit, Hefny said, because of his dark skin and kinky hair, he was more African than blacks such as former Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer. The case was dismissed in 1998.

Another challenge in getting Arab Americans and other ethnic groups to participate in the census is that some may be reluctant to give personal information to the U.S. government out of a fear the information will be given to law enforcement, said community advocates. In 2004, federal officials said that the census had forwarded information on Arab Americans to a Homeland Security agency that had requested it.

"This is the first census post-9/11," said Kim Hunter of the Detroit office of the Census Bureau. "We don't know what effect that will have." We have to make sure folks are engaged." □

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