

Regional development

Rebuilding Poland's industrial heartland

Pre-war Poland's largest economic project, the Central Industrial Region, is set for major redevelopment

The Sobieski Institute and the city authorities of Stalowa Wola have begun an initiative to revitalize the former Central Industrial Region (COP), an area created in the late 1930s to help Poland weather the period's worldwide economic crisis. The region comprises parts of the Świętokrzyskie, Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Mazowieckie and Małopolskie voivodships.

While few concrete details have been worked out, the organizers have gained the backing of the government, the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) and other cities in the region. It is known, however, that preliminary plans include establishing a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the area, as well as making use of a significant amount of EU aid and extending the A4 highway as far as Rzeszów and into Ukraine.

"We want to highlight the great efforts of that generation by modernizing the region again, this time using such incentives as Special Economic Zones or EU funds," said Stalowa Wola Mayor Andrzej Szlęzak.

"The COP was the largest project of the Polish state's intervention in the economy," explained Wojciech Morawski, the head of the Socio-Economic History Department at the Warsaw School of Economics.

The COP created 100,000 work places and accounted for 60 percent of all of the Polish government's investments during the period before World War II.

While the entire region is in great need of development, several projects which were completed as part of the COP in the 1930s now greatly contribute to Poland's economy, including: hydropower plants in Rożnów and Porąbka; an arms factory and steelworks in Stalowa Wola; a rubber and tire plant in Dębica; an airplane factory in Mielec; an arms and airplane-engine plant in Rzeszów; and a chemical plant in Sarzyna.

Anna Kalembasiak

Young entrepreneurs

Young and restless

The founder of a sailing-services firm has won a competition that will grant his business financing and free publicity

Bartosz Obracaj, the founder of Polconn – Complete Sailing Service, has won the 2007 edition of the PiNkubator Biznesu competition, which aims to support and promote young entrepreneurs and their businesses. The competition, held by private radio station Radio PiN in conjunction with the Polish Chamber of Commerce (KIG), chooses three business plans each year and grants them zł.24,000. These companies develop their business over one year, at the end of which a jury selects one to receive a prize of an additional zł.10,000 and a free, on-air promotional campaign.

This year's winner, Obracaj, had originally planned to develop Polconn into a sailing-services firm. The company's business plan called for cooperation with an investor from Germany, where the sailing industry is much more developed.



Bartosz Obracaj was able to adapt his firm to changing circumstances

"Unfortunately our investor decided to withdraw immediately after we were chosen as a finalist in the competition," Obracaj told *WBJ*. The sailing firm had to react quickly to stay afloat.

"Financial help from the organizers was significant in our case," said Obracaj. After the investor pulled out, Obracaj decided to change Polconn's activity and worked to turn it into a company offering travel services to South Africa.

"I was really surprised that we won, because we did not realize our business plan at all and changed our business con-

cept during the year," said Obracaj. But the competition's jurors saw things differently.

"The company was rewarded for its flexibility and ability to react to sudden, unexpected barriers," explained Andrzej Arendarski, president of KIG.

Polconn hasn't given up on its original idea of offering sailing services. "If we succeed in travel services to Africa, we are definitely planning to return to our original plans, because sailing services are practically undeveloped in Poland, and we want to change that," added Obracaj.

Anna Kalembasiak

Teachers reject proposal

During a meeting with trade union reps from the education sector, Education Minister Katarzyna Hall presented a draft resolution concerning wage increases. According to the draft, the base salaries of interns and teachers on contracts would increase this year by zł.200 gross monthly, while certified teachers would see an increase of zł.185. However, Hall's proposal was rejected.

Bad bet

In 2007, the turnover of bookmaking companies dropped for the first time in years, leaving them blaming internet-based competitors. "The amount of money Poles spend on online betting is already comparable to what they spend with traditional betting firms," said Bartłomiej Korniluk, an expert from the entertainment machines association IGPIOUR. Turnover fell to zł.800 million from a high of zł.830 million in 2006.

(Poland A.M.)

Red tape

Taking a stand

Polish entrepreneurship organizations have called with a common voice for greater economic freedom

Polish employers gathered last week to hammer out a common position on the modernization of the economy during the first Employers Congress in Warsaw. The event was organized by the six largest entrepreneurship organizations in Poland, including the Polish Confederation of Private Employers (PKPP) Lewiatan, the American Chamber of Commerce and the Polish Craft Association.

During the event, the government declared its will to cooperate with entrepreneurs. "You are the salt of this earth," Prime Minister Donald Tusk said on the first day of the Congress. He added that the development of entrepreneurship was beneficial for all social groups in Poland and that any change proposed by his cabinet would make employers' work easier.

"We will assess the government on the basis of the effects, rather than promises," coun-



KPP's Malinowski appealed for reduced bureaucracy

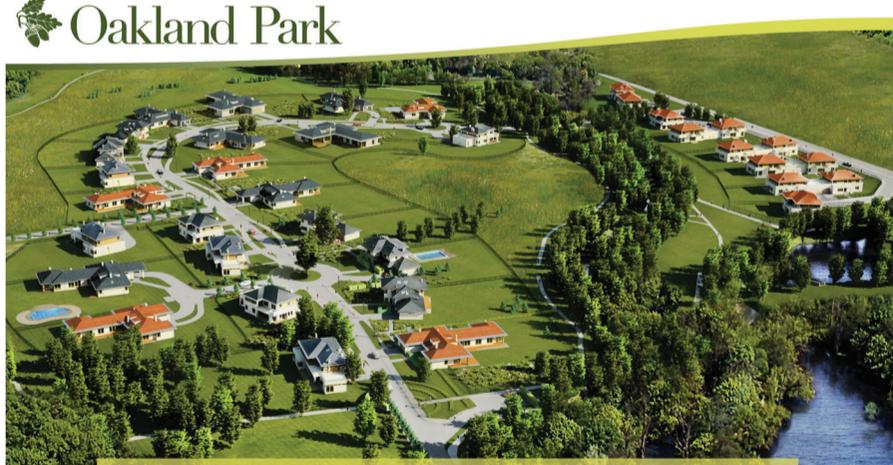
tered Andrzej Malinowski, the president of the Confederation of Polish Employers (KPP). He appealed for greater economic freedom, clearer laws and reduced bureaucracy, among other things. "Our country is too small for such excessive a bureaucracy as there is now," he said.

Leszek Balcerowicz, the former head of the National Bank of Poland (NBP), stressed the importance of low taxes and appealed for the process of privatizing of state-owned companies to be accelerated. The need for a better law on public-private partner-

ships was emphasized by Christian Schnell of the Polish-German Chamber of Commerce.

Entrepreneurs in Poland provide 6.5 million jobs and pay 60 percent of all the salaries in the country. Investments from the private sector, meanwhile, make up over 75 percent of all the investment in the Polish economy. The organizers of the conference noted that thanks to the private sector, Poland is the 11th fastest-growing economy in the world, with an average annual GDP growth of 4.5 percent over the last 16 years.

Konrad Kiedrzyński



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