

An Open Window

Poland has turned an important corner in its economic evolution. As it moves toward recovery and growth, it offers western business a significant window of opportunity. Those who take advantage of that opportunity can enter "on the ground floor" of what promises to be a large and dynamic market. They can also use a Polish location to access the European marketplace as Poland integrates into the world economy.

Poland is the largest single market in Central Europe. Its location at the geographic centre of Europe ensures ready access to the European Community (EC) — a market of more than 320 million people. It is also adjacent to the republics of the former Soviet Union and other Central European states which together represent some 370 million potential consumers. Poland also enjoys a large, growing, competitively priced, and well educated labour force that is the product of a traditional emphasis on scientific and technical training in the school system.

Poland has another fundamental advantage: stability. Unlike most of its neighbours, it is ethnically homogeneous and does not face serious conflicts over nationhood, religion, and language.

Rapid change often means economic dislocation and uncertainty. In many ways, the difficulties of doing business in Poland resemble those faced in a developing country undergoing structural adjustment. They include inefficient telecommunications, slow banking procedures, production bottlenecks, and an underdeveloped service infrastructure. But these shortcomings are being corrected. Several of the world's largest telecommunications companies, among them Northern Telecom, are participating in the modernization of the telephone system. The latest banking technology is being introduced and banking schools have been created to train a new generation of financial experts. Joint ventures are introducing western technology and know-how to improve production. And a growing array of business services, unknown during the communist regime, have sprung up to facilitate economic transformation.

The country is in a state of flux. Everything is being changed quickly and at the same time. Working in such an environment may not be easy, but for companies with patience and persistence, the potential advantages of doing business in Poland can more than compensate for the challenges.