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## The Circumstances of the Establishment of “Żegluga Polska” in 1926

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In the first half of the 1920s, many unsuccessful attempts were made in Poland to establish an efficient shipping company. In fact, the only Polish shipping company that operated for several years, between 1919 and 1926, was “Towarzystwo Żeglugi Morskiej «Sarmacja» S.A.” (hereinafter “Sarmacja”), in which the casting vote was with the Norwegian management associated with the shipping company “Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskab” from Bergen (BDS), a co-owner of the Polish firm.

As the Scandinavian and Baltic markets saw a coal mining boom in 1926, the ports of Gdańsk and Gdynia, through which Polish coal was to be shipped from Silesia, became a perfect place for the establishment and development of shipping companies. However, “Sarmacja” was unable to take advantage of this conducive economic situation. The company collapsed in the same year and was replaced by “Żegluga Polska” [Polish Shipping],<sup>1</sup> which, unlike its predecessor, was a shipping company funded solely by domestic capital. Interestingly, these events were closely related to one another and initiated the process of creating a number of new Polish shipping companies which survived until the outbreak of World War II.

In the literature to date, little space has been devoted to the foundation of “Żegluga Polska.” Wanda Czerwińska, whose research focused on the more general topic of the Polish merchant fleet in the interwar period, limited herself only to listing

1 In 1932, “Żegluga Polska” was transformed into “Żegluga Polska S.A.”

the company's vessels and characterising its capital.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, she determined the wrong date of the establishment of the company (13 May 1927).<sup>3</sup> Slightly more light on the issue in question was shed by Jerzy Miciński, who provided a short description of the shipowner's vessels.<sup>4</sup> Other authors, such as Donald Steyer,<sup>5</sup> Andrzej Piskozub,<sup>6</sup> Jan Piwowoński,<sup>7</sup> Kazimierz Mika<sup>8</sup> and Janusz Czechowski<sup>9</sup> merely enumerated the ships operated by "Żegluga Polska." A similarly small amount of information about the establishment of "Żegluga Polska" can be found in the second volume of Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski's book *Gospodarka Polski międzywojennej* [The Economy of Interwar Poland]<sup>10</sup> and also in publications by Zbigniew Machaliński<sup>11</sup> and Bogusław Dopierała.<sup>12</sup>

Some scanty facts about the foundation of "Żegluga Polska" are provided in publications from the interwar period by authors such as Julian Rummel,<sup>13</sup> Leonard Możdżeński,<sup>14</sup> Jan Korwin-Kamieński<sup>15</sup> and Zygmunt Jan Tyszel<sup>16</sup>. Memoirs by Ma-

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- 2 Wanda Czerwińska, *Rola państwa w polskiej gospodarce morskiej 1919–1939* (Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański, 1975), 90; Eadem, *Polska żegluga morska w latach II Rzeczypospolitej* (Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański, 1971), 32–33.
  - 3 Wanda Czerwińska, *Rola*, 90; Eadem, "Na morzu i zapleczu," in: *Dzieje Gdyni*, ed. Roman Wapiński (Wrocław: National Institute Ossolińskich, 1970), 43.
  - 4 Jerzy Miciński, *Księga statków polskich 1918–1945*, Vol. 1 (Gdańsk: Polnord-Oskar, 1996), 177–178.
  - 5 Donald Steyer, *Półwiecze Polski na morzu* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1970), 110; Idem, "Polish Merchant Navy 1926–1939," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 23 (1971): 120.
  - 6 Andrzej Piskozub, *Polska morska. Czyn XX wieku* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1986), 76–77.
  - 7 Jan Piwowoński, *Flota spod biało-czerwonej* (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1989), 17–18.
  - 8 Kazimierz Mika, "Gospodarka morska," in: *Problemy gospodarcze Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. Kazimierz Kozłowski (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 1989), 234.
  - 9 Janusz Czechowski, *Gdynia i Wolne Miasto Gdańsk w politycznej, gospodarczej i kulturalnej perspektywie II Rzeczypospolitej* (Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej, 2018), 125.
  - 10 Zbigniew Landau, Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka Polski międzywojennej 1918–1939*, Vol. 2: *Od Grabskiego do Piłsudskiego. Okres kryzysu poinflacyjnego i ożywienia koniunktury 1924–1929* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1971), 250.
  - 11 Zbigniew Machaliński, *Gospodarcza myśl morska II Rzeczypospolitej 1919–1939* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975), 226–238.
  - 12 Bogdan Dopierała, *Wokół polityki morskiej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1978), 269–270.
  - 13 Julian Rummel, "P.P. Żegluga Polska," in: *Kronika o polskim morzu. Dzieje walk, zwycięstw i pracy*, ed. Czesław Peche (Warszawa: Polska Gospodarcza, 1930), 224; Idem, *Morskie zagadnienia Polski* (Gdynia: Instytut Wydawniczy Państwowej Szkoły Morskiej, 1934), 34; Idem, "Polska marynarka handlowa," in: *XV lat polskiej pracy na morzu*, ed. Aleksy Majewski (Gdynia: Instytut Wydawniczy Państwowej Szkoły Morskiej, 1935), 150.
  - 14 Leonard Możdżeński, "Polityka morska Polski odrodzonej," in: *XV lat*, 20.
  - 15 Jan Korwin-Kamieński, "Zagadnienia morskie w Polsce," *Przegląd Techniczny* 4–5 (1929): 174–178.
  - 16 Zygmunt Jan Tyszel, *Pod ojczyzną banderą* (Katowice: Liga Morska i Kolonialna, 1930), 101–102.

mert Stankiewicz,<sup>17</sup> Bolesław Kasprowicz<sup>18</sup> and Stanisław Darski<sup>19</sup> merely make mention of the company's establishment.

Rummel, the first director of "Żegluga Polska," was the only author to include a little more information in his memoirs,<sup>20</sup> in which he suggested that the creation of the fully Polish shipping company had been significantly affected by the experiences associated with the activity of "Sarmacja." His valuable remark has not so far been examined in the broader context of data found in the documents available in the fonds of "Żegluga Polska S.A." in the State Archives in Gdańsk (ref. no. 146).

Apart from the sources mentioned above, the present study is also based on documents available in the Polish Archives of New Records (Poselstwo RP w Kopenhage, ref. no. 5, Państwowy Urząd Zakupów Artykułów Pierwszej Potrzeby, National Archives in Kraków (Oddział II, RHB VI 88), State Archives in Gdańsk (Rada Portu i Dróg Wodnych, microfilm 64211), State Archives in Katowice (Polska Konwencja Węglowa, ref. no. 132), Archives of the Maritime Museum in Bergen (Bergens Sjøfrtmsmuseum Arkiv, Polish Coal Charter, ref. no. 3689), the State Archives in Oslo, the fonds of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Riksarkivet Utenriksdepartementet, ref. no. 2507) and the Collection of Manuscripts at the University Library in Bergen (Universitetsbibliotek i Bergen, Manuskriptsamlingen, ref. no. 1570/24–2).

The aim of the present article is to determine, on the basis of the archival sources mentioned above and other data, the causes of the establishment of "Żegluga Polska," taking into account the role that the company "Sarmacja" and the coal mining boom of that time played in this process. The paper also examines the circumstances of the Polish state authorities' decision to fund "Żegluga Polska" exclusively by domestic capital. Importantly, the present study organises numerous existing, often contradictory, findings, as well as collecting and systematising facts scattered in different scientific publications.

### First attempts at creating the Polish merchant fleet

The first steps to creating the Polish merchant fleet were taken right after Poland had regained independence, when Józef Piłsudski, under the decree of 28 November 1918, established the "Polish Navy," with Bogumił Nowotny<sup>21</sup> as head of the Naval Section at

17 Mamert Stankiewicz, *Z floty carskiej do polskiej* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2007), 272–280.

18 Bolesław Kasprowicz, *Byłem juniorem* (Gdynia: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1965), 156.

19 Stanisław Darski, *W służbie żeglugi* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1978), 46.

20 Julian Rummel, *Narodziny żeglugi* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1980), 85–90.

21 Bogumił Nowotny (1871–1960) enlisted in 1890 as midshipman in the Austro-Hungarian Navy. Quickly earning promotions, he became commander of a half-flotilla of torpedo boats in Trieste in

the Ministry of Military Affairs.<sup>22</sup> The actions initiated at that time did not yet result in the creation of a merchant fleet and were rather part of propaganda aimed at obtaining for Poland the most convenient access to the Baltic Sea. As a matter of fact, the Polish state was then experiencing numerous difficulties associated with the post-war reconstruction of the country, which made it difficult to establish a Polish shipping company. It is noteworthy that the newly independent Poland did not have, for all practical purposes, a single ship or a single seaport. Further problems in creating a maritime policy were due to the Polish industry having negligible connections with overseas markets, a complete lack of commercial agents at destination ports<sup>23</sup> as well as the uncertain status of the city of Gdańsk.

The beginnings of the formation of the Polish merchant fleet did not follow a rational course: the first few ships flying the Polish flag appeared in the Black Sea, the Middle East and the Far East at a time when Poland did not yet have its own seaport capable of handling tramp and liner services. These undertakings should only be considered symbolic because, apart from the Polish flag, the vessels had no other relations with Poland. It is also worth noting that in the years 1919–1920, the Polish diaspora in the USA founded the Polish–American Navigation Corporation, which operated several ships. The first half of the 1920s saw the emergence of other ephemeral companies, namely: “Lechia” and “Biały Orzeł.”<sup>24</sup> The Act on Polish sea-going merchant ships of

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1908, and in November 1912, he received the rank of second lieutenant commander. From 24 July 1914 he was commanding officer of the destroyer *Scharfschütze*, and the outbreak of the First World War found him holding this position. The most important military operations he participated in included shelling of the Montenegrin coast, a successful foray into the Montenegrin port of Antivari (1914), a night invasion of the Corsini Canal leading to Ravenna (1915), the battle against Italian torpedo boats near Porto Corsini (1916), as well as the Battle of the Strait of Otranto (1916). His success in this last battle earned him a promotion to the rank of lieutenant commander. From February to the end of April 1918, Nowotny was commanding officer of the battleship *Erherzog Karl* and, simultaneously, squadron commander. Cf. Jerzy Pertek “Nowotny Bogumił,” in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, Vol. 23 (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983), 392–393; Maria Babnis, “Kronika Polskiej Marynarki Wojennej (październiki 1918–marzec 1947),” in: *Kadry Morskiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Vol. 2: *Polska Marynarka Wojenna*, pt. 1: *Korpus oficerów 1918–1947*, ed. Jan Kazimierz Sawicki (Gdynia: Wyższa Szkoła Morska, 1996), 5; Jan Przybylski, “90 lat polskiej marynarki, plany i rzeczywistość,” in: *Marynarka Polska (1918–2008)*, ed. Jan Kazimierz Sawicki (Gdynia: Wyższa Szkoła Morska, 2009), 48; Marek Twardowski, “Kiedy powołano polską marynarke?” in: *Marynarka Polska (1918–2008)*, Vol. 1, ed. Jan Kazimierz Sawicki (Gdynia: Pracownia Historii i Studium Wojaskowej Akademii Morskiej w Gdyni, 2009), 168.

22 Rozkaz do Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych Józefa Piłsudskiego [Józef Piłsudski’s order to the Ministry of Military Affairs], *Monitor Polski*, no. 217, 30/11/1918, 20. The decree, however, does not make it clear what type of navy, military or merchant, Piłsudski had in mind. Cf. Daniel Duda, Stanisław Kołaczyński, Wojciech Żurawski, “Początki polskiej administracji morskiej,” *Nautologia* 131 (1999), 2: 18.

23 *Bandera Polska. Księga pamiątkowa poświęcona rozwojowi i rozbudowie polskiej floty handlowej*, ed. Radosław Krajewski (Warszawa: Liga Morska i Kolonialna, 1926), 55.

24 Czerwińska, *Polska*, 32–34.

28 May 1920 was supposed to aid the formation of the Polish merchant fleet<sup>25</sup> but, for a long time, it failed to deliver tangible results. It was only after several unsuccessful attempts to create the country's own merchant fleet that a fully independent port in Gdynia began to be built.

### Experiences of "Sarmacja"

The only shipowner of a Polish character that operated for a longer while in the first half of the interwar period was the aforementioned Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej "Sarmacja" S.A., which was supported in a large part by foreign capital invested in it by one of the largest Norwegian shipowners Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskab (BDS).<sup>26</sup>

The first director of "Sarmacja" was B. Nowotny, who on 9 November 1919 became a co-founder of "Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej «Sarmacja» Spółka z o.o." with its seat in Kraków<sup>27</sup> (this was the company's first name, which was used until 13 November 1921). Initially, the firm's capital amounted to 3 million Polish marks (mp),<sup>28</sup> with a notable 80% of these funds belonging to Polish shareholders in 1921.<sup>29</sup> Already at the time of its establishment, a decision was made that the company would be engaged in shipping and trade activities in Poland and abroad,<sup>30</sup> as well as providing goods reloading and storage services.<sup>31</sup>

25 Ustawa z 28.05.1920 o polskich statkach handlowych morskich, Dz.U. 1920, nr 47, poz. 285 [Act of 28 May 1920 on Polish Sea-going Merchant Ships, Journal of Laws 1920, no.47, item 285]

26 BDS was founded in Bergen on 12 December 1851 and was the first Norwegian steam shipping company. In the interwar period, it conducted its activities mainly in the Baltic and English ports.

27 National Archives in Cracow (Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie, hereinafter: ANK), Oddział II, RHB VI 88, Akta firmy spółkowej Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej "Sarmacja," Wpis do rejestru handlowego firmy spółkowej Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej Sarmacja Spółka z o.o., 23.12.1919, Branch II, RHB VI 88, Files of the company Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej "Sarmacja," Entry into the company register of the company Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej Sarmacja Spółka z o.o., 23 Dec. 1919 (no pagination).

28 Andrzej Matla, "Polsko-norweskie kontakty żeglugowe w latach 1919–1926," *Komunikaty Instytutu Bałtyckiego* 23/24 (1986/1987), 38/39: 50.

29 Polish Archives of New Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych, hereinafter: AAN), Poselstwo RP w Kopenhadze, sygn. 5 [Diplomatic Mission in Copenhagen, ref. no. 5] Sytuacja ekonomiczna w Polsce, główne sprawy finansów, handlu i żegluga handlowej. Texts of articles, Lidt om den polske Handelsmarine, 12.

30 Matla, "Polsko-norweskie," 50.

31 AAN, State Office for the Purchase of Basic Necessities (Państwowy Urząd Zakupów Artykułów Pierwszej Potrzeby, hereinafter: PUZAPP), Branch in Gdańsk, Korespondencja z Polskim Towarzystwem Żegluga Morskiej "Sarmacja," sygn. 2464, Pismo PUZAPP do Polskiego Towarzystwa Żeglugowego "Sarmacja" z 15.01.1921, 20.01.1921 [Correspondence with Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga

In 1922, BDS established a branch in Gdańsk – Bergenske Baltic Transports Ltd. (hereinafter: “Bergenske” or BBT), which associated itself with “Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej «Sarmacja» S.A.,”<sup>32</sup> among others, by providing brokerage services for it. More importantly, BBT was an executor of the decisions made in Bergen, the headquarters of BDS. A new statute of “Sarmacja” was also passed. Under the new statute, the Polish shipping company was authorised to establish branches both at home and abroad to do business on a larger scale. The seat of the company was soon moved to Warsaw. In February 1922, the shipowner’s new statute was approved by the Treasury. At that time, the company’s capital was 66,000,000 mp divided into 66,000 shares. Sixty percent of the shares<sup>33</sup> could be owned by Polish citizens only, which confirms that an attempt was made to give the company a Polish character. BDS, and individuals associated with the Norwegian shipowner, owned a total of 26,320 shares in “Sarmacja” worth 26320,000 mp, which constituted a significant part (about 39.8%) of the 66,000,000 mp capital.

This large contribution of foreign capital posed a serious image problem for “Sarmacja,” which was additionally blown up by the Polish press. On 9 February 1922, articles were published in “Gazeta Gdańska” and “Żeglarz Polski” in which the company was accused of employing German sailors.<sup>34</sup> In 1923, further accusations were made about the hiring of German crews on the Polish shipowner’s vessels. This time, the daily “Słowo Pomorskie” stressed that the ships operated by “Sarmacja” were Polish in name only and that the officers and crews employed on them spoke German. The newspaper admitted that, of course, some seamen did have Polish citizenship, but only for the sheer purpose of being able to sail the Polish shipowner’s vessels.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that B. Nowotny hired foreigners was a result of a severe shortage of trained sailors of Polish nationality; the director of “Sarmacja” recruited Austrian sailors, whom he knew from his own military service in the Austro-Hungarian Navy. It should be remembered that this personnel policy, though strongly criticised, complied with

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Morskiej “Sarmacja,” ref.no. 2464, Letters of 15 Jan 1921 and 20 Jan 1921 from PUZAPP to Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej “Sarmacja”, 72, 67.

32 Jordan Siemianowski, *Działalność norweskich armatorów w Gdańsku i Gdyni w latach 1919–1939* (Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński, 2020), 100.

33 ANK, Oddział II, RHB VI 88, Akta firmy spółkowej Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej “Sarmacja,” Wypis aktu notarialnego z 28.03.1922 r. [ANK, Division II, RHB VI 88, Files of the company Polskie Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej “Sarmacja,” Extract from a notarial deed of 28 March 1922] [no pagination].

34 *Gazeta Gdańska*, 9/02/1922; Jerzy Klejnot-Turski, “W sprawie załogi Krakowa,” *Żeglarz Polski* 3 (1922): 45. Władysław Milewski lists in his memoirs, among the fifteen members of the crew of SS “Wisła,” four Poles from central Poland, and officers from the former Austrian Navy, Germans from Gdańsk and Kashubians. The language spoken on board was German. Cf. Władysław Milewski, *Na morzu i lądzie* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1976), 35.

35 *Słowo Pomorskie*, 13/06/1923.

the Polish Ships Act of 20 May 1920, which allowed for crews on Polish ships to consist of fewer than three quarters of officers and sailors with Polish citizenship within the first five years of operation.<sup>36</sup>

Much more serious criticism of the cooperation between "Sarmacja" and BDS was associated with the one-sided financial benefits that the Norwegian partner derived from selling its used ships to the Polish company. At that time, this policy was hard to change, especially since the key decisions regarding the activities of the Polish shipowner were made in Bergen. Of course, B. Nowotny also participated in the general meetings of BDS, but, being an observer only,<sup>37</sup> he had no influence on the fact that "Sarmacja" had an outdated fleet, lacked appropriate business connections and, above all, did not have financial resources to provide regular shipping services,<sup>38</sup> improve the quality of its existing services or expand its fleet.

From 1923 on, the attitude of BDS towards "Sarmacja" began to stiffen even more. This is evidenced by the fact that in that year the Norwegian company took away from the Polish shipowner the exclusive right to represent "Bergenske" in Gdańsk, giving this right to "Polski Lloyd S.A."<sup>39</sup> An attempt to buy a ship was also unsuccessful, as the price of £19,000 for a 1600 BRT vessel built at the Schichau Shipyard was too high, and the offer was rejected by B. Nowotny.<sup>40</sup>

A chance to improve the condition of "Sarmacja" appeared in April 1925, when the vessels of the Polish shipowner began to provide freight transport services between London and Gdańsk<sup>41</sup> and other Baltic ports. Since the Norwegian partner did not offer any major support, in mid 1925, the Polish Ministry of Industry and Trade (hereinafter: MI&T) came up with a proposal to engage "Sarmacja"'s ships in the transport of hard coal to the northern regions of Europe through the port in Gdynia. The Ministry also wanted to use the ships to deliver other goods, including grain and sugar. In this way, on 1 July 1925, "Sarmacja" received a subvention from the Polish government.<sup>42</sup>

36 Act of 28 May 1920, Art.47, para. 285.

37 Feliks Rostkowski, *Sześć lat polskiej polityki handlowo-morskiej* (Warszawa: [n.p.] 1926), 4. The Norwegians' position in "Sarmacja" was so strong that they went as far as forbidding director J. Korwin-Kamieński to enter the company's ships or inspect the books of accounts. Cf. Matla, "Polsko-norweskie," 58.

38 Matla, "Polsko-norweskie," 58.

39 Andrzej Matla, "Działalność norweskiego koncernu Bergenske w portach polskiego obszaru celnego w latach 1919–1939," *Komunikaty Instytutu Bałtyckiego* 29 (1992), 41: 51.

40 Bergens Sjøfartsmuseum Arkiv (hereinafter: Bsj) Aa–Forhandlingsprotokoll III 1921–1927, Report from a meeting with BDS of 9 Oct. 1923 r. [no pagination].

41 Bsj, Ms 26 (BDS): Aa–Forhandlingsprotokoll III 1921–1927, Report from a meeting of the management of BDS of 21 Apr. 1923 r. [no pagination].

42 Probably, "Sarmacja" received a monthly government subsidy of £ 150 each for SS "Wisła" and SS "Wawel." Cf. Władysław Milewski, "Trudne początki morskiego żywota," in: *Na morze po chleb i przygodę*, ed. Wincenty Bartosiak (Warszawa: Pax, 1972), 314.

Unfortunately, in October 1926, after the failure of the ship SS “Wisła,” which was no longer fit for further exploitation, the collapse of “Sarmacja,” which now had only one operational vessel, was inevitable.

The Norwegians’ devastating policy also led to the suspension of the opening of the branch of BDS in the developing city of Gdynia as well as putting in limbo the appointment of a new director of “Sarmacja” (among others, the candidacy of J. Rummel fell through<sup>43</sup>).<sup>44</sup> One should agree with Stankiewicz and Matla, who negatively assessed the involvement of the Norwegians in the company’s operations. According to the former author, the company’s executives wanted the ships of “Sarmacja” to enjoy the privileges of the Polish flag and at the same time maintain the not-fully-Polish character of the firm.<sup>45</sup> The latter author noted that the Norwegian policy was to beat off Polish competition, on the one hand, and, on the other, to ensure that the Norwegian side made relatively high profits by concealing their actual revenue, part of which was invested as a write-off of shares in “Sarmacja.”<sup>46</sup> Also, the government’s press service “Przemysł i Handel” (Industry and Trade) emphasised that the foreign capital invested in “Sarmacja” put a brake on its development.<sup>47</sup> At that time, the company needed radical changes as its heavily outdated and worn vessels, which were not even suitable for renovation,<sup>48</sup> made it fairly uncompetitive.<sup>49</sup>

To make matters worse, the above-mentioned factors had a negative impact on the relations between “Sarmacja” and the Polish government<sup>50</sup> which, despite many efforts, not so much failed to improve the company’s situation, as did not prevent its collapse. In this connection, one should mention the government’s act of 25 November 1925 on supporting maritime shipping<sup>51</sup> and the decision of the Polish Ministry of the Treasury

43 Rummel, *Narodziny*, 71–72.

44 Matla, “Działalność,” 51.

45 Stankiewicz, *Z floty*, 246.

46 Matla, “Polsko-norweskie,” 59.

47 Feliks Rostkowski, “Sześć lat polskiej polityki handlowo-morskiej,” *Przemysł i Handel* 9 (1926): 244.

48 Rostkowski, *Sześć*, 3.

49 Stanisław Wojciechowski, *Flota handlowa w Polsce. Rozwój i jej znaczenie* (Warszawa: Liga Morska i Kolonialna, 1927), 12.

50 Jan Korwin-Kamieński, “Zagadnienia morskie w Polsce,” *Przegląd Techniczny* 4–5 (1929): 177.

51 Ustawa z 25.11.1925 o popieraniu polskiej żeglugi morskiej, Dz.U. 1925, nr 125, poz. 891 [Act of 25 November 1925 on supporting Polish maritime shipping, Journal of Laws 1925, no.125, item. 891]. The worsening of the position of the Norwegian merchant fleet in servicing the ports of the Polish customs area was also pointed out by Jan Szymański. Cf. Jan Szymański, “Kapitał norweski wobec gospodarki Polski międzywojennej (1919–1939),” *Zapiski Historyczne* 52 (1987), 2: 68.



of September 1926 to exempt "Sarmacja" for five years from paying income, industrial and property taxes.<sup>52</sup>

There are many indications that the financial aid "Sarmacja" received multiple times from the Polish state authorities had a counterproductive effect and was one of the causes of the company's collapse. BDS preferred to liquidate "Sarmacja" to allow it to be strengthened with government subsidies and thus create competition for the Norwegian shipowner's vessels. The weakness of "Sarmacja" is also evidenced by the fact that the company never had its own shipping liner service that would provide it with steady income. So the question arises whether BDS was capable of turning "Sarmacja" into a reliable shipping company. Considering that BDS operated more than 15 shipping liner services at that time<sup>53</sup> and was also one of the largest Norwegian shipping companies, the answer is affirmative.

### The coal boom

As already mentioned, the process of liquidating "Sarmacja" was taking place at the time of an upturn in international trade that created advantageous conditions for the transport of coal, and thus also for the activities of shipping companies which transported this raw material from Gdańsk and Gdynia. Before this upswing in coal trade, traffic in the ports of the Polish customs area had not been very busy, which was the consequence of Poland having a negligible share in international maritime trade (for example, in 1922 it was only 7.3%). It was widely believed that in order to change this situation, the country's economic structure should be reorganised along with a change in the transport system from latitudinal (east–west) to meridian (north–south). At that time, the following slogan became the motto of the Polish state authorities: "Polish goods, through Polish ports, on Polish ships." This meant that it was necessary not only to build an independent seaport which, together with the port of Gdańsk, could handle the increasing trade turnover, but also to create a Polish merchant fleet that would allow Poland to free itself from the costly brokerage of companies operating under foreign flags.<sup>54</sup>

In May 1926, English miners started a strike which threatened the supply of coal to the Baltic and Scandinavian states – the natural trading partners of the Second

52 Hugon Pistel, "Polska flota handlowa," in: *Polityka gospodarcza. Zagadnienia administracyjne*, Vol. 1 (Warszawa: Ministerstwo Przemysłu i Handlu, 1928), 435.

53 *Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskab Bergen. Beretning og Regnskap 1926*, 6–8.

54 State Archives in Gdańsk (Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, hereinafter: APG), *Żegluga Polska*, ref. no. 146, "Żegluga Polska" S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, 4.

Republic of Poland.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting that the Norwegians had known about the impending strike already in December 1925, and had ordered 560 tons of Polish coal on a trial basis.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, the coal base of the port in Gdańsk, which included Polish Silesia (Śląsk), was still poorly communicated with the coast. Also, the ports of the Polish customs area (Gdańsk and Gdynia) were not properly adapted to the efficient shipment of larger cargoes. In 1925, the port of Gdańsk still had an insufficient number of reloading cranes and warehouses. At that time, the Polish government had a large enough budget to finance the extension of the port, but the government's attempts to invest were thwarted by objections from Gdańsk authorities, who feared Gdańsk would be Polish.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from the port in Gdańsk, Poland had a port in Gdynia, the construction of which had officially begun in the spring of 1921. Unfortunately, the Act on the construction of the port passed by the Sejm (Lower House of the Polish Parliament), which provided a legal basis for the construction works, was merely a piece of propaganda. The grand opening of the port under the name "Temporary Military Port and Shelter for Fishermen" took place on 29 April 1923. In August of the same year, the first ship – the French SS "Kentucky," called at the Port of Gdynia.

During the term of office of the Minister of Industry and Trade, Józef Kiedroń (December 1923–May 1925), the implementation of the construction plans for the port of Gdynia speeded up a little. This became possible, among others, due to the resolution passed by the Sejm on 21 March 1924 which set a six-year deadline on the completion of the construction works in the port in Gdynia. In December of the same year, the Sejm passed another resolution, this time on the construction of new railway lines that significantly shortened the travel distance from Silesia to the Polish coast. The construction was commissioned to "Francusko-Polskie Konsorcjum dla Budowy Portu w Gdyni" [French-Polish Consortium for the Construction of the Port in Gdynia], which in practice coincided with the commencement of the actual expansion of the port. The subcontractors were a Danish company "Højgaard & Schultz AS" and a Dutch-Belgian company "Ackerman & van Haaren." In February 1925, the French consortium signed an additional agreement with the MI&T, which was to speed up the works, but the French party terminated it in January of the following year. Owing to the intervention of the MI&T, the works were resumed soon, but the pace was still slow.

After the May coup, the then Minister of the Treasury, Czesław Klarnier, outlined the main directions of Poland's economic policy, whose main focus was the construction

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55 Dopierała, *Wokół*, 207.

56 Jan Szymański, *Stosunki gospodarcze Polski z Norwegią w latach 1918–1929* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2005), 228.

57 Dopierała, *Wokół*, 207.

of the port in Gdynia and the improvement of railway connections between Poland's main industrial centres and the Polish coast. These efforts were made to bypass the intermediary role of foreign ports in Polish maritime trade so that Poland could send goods to recipients directly as an independent exporter.<sup>58</sup> A deeper tone to the development of the Polish coast was given by Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, who was appointed Minister of Industry and Trade in June 1926. In his opinion, apart from the port of Gdynia, it was necessary for Poland to use the ports in Gdańsk<sup>59</sup> and Tczew. Moreover, the minister wanted a comprehensive expansion of the port in Gdynia that covered its reloading facilities for coal and iron ore; he planned the construction of a fishing port, an expansion of cargo warehouses and, above all, the construction of Poland's own fleet.<sup>60</sup> Minister Kwiatkowski's idea was for the three ports to handle 10 to 12 million tons of goods annually, with Gdańsk specialising in bulk cargo handling, and Gdynia specialising in the handling of food and perishable goods. Gdynia was also supposed to be the seat of Polish shipping lines.<sup>61</sup> The Polish tariff, rail and fiscal policies were to be adapted to using access to the sea, also with regard to foreign trade.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, wanting, on the one hand, to maintain good relations with the French economic circles, and, on the other, to accelerate the construction of the port in Gdynia, Minister Kwiatkowski concluded a new contract with the "French-Polish Consortium for the Construction of the Port in Gdynia" in October 1926.<sup>63</sup> Despite all these efforts, however, in 1926, Gdynia still remained a small fishing town with a railway station.

The coal boom generated not only the need to expand the ports of the Polish customs area, but also to improve the extraction of coal and its delivery to these ports. Until 1925, under the Treaty of Versailles and the Geneva Convention of 15 May 1922, large amounts of Polish coal had been exported to Germany.<sup>64</sup> For example, in 1923,

58 Dopierała, *Wokół*, 298–299; Bolesław Hajduk, "Działalność spółki duńskiej Højgaard & Schultz AS w Polsce w latach 1924–1949," in: *Polska – Dania w ciągu wieków*, ed. Jan Szymański (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, OPTIMA s.c., 2004), 178.

59 Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski expressed the need for Poland to use both the port in Gdynia and in Gdańsk, among others in *Dysproporcje*. Cf. Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, *Dysproporcje. Rzecz o Polsce przeszłej i obecnej* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1989), 299.

60 Małgorzata Łapa, *Modernizacja państwa. Polska polityka gospodarcza 1926–1929* (Łódź: Ibidem, 2002), 197.

61 Dopierała, *Wokół*, 234, 267–269, 297–299.

62 Feliks Hilchen, "Problem morski," in: *Pięć lat na froncie gospodarczym 13 V 1926–1931*, Vol. 1 (Warszawa: Droga, 1931), 494.

63 Mieczysław Widernik, *Porty Gdańska i Gdyni w życiu gospodarczym II Rzeczypospolitej* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1991), 40–43.

64 Karol Józef Błahut, *Polsko-niemieckie stosunki gospodarcze w latach 1919–1939* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975), 11, 58; Jerzy Krasuski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1919–1932* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1975), 37, 69–70; Barbara Ratyńska, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie w okresie wojny gospodarczej 1919–1930* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1968), 42.

the sales of this raw material from Upper Silesia to German markets amounted to as many as 8 million tons, which accounted for about 35% of the total mining sales and 67% of exports. When Article 224 of the Geneva Convention, which provided for duty-free export of Polish coal to Germany, expired on 15 June 1925, Berlin closed the domestic market to Silesian coal, forcing the Polish coal mining industry to find new export routes.<sup>65</sup> This situation caused a decrease in coal production to 67% of the amount produced in 1913.<sup>66</sup> Because the Polish government had not considered exporting coal via Gdańsk and Gdynia until the summer of 1925, the ports were practically unprepared to export this raw material.<sup>67</sup> Matters were complicated even further by the large distance (600 km) that separated the ports of the Polish customs area from Silesian mines.<sup>68</sup> Ships carrying freights of Polish coal were more often forced to pay fees for downtime than was the case with shipments of English coal.<sup>69</sup>

It was only as late as 1925 that the Polish state authorities undertook a series of actions aimed at increasing the capacity of existing railway lines and creating new connections between Silesia and the coast.<sup>70</sup> Even before Article 224 of the Geneva Convention was no longer in force, the Polish government had decided, pursuant to the Act of 13 May, to build a railway line from Kalety to Podzamcze, which permitted to bypass the so-called Kluczbork corridor,<sup>71</sup> which belonged to Germany, and thus make savings on coal transports.<sup>72</sup> In response to this decision, on 15 May 1925, German state railways introduced a discount of up to 60% of the tariffs applied inside Germany, called *Seehafendurchfuhrtarif* – SD5.<sup>73</sup> Germans took this step to encourage the use of the port in Szczecin (Stettin) at the expense of the ports in Gdańsk and Gdynia.

65 State Archives in Katowice (Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach, hereinafter: APK), Polish Coal Charter (Polska Konwencja Węglowa, hereinafter: PKW), ref.no. 132, *Eksport węgla – dane statystyczne 1928–1939. Wywóz drogą morską*, 3–4; Krasuski, *Stosunki*, 370; Idem, *Polska-Niemcy. Stosunki polityczne od zarania po czasy najnowsze* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2009), 253.

66 Natalia Gąsiorowska, *Górnictwo i hutnictwo w Polsce* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1949), 102.

67 APG, Rada Portu i Dróg Wodnych [Harbour and Waterways Council], microfilm 64211, *Eksport węgla* [Coal exports], Vol. 1: 1925–1938, Pismo M. Borowskiego do MPiH z 2.12.1928 r. [Letter of 2 Dec. 1928 from M. Borowski to MI&T], 87.

68 APK, PKW, ref.no. 132, *Eksport węgla – dane statystyczne 1928–1939. Wywóz drogą morską* [Coal exports – statistical data 1928–1939. Export by sea], 4.

69 Bsj, Polish Coal Charter, ref.no. 3689.

70 APK, PKW, ref.no. 132, *Eksport węgla – dane statystyczne 1928–1939. Wywóz drogą morską*, 4.

71 Dopierała, *Wokół*, 269.

72 Józef Roguszczak, *Dynamika kierunków rynków zbytu górnośląskiego rynku węglowego* (Katowice: Księgarnia i Drukarnia Katolicka, 1938), 160.

73 Dopierała, *Wokół*, 261; Alfred Siebeneichen, “Konkurencja portów bałtyckich,” in: *Kronika o polskiem*, 357.

Germany's policy prompted Polish coal companies to also take decisive steps by starting the construction of reloading facilities in Gdynia, and by granting long-term loans to the Polish government. In addition, these firms started running promotional activities on the Scandinavian markets to demonstrate the high quality of Polish coal.<sup>74</sup> In order to create conditions for getting into foreign markets, the "Dąbrowa-Kraków Convention" (Konwencja Dąbrowsko-Krakowska) and the "Upper Silesian Coal Convention" (Górnośląska Konwencja Węglowa) were merged into the "National Coal Convention" (Ogólnopolska Konwencja Węglowa, OKW)<sup>75</sup> on 1 July 1925. The newly-established organisation concentrated as much as 94% of the nationwide coal production. Moreover, it regulated the shipment of coal by rail within the Polish customs area, including Wolne Miasto Gdańsk (the Free City of Danzig).<sup>76</sup> At that time, in view of the closure of the German market to Polish coal, Scandinavia became a convenient export destination.<sup>77</sup>

The development and expansion of the ports in Gdańsk and Gdynia and their supply base, combined with the coal boom, corroborate the conclusion that in 1926 having a stable and predictable shipping company was, to say the least, desirable for the Second Polish Republic. Given the maritime trade turnover of 6 million tons, as well as the genuine prospects of further expansion of the port in Gdynia, the size of the then Polish merchant fleet was clearly insufficient.<sup>78</sup> The extensive work carried out in Polish ports could have provided a chance for the development of "Sarmacja," but only on the condition that BDS's policy had undergone a radical change. Otherwise, it was impossible for the Polish shipowner to cope with the competition from other shipping companies interested in transporting coal from the ports of the Polish customs area.

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74 APK, PKW, ref.no. 132, Eksport węgla – dane statystyczne 1928–1939. Wywóz drogą morską [Coal exports – statistical data 1928–1939. Export by sea], 4–5.

75 Jerzy Jaros, *Historia górnictwa węglowego w Zagłębiu Górnośląskim w latach 1914–1945* (Katowice: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), 347; Zenon Szmidtke, "Skarboferm" 1922–1939. *Związki polityki z gospodarką* (Opole: Instytut Śląski, 2005), 193.

76 Roguszczyk, *Dynamika*, 165–166; Aldona Podolska-Meducka, *Polskie ustawodawstwo kartelowe w latach 1918–1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2003), 67.

77 Cybulski, "Eksport węgla morzem," in: *Kronika o polskiem*, 272.

78 The Polish merchant fleet of that time consisted of the training sailing ship "Lwów," the military transport ship "Warta," the port tugboat "Ursus," two vessels operated by "Sarmacja," the motorboat "Józef English" belonging to the company "Biały Orzeł," as well as several tugboats belonging to the company "Wisła-Bałtyk," not counting smaller boats, barges, etc. See: APG, Żegluga Polska, ref. no. 146, "Żegluga Polska" S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, p. 6.

### Establishment of “Żegluga Polska”

At the time when “Sarmacja” collapsed and the coal boom started, Poland practically had no single ship it could use to take advantage of the new favourable business circumstances. Meanwhile, at the end of 1924, even before the strike of English miners, an idea had been conceived in the circles of the National Economic Bank of launching a liner service connecting Poland with major ports in the Middle East; it was described by Feliks Rostowski in the pages of “Przemysł i Handel.” The originators of this initiative secured a share of foreign capital and got in touch with an Italian shipyard, which agreed to grant a loan for the purchase of four ships. According to the author of the article, it was reasonable then to use older, not necessarily large vessels, which the newly created shipping company could use to “learn the shipping business.”<sup>79</sup> A year later, a government initiative was launched, supported by a rich programme, which aimed at establishing the joint stock company “Spółka Akcyjna Polska Żegluga Morska.”<sup>80</sup>

In April 1926, also in “Przemysł i Handel,” J. Rummel<sup>81</sup> called for the establishment of a Polish shipping company that would provide passenger and cargo services to English, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian and North-French ports. These liner services were to be coordinated with rail services to Gdańsk and Gdynia. That author also emphasised that the Polish government should take initiative to establish a shipping company.<sup>82</sup>

All the above-mentioned ideas fell through as there were no favourable conditions at that time to engage in setting up a fully Polish shipping company. This fact was not changed even by the disastrous situation of “Sarmacja” and the necessity to replace it with another shipowner. Even in the first months of 1926, the establishment of a Polish shipping company was not an obvious option, as evidenced, among others, by a proposal made by the barrister Emil Waydel for the Polish shipping activist J. Rummel to

79 Rostkowski, “Sześć,” 245.

80 Mika, “Gospodarka,” 233.

81 Julian Rummel (1878–1954) was born in Liepaja. He graduated from St. Petersburg Commercial School, where he studied in the years 1892–1899. In the year of his graduation from the school in St. Petersburg, Rummel signed on a ship. After Russia’s defeat in the war with Japan in 1905, Rummel became involved in the work of the Fleet Revival League, of which he was secretary and then vice-president. At the same time, he was a member of the Russian Imperial Technical Society, a world-renowned scientific institution which gave opinions on and inspired the development of technology and science. Rummel, as secretary of the Maritime Section, participated in the work of the 4th Technical Division of this organisation. In July 1918, during an economic conference in St. Petersburg, he delivered a paper on the project of the Polish maritime economy and the tasks of the future Polish merchant fleet in the reborn Polish state. In 1922, he became director of the Maritime League Office (Biuro Ligi Morskiej), working in which, he developed a maritime programme for Poland. See: Maciej Rdesiński, introduction to *Narodziny żeglugi* by Julian Rummel (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1980), vi–xvi.

82 Julian Rummel, *Gdynia, port polski* (Toruń: Ministerstwo Żeglugi i Handlu Zagranicznego. Departament Morski, 1926), 446.

take over as director of "Sarmacja." Waydel was a shareholder in the company. Rummel did not make an immediate decision, but he assured Waydel that he would respond to the offer after carefully examining the company's situation and inspecting its ships. He also made a provision that as the person in charge he wanted to be completely independent and take full responsibility for the company. This clearly shows that he did not allow any possibility of the company he was asked to manage to be pure fiction, as it had been until that moment.

After looking into the company's situation, J. Rummel came to the conclusion that its fate had already been sealed and he also believed that, in the event that "Bergenske" did not have adequate financial resources, it was going to liquidate the Polish enterprise. To make matters worse, the Maritime Department aired a critical opinion of the Norwegians' activity in "Sarmacja," which indicated that the shipowner could expect problems in receiving subsidies from the Polish government in the near future. J. Rummel, who was extremely influential in the Polish shipping milieu, believed that the Norwegians wanted a fictitious shipping business to operate in Poland, which would prevent the establishment of another, much more efficient, Polish shipping company.

Waydel fully shared Rummel's opinion. He also declared that the Polish group in "Sarmacja" wanted no one else but Rummel to manage this company. One of the few controversies between the two activists was their attitude towards the Norwegians' personnel policy. While Waydel thought that the foreign owners of "Sarmacja" expected the company to be run by a highly-qualified person, such as J. Rummel, the latter was of the opposite opinion that, due to his high qualifications, the Norwegians would view him as an undesirable candidate. In the same year, it turned out that Rummel was right and the company had to be liquidated because the Polish state authorities did not think it made sense to continue subsidising a business they had no say in. The situation was all the more embarrassing as the Norwegian management refused to pay dividends to shareholders. It was at this point that J. Rummel decided it was necessary to create "Żegluga Polska," because, as he claimed, "Sarmacja" practically no longer existed.<sup>83</sup>

The first news of the Polish state authorities taking decisive steps to establish a shipping company appeared in October 1926 in "Przemysł i Handel," which announced a purchase of five merchant ships intended mainly for the transport of coal.<sup>84</sup> The following month, "Żegluga Polska" was founded as a company operating under its own statute and according to its own commercial principles. Taught by the experiences with "Sarmacja," the Polish state wanted to avoid the interference of foreign capital and

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83 Rummel, *Narodziny*, 73.

84 *Przemysł i Handel*, 1926, 1348.

create a fully Polish shipping enterprise.<sup>85</sup> Hugo Pistel, head of the Shipping Division in the Maritime Department of the MI&T, was entrusted with the task of purchasing the shipping fleet for “Żegluga Polska.” A decision was made to buy bulk carriers which were to be engaged in tramp trade, mainly the transport of coal in the Baltic Sea and in the North Sea region, with the possibility of calling at secondary, relatively small and shallow, ports.<sup>86</sup>

Invitations to tender were issued for the purchase of the ships, which generated approximately 700 offers. A special commission, composed of H. Pistel, Cdr Eng. Ksawery Czernicki, Eng. Aleksander Jezierski and Master Mariner Tadeusz Stecki, was appointed to review the offers. This tender was also associated with Norwegian shipping circles, which were interested in building ships for the Polish shipowner. According to C. Robertson, an employee of Det Kongelige Departement Handel, Sjøfart, Industri og Fiskeri (Royal Department of Trade, Shipping, Industry and Fisheries), in September 1926, the Polish government planned to purchase ten 1 500 DWT ships and four 3 500 DWT ships for “Żegluga Polska.” These vessels were to be ready between 1927 and 1929 and were to be engaged in trade to and from the ports of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. The Norwegian shipyards that showed particular interest in the Polish offer included “Nylands Verksted A/S” and “Akers Mekaniske Verksted A/S”; they both sought financial support in the amount of NOK 500 000 from local governments in order to be able to fulfil the order. The two shipyards were to divide the construction work between themselves. At the beginning of November 1926, however, the Polish Ministry decided to purchase French ships instead, and the plans to buy 14 Norwegian vessels were postponed.<sup>87</sup> It is worth adding here that at the end of October 1927, the Polish MI&T turned to the Norwegian chargé d'affaires in Warsaw, Niels Christian Ditleff, with a request to mediate in the execution of another order, for two passenger ships, to be placed with Norwegian shipyards. The relevant documents show, however, that none of the Norwegian shipyards was interested in the Polish offer this time.<sup>88</sup>

The example of the Norwegian proposal shows that at that time the Polish side had no choice but to give up on this type of offer, which was mainly due to the urgency of the matter. The delivery of ships between 1927 and 1929 was not an option since the coal export boom could end at any moment. It is interesting that, also in 1926, an offer

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85 APG, Żegluga Polska, ref. no. 146, “Żegluga Polska” S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, 6.

86 Miciński, *Księga*, 177.

87 Riksarkivet i Oslo (hereinafter: RA), Utenriksdepartementet (hereinafter: UD), ref. no. 2507, H2-B2, Polen. Understøttelse av handelsflåten, Letter of 18 Sept. 1926 from C. Robertson to UD [no pagination].

88 RA, UD, Polen. Understøttelse av handelsflåten, Letter of 28 Oct. 1927 from N.C. Ditleff to UD [no pagination].



was made to the future Polish shipowner for the sale of "Sarmacja"'s ship SS "Wisła."<sup>89</sup> According to Norwegian sources, "Żegluga Polska" did not have sufficient financial resources to buy this vessel at that time.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, the fact that, a while later, the Polish shipowner purchased five new ships seems to demonstrate that the Polish side no longer wanted to do business with BDS.

The aforementioned commission with H. Pistel selected the offer made by the French shipyard "Chantiers Navals Français" in Blainville near Caen. The French company offered to sell five nearly identical 3,000 DWT steam coal carriers on favourable credit terms. Initially, the purchase of six ships had been considered, but one of them had been sold in the meantime. The vessels were built in the years 1925–1926 to the order of the French shipowner "Compagnie Nationale de Navigation" in Paris (later "Société Annexe d'Armements Maritimes" in Rouen). Originally, they were intended to carry coal freights between English and French ports, but the French shipowner was experiencing financial problems at the time due to the long strike of English miners.

When the offer was placed, three of the vessels had already been engaged in transport, and the remaining two were under construction. The total cost of the ships was £ 150,000, with each vessel valued at £ 30,000. The Polish shipowner was to pay 20% of the total amount upon conclusion of the contract, and the remainder of the sum was to be spread over four instalments.<sup>91</sup>

The ships were purchased in November 1926. "Żegluga Polska" was established in the same month<sup>92</sup> and was given a legal base on 13 May 1927<sup>93</sup> (see below). During the establishment of the company, strong pressure was exerted by the German-Gdańsk circles, according to which this type of undertaking could not be successfully accomplished without any foreign aid.<sup>94</sup> Actually, some members of the Board of the Polish shipowner, such as Commander Stanisław Witkowski, supported cooperation with German companies, but J. Rummel firmly opposed any interference by external capital in the creation of the Polish shipping company.<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, the trend towards Polonisation of enterprises was also manifest in the Polish government's attitude towards "Sarmacja." And so, on 13 November 1926, the Norwegian side, not wanting to

89 Universitetsbiblioteket i Bergen, Manuskriptsamling (hereinafter: UBB), ref. no. 1570/24–2, Konsul Einar Nielsen, Privat von 1 Januar 1927 bis 31 Desember 1928, Letter of 7 Jan. 1927 from Bergen Agent AS. to E. Nielsen [no pagination].

90 UBB, ref. no. 1570/24–2, Konsul Einar Nielsen, Privat von 1 Januar 1927 bis 31 Desember 1928, Letter of 7 Jan. 1927 from Bergen Agent AS. to E. Nielsen [no pagination].

91 Miciński, *Księga*, 178.

92 One of the documents stored in the State Archives in Gdańsk points to the date of 20 December 1926. See: APG, *Żegluga Polska*, ref. no. 146, "Żegluga Polska" S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, p. 24.

93 *Ibidem*.

94 *Bandera Polska*, 60.

95 Rummel, *Narodziny*, 87.

allow the Polish share in “Sarmacja” to increase under pressure from the Polish MI&T, decided to liquidate the company.<sup>96</sup> It was the last attempt by the Polish state authorities – who apparently thought it was possible for two Polish shipping companies to operate side by side – to save “Sarmacja.”

“Żegluga Polska” was established on the basis of the Act on commercialisation of state-owned enterprises. J. Rummel believed that it was not the best solution for the company to be run by the state, especially since state bureaucracy was not conducive to managing businesses so highly sensitive to international economic conditions. At that time, however, no Polish capitalist would take it upon themselves to pioneer the organisation of a private shipping company based solely on Polish capital. J. Rummel was also concerned that the establishment of a fully Polish shipping company could be obstructed by companies with foreign capital,<sup>97</sup> as had been the case with “Sarmacja.” In this situation, it was necessary for the Polish government to take over the initiative in setting up and running the shipping company.

Another person who committed himself directly to the formation of “Żegluga Polska” was E. Kwiatkowski, who appointed the company’s Administrative Board consisting of the president of the Polish shipping company and Mayor of the city of Poznań, Cyryl Ratajski, as well as Gabriel Chrzanowski, Władysław Gieysztor, Antoni Olszewski, J. Rummel and Mariusz Zaruski. The members of this body offered the position of director to J. Rummel, who, according to many specialists, had the greatest knowledge of running shipping companies in Poland at that time. E. Kwiatkowski himself appointed him to the position of managing director of the Polish shipowner on 20 November 1926.<sup>98</sup> The first office of “Żegluga Polska” was rented in December 1926 and was located at ulica 10 lutego [street] in Gdynia and was then moved to ulica Starowiejska. At the same time, the construction of a new building was started at ulica Waszyngtońska.<sup>99</sup>

On 4 January 1927, the first ship purchased in France, SS “Vilnius,” arrived in Gdynia, followed by the four remaining ships,<sup>100</sup> also intended for the transport of coal, wood and scrap (SS “Katowice,” SS “Kraków,” SS “Poznań” and SS “Toruń”).<sup>101</sup> It was planned that these ships would be transporting coal to the Baltic States, timber to England, Belgium, France and the Netherlands, grain to England, Belgium, the

96 Siemianowski, *Działalność*, 139.

97 Julian Rummel, “Problem polskiej floty handlowej,” in: *Akademicki Kurs dla Publicystów i Dziennikarzy o Pomorzu* (Toruń: Instytut Bałtycki, [c.1930]), 1–2.

98 Miciński, *Księga*, 178.

99 APG, Żegluga Polska, ref. no. 146, “Żegluga Polska” S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, 32.

100 Ibidem, 10.

101 *Żeglarz Polski* 42 (1926), 152: 236.

Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway, and sugar to England.<sup>102</sup> The crews of the ships consisted mainly of Kashubians, but the German press initially maintained that they were German sailors.<sup>103</sup> It turns out that many of the seamen who used to work on "Sarmacja"'s vessels were now employed by "Żegluga Polska,"<sup>104</sup> including two captains – Zdenek Knoetgen and Adolf Münzel.<sup>105</sup>

On 6 January 1927, a flag-raising ceremony was held on the ships of "Żegluga Polska" in the presence of the Minister of Industry and Trade E. Kwiatkowski, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Franciszek Doleżał, Mayor of Poznań C. Ratajski, General Commissioner for the Republic of Poland in Gdańsk Minister Henryk Strassburger, as well as a large audience of spectators.

As predicted earlier by Rummel, the beginning of the company's activity coincided with a period of prosperity. Initially, bulk goods such as coal and wood were carried by tramp shipping, to test the economic possibilities and the conditions for the future operation of liner services. In accordance with the earlier assumptions, from the very start, the company was run primarily using state capital.<sup>106</sup>

As already mentioned, on 13 May 1927, the Council of Ministers approved the statute of "Żegluga Polska." According to the statute, the company's seat was Gdynia, and its mission was to provide maritime transport services with particular emphasis on the needs of Polish industry and trade, including the transport of goods and people on the company's own and leased ships. "Żegluga Polska" was also responsible for forwarding, brokerage and other activities related to the transport and storage of goods, as well as building its own marinas and warehouses.

In addition, the company was authorised to set up offices and agencies both at home and abroad. Two important decisions by the Polish state were to exempt "Żegluga Polska" from all state taxes and fees for a period of 15 years and to give it priority in transporting freight owned by the state or serving state purposes. The authorities of "Żegluga Polska" included the Administrative Board (composed of nine members appointed by the Minister of Industry and Trade), the Directorate, and the Audit Committee. The Administrative Board was responsible for the general supervision and control over the activities of the enterprise. The Board took decisions by a majority vote, and tie

102 *Żeglarz Polski* 44 (1926), 154: 250.

103 *Bandera Polska*, 60.

104 Cf. Stefan Ciundziewicki, "Lata wojny na m/s Lewant," in: *Na morze po chleb i przygodę*, ed. Wincenty Bartosiak (Warszawa: Pax, 1972), 72; Michał Kisielewski, "W awangardzie," in: *Na morze po chleb i przygodę*, ed. W. Bartosiak (Warszawa: Pax, 1972), 134; Szymon Kupis, "Na polskich «pasażerach» w latach pokoju i wojny," in: *Na morze po chleb i przygodę*, ed. Wincenty Bartosiak (Warszawa: Pax, 1972), 264; Milewski, "Trudne początki," 282, 314.

105 Stankiewicz, *Z floty*, 274.

106 APG, Żegluga Polska, ref. no. 146, "Żegluga Polska" S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, 7–8.

votes were resolved by the president, who had the casting vote. The tasks of the Directorate included keeping the company's books and preparing its business plan, budget and annual balance sheets. The Audit Committee carried out financial audits of the enterprise.<sup>107</sup>

J. Rummel, as the person in charge of "Żegluga Polska," was entrusted with a broad scope of competencies. As director of the company, he answered solely to the Administrative Board.<sup>108</sup> The company's accounts were overseen by the Audit Committee and the Supreme Audit Office.<sup>109</sup> All these factors meant that the management of "Żegluga Polska" depended on good relations of its director with the ministries mentioned, which had the greatest impact on subsidising the Polish shipowner and supported it by concluding contracts with state and foreign contractors.

Also in 1927, new vessels were added to the company's fleet: the military transport ship SS "Warszawa" – in May, and SS "Tczew" and SS "Zagłoba" – in November.<sup>110</sup> Crews were trained and new staff were recruited in cooperation with the Polish Navy and the State Maritime School in Tczew (Państwowa Szkoła Morska w Tczewie). The company's business was hampered by the fact that the seaport in Gdynia had not been completed yet and there were not enough reloading facilities and repair workshops, which meant that the shipowner had to use the port in Gdańsk. Since Poland did not have much experience in operations associated with maritime trade and transport, such as brokerage, forwarding and marine insurance, "Żegluga Polska" was forced to cooperate with the Polish Maritime Agency (Polska Agencja Morska)<sup>111</sup> – a broker established in June 1926<sup>112</sup> operating under the auspices of the Polish government.

In June 1927, "Żegluga Polska" launched its first coastal shipping liner service, operated by the chartered ship SS "Sachsen," and in August and July, two new ships ordered by the Polish government in the previous year and handed over to the company – SS "Gdynia" and SS "Gdańsk" – were placed in the passenger liner service. The total turnover of the Polish shipowner in the tramp shipping market in 1927 was

107 Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 13 maja 1927 r. w sprawie zatwierdzenia statutu przedsiębiorstwa "Żegluga Polska" [Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 13 May 1927 on the approval of the statute of the company "Żegluga Polska"], *Monitor Polski*, no. 127, 4/06/1927, 1–2.

108 Rummel, *Narodziny*, 89.

109 Rummel, "P. P. Żegluga Polska," 223.

110 APG, Żegluga Polska, ref. no. 146, "Żegluga Polska" S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, 10.

111 *Ibidem*, 11.

112 "1937 czerwiec [2], Gdynia – Informacje Inspektoratu Straży Granicznej Gdynia dla Pomorskiego Inspektoratu Okręgowego Straży Granicznej w Bydgoszczy o firmie «Polska Agencja Morska» w Gdyni" ["1937 June [2], Gdynia – Information from the Inspectorate of the Border Guard in Gdynia for the Pomeranian District Inspectorate of the Border Guard in Bydgoszcz about the company «Polska Agencja Morska» in Gdynia"], in: *Wywiad gospodarczy Straży Granicznej wobec firm gdańsko-gdyńskich w latach 1932–1938*, compiled by Piotr Kołakowski and Ryszard Techman (Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej, 2010), 164.

PLN 303,467. The ships of "Żegluga Polska" transported 40,049 tons of imported cargo and 211,653 tons of exported cargo, and carried 51,585 tons of cargo between foreign ports, which in total amounted to 303,647 tons. In the same year, the company transported 78,840 passengers.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusions

The facts discussed in this study indicate that the coal boom was the main factor that contributed to the establishment of "Żegluga Polska," as it brought about an increase in ship traffic in Gdańsk and Gdynia, and heralded an accelerated expansion of the ports of the Polish customs area, the creation of a cartel of Polish coal mines and the construction of a connecting route between the Polish coast and Silesia. In such circumstances, establishing a Polish shipping company was a must since it gave Poland a unique opportunity to start the process of creating the Polish merchant fleet. In this light, it was not a matter of coincidence that the Polish government purchased ships for "Żegluga Polska" which were perfectly suited for the transport of coal and other bulk goods in the Baltic Sea.

The lesson Poland learned from the history of the Polish-Norwegian shipping company "Sarmacja" – especially its poor financial standing and the lack of possibilities of further development, which was compounded by the ruinous attitude of the Norwegian co-owner BDS – was the reason why so much emphasis was put this time on making "Żegluga Polska" a Polish company. Having learned from this experience, the Polish government could not allow representatives of foreign capital to make decisions on the financial status and strategy of the newly-created shipowner. Moreover, the Polish state authorities ensured they could supervise "Żegluga Polska" by granting the Minister of Industry and Trade the right to appoint the company's executives. If one is to believe J. Rummel's words that no Polish private entrepreneur would have ventured to set up a shipping company on their own at that time, the establishment of a shipping company under the auspices of the Polish government was not only an additional guarantee of proper operation of the firm, but simply a condition for its establishment.

The history of the establishment of "Żegluga Polska" shows that in the young Polish state, which had no major shipping traditions and whose society was not interested in maritime affairs, it was difficult to take full advantage of the access to the sea and there were no solid foundations for establishing a shipping company. It turns out that the laborious creation of the Polish merchant navy required not only legal and financial support from the state, but also favourable external conditions.

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113 APG, Żegluga Polska, ref. no. 146, "Żegluga Polska" S.A. Jedenaście lat pracy na morzu, 9, 11, 40, 71.

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## SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to show the impact of the activities of the Polish-Norwegian sea shipping company "Towarzystwo Żegluga Morskiej «Sarmacja» SA" and the events in the international coal market on the establishment of the Polish shipowner "Żegluga Polska" in 1926. The investigations are based on the analysis of documents available mainly in the Polish Archives of New Records, the State Archives in Gdańsk, and Riksarkivet in Oslo, as well as the literature of the subject, including memoirs and scientific publications. The study provides evidence that the collapse of "Sarmacja" and the high demand for Polish coal were the key impulses for the establishment of "Żegluga Polska." The final conclusion is that in 1926, a solid Polish shipping company could not be created without the full financial support of the Polish state authorities. The present article also sorts out contradictory literature findings and organises already-known facts into a coherent whole.

## Kulisy założenia Żegluga Polskiej w 1926 r.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Druga Rzeczpospolita, gospodarka morską Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, polityka morską Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, polscy armatorzy, "Żegluga Polska," polska flota handlowa

## STESZCZENIE

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wpływu działalności polsko-norweskiego Towarzystwa Żegluga Morskiej "Sarmacja" S.A. oraz międzynarodowego rynku węglowego na powstanie w 1926 r. polskiego armatora Żegluga Polska. Opracowanie sporządzono na podstawie analizy dokumentów dostępnych głównie w Archiwum Akt Nowych, Archiwum Państwowym w Gdańsku, Riksarkivet w Oslo, jak również literatury przedmiotu – wspomnień oraz publikacji naukowych. Podjęte badania dowodzą, że upadek "Sarmacji" oraz koniunktura na polski węgiel wywarły decydujący wpływ na powstanie Żegluga Polskiej. Zwieńczeniem dokonanej analizy jest udowodnienie, że utworzenie solidnego polskiego przedsiębiorstwa żeglugowego w 1926 r. bez całkowitego wkładu finansowego polskich władz państwowych było niemożliwe. Artykuł porządkuje ponadto obowiązujące w nauce sprzeczne ustalenia oraz scala obowiązujące fakty.

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