

Poland's Urban Elite More Interested in Business than Politics

By Jan Puhl in Gdansk

(...)

FROM THE MAGAZINE

DER SPIEGEL

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Such assurances are practically an act of courage in Poland today, especially since the Kaczynski twins have been at the helm in Warsaw -- the two leaders have taken a sharp nationalistic tone in their dealings with Germany.

But Adamowicz seems relaxed as he leans back in his antique mayor's chair. "No politician can destroy something that has developed over the years," he says, insisting that his city still enjoys an excellent relationship with the Germans, and that German investors are not deterred by the current tense relations between Warsaw and Berlin. The tourists, who haven't stopped coming to Gdansk in droves, seem to agree.

Mayor Adamowicz is practically bursting with self-confidence. The liberal politician has been running the city for the past nine years. "We benefit from Poland's membership in the European Union," he says. With assistance from Brussels, for example, he has been able to have a new container port built on a manmade island off the coast. Gdansk also enjoys a low unemployment rate of just 4.5 percent.

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Despite the political turmoil, the country is booming, with Gdansk only one of many examples of progress. The Polish economy will grow by more than 6 percent this year, and the unemployment rate in Poland has dropped from 19 to 12 percent since the country joined the EU.

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The future is what drives Poland's cities. Professor Renata Glosnicka, 71, heads a startup company in the growing biotech industry, a role her appearance seems to belie. After retiring, Glosnicka, a physician by trade, decided to begin a new career. Her company, Immunolab, produces vaccines for chickens and already controls half of the Polish market -- only two years after it was founded.

Glosnicka talks enthusiastically about the different varieties of salmonella that her company's drugs are designed to wipe out. "Vaccinating the animals keeps people healthy," she says. She invented the vaccine while working as a researcher at the University of Gdansk and patented the formula in 1991.

Immunolab is based in the newly created Pomeranian Science and Technology Park in nearby Gdynia. The cities of Gdansk, Sopot and Gdynia have grown together and cooperate economically,

and are now referred to as the Tricity. The research park, a former streetcar depot, was modernized with EU funds. The wood-and-glass complex, designed in the Scandinavian style, already houses more than 60 small businesses, including computer firms, high-tech laboratories and companies specializing in communications.

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