
FROM THE HISTORICAL CALENDAR

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99 years of activity of the Maritime and River League for the promotion of the idea of the Maritime Poland

*“(...) As long as there’s water in the Baltic,
you will be the Polish sea,
as you’ll lead to the blossoming
of Polish people’s golden dreams”
Hymn to the Baltic
(excerpt)*

Abstract

This article presents the history of Maritime and River League (Liga Morska i Rzeczna) during 99 years of its activity to promote the idea of the Maritime Poland. The goal of this organisation is to spur general development, which is achieved by developing the principles of organisation of ports, shipping, universal maritime terminology, the development of shipping, the construction of the waterway system in Poland, the training of personnel and the promotion of the essence of shipping and maritime sports among Polish population. Moreover, this article describes the various types of activities of Maritime and River League, such as launching publications related to the issues of the sea, creating plans for the construction of the port of Gdynia and Naval Yard and the expansion of the city of Gdynia, collecting money for the construction of ships and propaganda campaigns. The article describes also the relation between the activity of Maritime and River League and the expansion of Polish Navy. The conclusion of this article refers to an exhibition organised by the Library of the Naval Academy in Gdynia which will be touring Poland for the next two years.

Keywords: Maritime Education, Development Of Maritime Culture

The chorus of the *Hymn to the Baltic* presented above seems to perfectly capture the spirit of the sea that lives in the activists of the Maritime and River League, as its members saw the value of and the need for the access to the sea by Poland from its very inception. The Baltic Sea offers Poland a wide range of opportunities not only for the trade of goods and transport of passengers but also for Polish fishery, sea rescue and above all the presence of Poland in the international arena as one of the countries pursuing maritime policy. However, an effective defence of maritime interests requires a “working” Navy, i.e. one that has ships with equipment and armaments which are adequate for the particular tech-



Photo 1. Counter admiral Kazimierz Porębski in a naval uniform (source: http://foto.mw.mil.pl/disp.php?host=8fow&id_foto=13)

nological development of a given period as well as a skilled crew. The complete success necessitates social consciousness and the will of the people, who are aware of the benefits accruing from having the sea coast and an access to the sea and the need to ensure freedom of navigation.

The date of establishment of the Navy coincides with the formation of the Maritime and River League. Both these events were elements of the reconstruction of the Polish state that was taking place after 123 years of partitions. The first meeting of members of the precursor of the Maritime and River League, the Association of Workers for the Development of Shipping *Bandera Polska*, headed by counter admiral Kazimierz Porębski, took place on 1 October 1918, meaning even before the independence was formally regained (more than a month before)¹.

The goals of the *Bandera Polska* Association included primarily a broadly understood development. Starting from the development of the principles of organisation of ports,

¹ Counter admiral Kazimierz Porębski was born on 15 November 1872 in Vilnius and had strong ties with the sea from the early school age. After graduating from a middle school, he attended the Sea Cadet Corps and became an officer of the Tsar's Navy in 1892, after which he spent one year studying at the Mine and Torpedo Officer School. After graduation, he served on ships in the Japanese Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, the Arctic Ocean and the Baltic and the North Sea. Following his release from the Russian Navy, he founded the *Bandera Polska* Association in Warsaw in 1918. He was the initiator of the creation of the Polish naval and merchant fleet. In addition, he supported the idea of building a seaport in Gdynia. He contributed to the formation of the Navy Officer School (*Oficerska Szkoła MW i Lotnictwa Morskiego*) and thanks to his contacts France, Polish Navy officers were able to train in the French Navy.

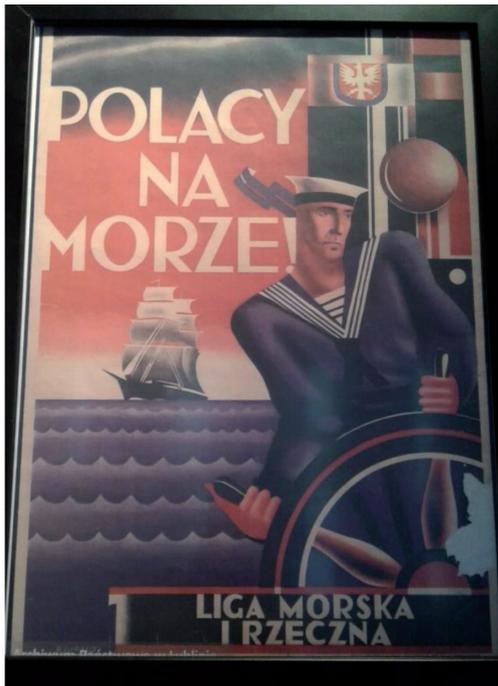


Photo 2. Maritime and River League Propaganda Poster
(Source: a photo from the exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary”)

shipping, uniform maritime terminology, to the development of shipping, the construction of a waterway system in Poland, the training of personnel and the promotion of the essence of maritime sports and shipping among the Polish society through a series of propaganda activities (photos 2, 3).

Apart from civilians, such as maritime engineers, the first members of the Association included: Antoni Garnuszewski, Witold Hubert, merchant navy officer Edmund Krzyżanowski, international navy captain Ludgard Skrzycki, river navigation captain Tadeusz Maliszewski, mechanical engineer Aleksander de Luhe, communications engineer Tadeusz Wenda, engineer Kazimierz Piotrowski. Counter admiral Michał Borowski, first naval officer col. Bogusław Nowotny and commander Witold Panasewicz joined the ranks of the *Bandera Polska*, as well.²

23 day later, that is on 24 October, the general meeting adopted a plan to take over the river fleet and water infrastructure from the occupiers, which was then submitted to the Minister of Industry and Trade. The Association published the first issue of the monthly magazine entitled *Bandera Polska* already in May 1919. Two issues were published in 1919, and from 1921 on the monthly was published cyclically. When the prospect of a quick takeover of the coast appeared, the territorial activities had to be extended to cover

² DUDA, D., SZUBRYCHT, T., *Działania Ligi Morskiej i Kolonialnej na rzecz Marynarki Wojennej w okresie międzywojennym*, Gdynia 2008.

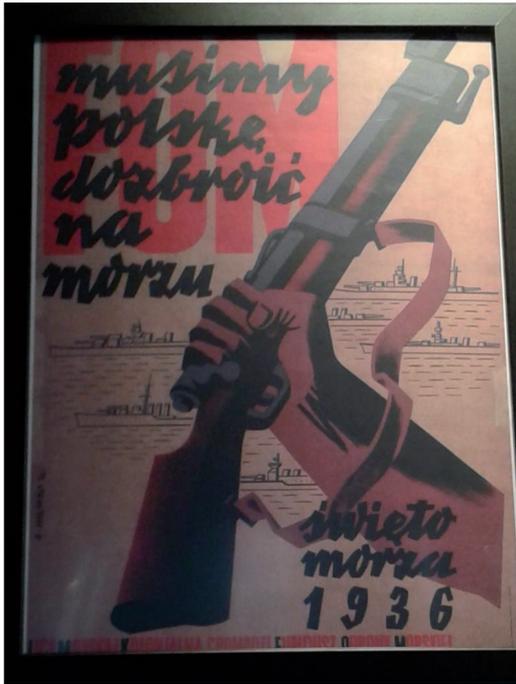


Photo 3. Maritime and River League Propaganda Poster
(Source: a photo from the exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary”)

all the lands of the Polish state and to focus works on the exploration of the sea as an important link in the emerging Polish economy and the directly related establishment of the Navy and the merchant fleet. Thus, on 17 June 1919, the Bandera Polska Association became the League of Polish Shipping (“Liga Żeglugi Polskiej”), which, after verifying its predecessor’s work, intensified the efforts to meet the emerging challenges and achieve its goals. Undoubtedly, the most significant achievement of the League of Polish Shipping was the lobbying of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on the adoption of the resolution on the construction of the seaport of Gdynia (photo 4), which was finally adopted on 23 September 1922. In the meantime, on 10 February, 1920 Poland’s Wedding to the Sea took place – a historic event that symbolically depicted the regaining of the Polish sea. General Józef Haller rode on horseback to the Bay of Puck and tossed the ring (photo 5) which is now the highest award of the League. In addition, the Poland’s Wedding to the Sea has been celebrated to this day.

On 21 January 1924, demonstrations were organised by the members of the League of Polish Shipping whose aim was to fight for Polish right to Gdańsk and commence the construction of the port of Gdynia and further expand the city of Gdynia itself. Another significant moment in the history of the League was the date of 27 April 1924 when the Ministry of Interior Affairs approved the new statute and the name “Maritime and River League”. The activities of the League were expanded to include also the issue of armed forces at sea and on rivers and its scope was extended from the Polish lands to “Polish exile”. It is impossible not to mention the great awareness that the Leagues activists had of



Photo 4. The construction of the seaport of Gdynia – a crane being operated during the construction of the port of Gdynia
(Source: National Digital Archives)



Photo 5. General Haller throws a ring into the Bay of Puck
(Source: a photo from the exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary”)

the need to have a strong naval fleet for the defence and protection of Polish interests at sea. In November of that same year, the first issue of the monthly *Morze (The Sea)* was published. The cyclical appearance of the magazine was interrupted by World War II. The main aim of the monthly was to promote the idea of the Maritime Poland in the society. The following year, on 30 January the Ordinary General Meeting of the Maritime and River League chose a new Council of the League, which was established on 4 February of the same year. Kazimierz Porębski continued to be the President of the League and Edmund Krzyżanowski became the President of the League Management Board. The involvement of the League in the activities for the development of maritime economy led to the formation of the Polish Shipping Association – Polska Żegluga Morska.

Very important was also the matter of naval and merchant fleet, which needed to be managed by competent persons. In the 1920s, many talked about the establishment of the Central Committee of Marshal Józef Piłsudski Submarine Foundation. It was planned to tax both professional officers and petty officers in an amount equal to 0.5% of their salaries until the sum of money required to cover the construction of a new submarine was collected. In addition, in 1927 the Main Management Board of the Maritime and River League adopted a resolution ordering the construction of a yacht for the needs of the Navy.

“The sea as a working area for the Polish worker” – these words uttered by Commander Aleksander Rylke were printed on ten thousand brochures, which were an example of a less spectacular campaign to popularise maritime issues among the population. In 1928, the autonomous section of the League of Polish Shipping called the Association of Colonial Pioneers (Związek Pionierów Kolonialnych) was formed. A colonial programme was adopted one year later, during the 1st General Congress of Delegates, which was organised on 20 and 21 October 1928. In November 1929, the 2nd General Congress of Delegates took place, which did not remain indifferent to the issues of the Navy. In June 1930, the Association of Friends of the Maritime and River League was established in France, whose name was changed to the Maritime and Colonial League (Liga Morska i Kolonialna – LMiK) in October of the same year. This took place during the 3rd General Congress of Delegates, which took place between 25 and 27 October 1930, where the conclusions of the Shipping Commission were also presented from the expansion of the naval and merchant fleets. The structure of the national Maritime and Colonial League included 18 branches, the most numerous of which were the Lublin branch – 207 sections, the Radomsko-Kielce branch – 177 sections and the Warsaw capital city branch – 109 sections. The last positions in the ranking were occupied by Pomeranian district with 25 sections and Polesie district with 24 sections, which the dislocation of the forces of the Navy and the essential entities of the maritime economy were based on. An extremely important element in the activity of the League for the benefit of Navy was the adoption of the resolution according to which the Council of the Maritime and River League would select a delegation to show the President of the Republic of Poland and Marshal Józef Piłsudski the need to expand the Navy to such an extent so as to make it capable of ensuring the inviolability of the state border. On 25 March 1931, a delegation, which included e.g. Benedykt Krzywiec, was received at the Castle in Warsaw by President Ignacy Mościcki. Two months later, on 27 May, the same delegation was received by Dr Świtalski, who held



Photo 6. Maritime Defence Fund Posters
(Source: a photo from the exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary”)

the office of the Marshal of the Sejm. *The memorandum on the necessity of the development of the naval fleet* was put into his hands. A Fund of the Colonial Action (Fundusz Akcji Kolonialnej) was established in April 1932, and the first Sea Festival in Gdynia was celebrated in August of that year. Also, the Fourth General Congress of Delegates of the Maritime and Colonial League took place this year.

Vice-Admiral Kazimierz Porębski, the first president of the Maritime League, died on 2 January 1933 and 18 days later the Council of Ministers adopted the Resolution on transferring the Maritime Defence Fund (FOM) to the League. The Prime Minister Janusz Jędrzejewicz appointed divisional general Kazimierz Sosnkowski to be the president of FOM. The members of the Management Board were: Adolf Bniński – the Voivode of Poznań, Commander Xawery Czernicki, Jan Dębski – Vice-president of the Maritime and Colonial League, Commander Karol Korytowski – Chief of Staff of the Navy, Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, bishop Stanisław Okoniewski and professor Stanisław Sumiński³. The aim of the Fund was to raise money from voluntary contributions made by the public for the expansion of the Navy. As stated in the Maritime and Colonial League magazine *Morze*: “*Maritime Defence Fund is the iron and the will, it is concrete and focused thoughts, it is granite scraps and the awareness of defence that today’s Poland expects and desires*”⁴, since new ships mean not only an expansion of the Navy but also the

³ DUDA D., SZUBRYCHT T., op. cit.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 20.

reduction of unemployment. This relation was seen by General Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer, who said (...) *the FOM collection campaign is not only the expansion of our navy, it is also an awakening of the pulse of the economic life and reduction of unemployment as the ships will be built in Poland with hands of the Polish worker in the Gdynia Shipyard*⁵.

In May 1933, during the 5th Congress of Delegates of the Maritime and Colonial League, the following words were delivered: *“Ending their debate at the Baltic Sea coast, the delegates at the 5th Congress of the Maritime and Colonial League, who represent all layers of society and all districts of the country, solemnly declare that access to the sea, the eternal engine of development and prosperity of the world, is a guarantee of the independent existence of the State and that Pomerania region is the eternal haven of Polishness. Therefore, any attempt to take away Poland’s connection to the sea will meet the strongest resistance of the whole nation”*⁶, which emphasised the League activists’ high awareness of the importance of free access to the open sea for Poles, which they would defend at all costs. These words apply perfectly to the song “Morze, nasze morze” whose chorus and second verse are as follows: *“(...) Sea, our sea, we will be your loyal guards. We have an order to hold you or lie at the bottom, at your bottom, lie at the bottom with honour. No power and no storm will take Gdynia from us. Our own fleet, although small, vigilantly guards the gate”*. In addition, the 5th Congress adopted a plan for the FOM collection campaign and a maritime youth education programme, and the first rally to the Baltic, attended by youth from all over Poland, was organised in August. In February of 1934, the first issue of the *Polska na morzu* monthly was published and the first issue of the *Sprawy Morskie i Kolonialne* quarterly was published in November. A very important decision to build the Naval Shipyard in Gdynia was made that year, which gave hope for the bright future of the Navy and maritime economy.

Maritime policy and the related issue of development of the Navy and the merchant fleet were the main areas of activity of the Maritime and Colonial League (photo 7, 8). A considerable attention of the League was paid to the shipbuilding industry, Poland as a transit state and even general care of the Kashubian population. In January 1935, the first issue of the League’s monthly entitled *Szkwał* was published. On 20 October 1935, an extraordinary Congress of the League was organised in Kraków to commemorate the death of the Head of State – Józef Piłsudski. On 16 July 1936, the president of the Main Management Board of the Maritime and Colonial League, General Gustaw Orlicz Dreszer, died. After his tragic death, the brigade general Kwaśniewski became the president of the Main Management Board of the Maritime and Colonial League. In 1936, LMiK Vice-President Jan Dębski published an article in the *Morze* monthly, where he specified LMiK’s goals and wrote the following words: *(...) the events are happening fast because we are approaching hard times of which only strong and tight nations will come out victorious. We, as the Maritime and Colonial League, have specific tasks to fulfil. We see a large issue in front of us, but it is still only a part of Poland’s affairs. It does not pre-*

⁵ Ibidem, p. 21.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 19.

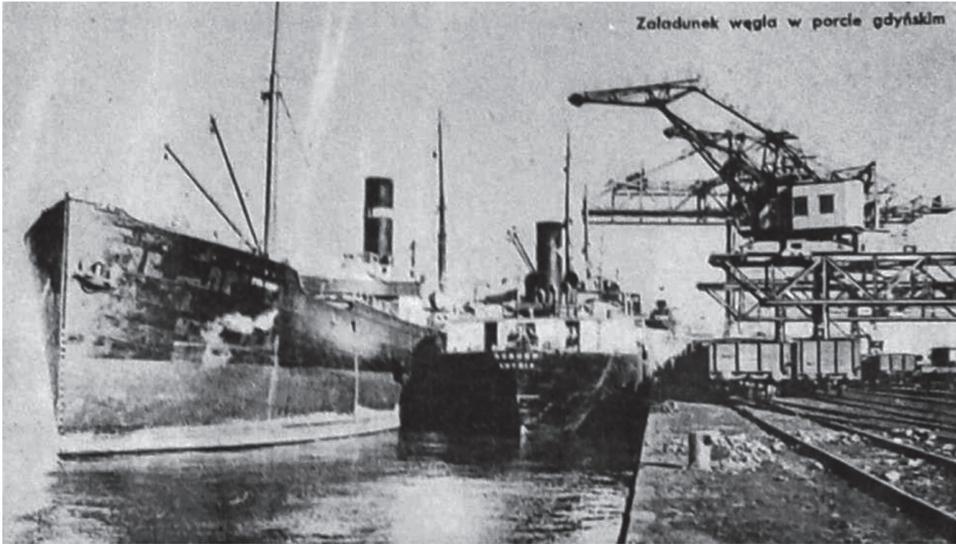


Photo 7. Loading coal in the port of Gdynia
(Source: Morze Monthly 1937, no. 1)



Photo 8. Unloading of rice from a ship in the port of Gdynia
(Source: Morze Monthly 1937, no. 6)



Fig. 1 Structure of the Maritime and Colonial League in 1937

(Source: own study based on: Duda D, Szubrycht T.: *Activities of the Maritime and Colonial League (Działania Ligi Morskiej i Kolonialnej...)*)

*vent us from seeing all the needs and the position of the State. We are entitled and obliged to fight against passivity, a sense of inferiority, to lift Poland and Poles higher and not to lower them, to raise the will and ambition of a better tomorrow and destroy the pettiness, stupidity, sectarianism and degradation which sponge off the life of Poland. (...) Times are coming – or rather we are already living in the times that are characterised by national arms-race – a material and moral arms-race. The Maritime and Colonial League must work perfectly together on the comprehensive moral and material armaments of the Polish Nation*⁷. These words emphasise the need to have a strong Navy commensurate with the need to resist the existing threats.

In May 1937 in Poznań, during the 7th General Congress of the Maritime and Colonial League, a Board of the League Distinction “Pro Mare Nostrum” was established. The structure of the League in that period is shown in Fig. 1. The following words were uttered by Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski: (...) *Today, if we were to answer the ques-*

⁷ Ibidem, p. 23.

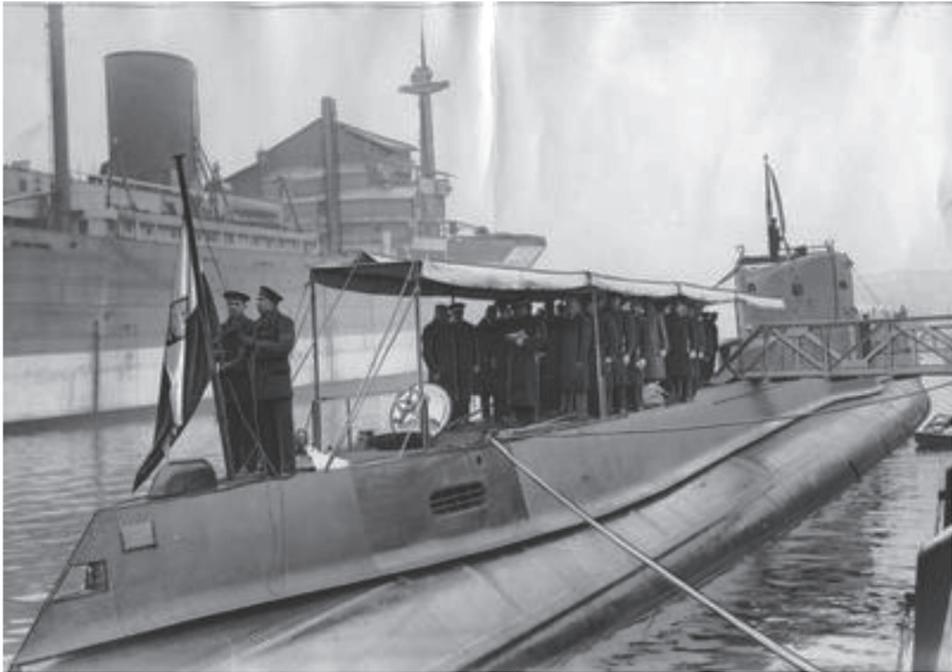


Photo 9. The first flag raising after launching ORP Orzeł submarine
(Source: National Digital Archives)

tion about what Poland was lacking, what Poland was suffering from, I would never say that it lacks money, factories, equipment or machines or any other physical phenomena. I would just say that there is no proper soul and ability to cooperate. We don't lack a single man but we do lack people who could create the greatness and power of their homeland in a collective effort and harmonious union like soldiers. (...) It was the Maritime and Colonial League that created a nautical psychology in Poland, began to process millions of human brains focused on land issues and dismissing the sea, not understanding its values; the brains that were not geared towards the sustainability of the efforts focused on the sea"⁸. It is impossible to resist the impression that the words above have not lost their significance despite the passage of time. We still lack common effort for the benefit of Polish maritime policy and those who nurture the hard work.

Over the last two years, the activities of the League for the Navy were intensified. From the point of view of the activity of the Maritime and Colonial League for the Navy, a major event was the launch of the FOM-funded Orzeł submarine, which took place on 15 January 1938 (photo 9), i.e. a few months before the 20th anniversary of the Association.

Two days earlier, i.e. on 13 January 1938, the Praesidium of the Council, the Presidents of the Districts and the General Board convened on a meeting which decided that the FOM

⁸ Ibidem, p. 25.

collection should be combined with the propaganda for a strong Polish military fleet, funded by the state budget. In addition, the need to establish the Naval Museum and construct the Garrison Church in Gdynia was recognised. In May of 1939, the 8th General Congress of Delegates of the Maritime and Colonial League took place in Toruń, after which, i.e. on 1 June 1939, it was estimated that the LMiK already had 992,780 members, including ordinary, supporter, collective and school members. In the interwar period, the League was characterised by the fact that the decisive power over it was entrusted to the annual General Congress of Delegates. The Main Management Board headed by the President of the Main Management Board was the supreme authority in the intervals between the congresses. The Naval Propaganda Department (Fig. 1) was the dominant unit.

The activities of the Maritime and Colonial League were interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. However, the Maritime and River League of the interwar period is considered the most opinion-forming organisation operating during this period. The League saw the economic and political potential and the benefits derived from tourism, made possible by the fact that Poland had regained the access to the sea. Therefore, the main objective of the League was to promote maritime issues among Polish society. Water sports were to be used as the tool for the education of youth. In addition, a number of activities were carried out, both for the construction and the expansion of the sea, river, war and merchant fleets. Much attention was also paid to the construction of the port of Gdynia, which was to be the most modern seaport in the Baltic Sea, and the publishing activity in the form of magazines, brochures, posters and other paper-based forms of written language. During World War II, League members actively participated in armed activities, fighting for free Poland on all fronts. Some of them joined the crews of naval ships taking part in the fight at sea. Before the end of the war, in October of 1944, the League was reactivated under the name of Liga Morska (Maritime League) and a meeting of its members was held on 7 February 1945. On 10 May 1953, the Maritime League was combined with the Liga Przyjaciół Żołnierza (the League of Soldier's Friends) and thus it was liquidated. It was only in December 1980 during the 2nd Congress of Maritime Culture that the Maritime League was restarted as an independent organisation. The reconstruction of its structures, the acquisition of human potential and the rebuilding of the training base began, allowing the League to continue to this day.

In almost a century of its operation, the activity of the Maritime and River League for the promotion of the Maritime Poland took on various forms. It should be noted that apart from spreading propaganda and fighting for plans for the feasible expansion of the port of Gdynia and the city of Gdynia itself, an important aim of the League was the maritime education of youth. From 1919 on, so practically from the beginning of the existence of the Association, it published magazines promoting the matters of the Maritime Poland. It is believed that the Maritime and Colonial League was one of the most opinion-forming social organisations of the interwar period, at the same time being one of the most numerous. By promoting the maritime issues, the League enjoyed social respect and recognition.

The Sea Days, which were initiated under the name of "the Sea Feast" in 1932, have continued to be celebrated to this day. Although the name of the Maritime and River League has evolved over time (Fig. 2), its main statutory goals have remained unchanged.

1.10.1918	• Bandera Polska
17.06.1919	• Liga Żeglugi Polskiej
27.04.1924	• Liga Morska i Rzeczna
październik 1930	• Liga Morska i Kolonialna
20.10.1944	• Liga Morska
marzec 1999	• Liga Morska i Rzeczna

Fig. 2 Names of the Maritime and River League over the years

It is impossible to overlook the contributions of the League for the promotion of maritime culture and the development of the Navy. One should mention the efforts to restore and strengthen the armed sea forces, aimed not only at raising funds necessary for the construction of ships but also carrying out a number of propaganda activities. At the same time, it was critical for the Polish public to be aware of the importance of having access to the sea and the expansion of the fleet, including merchant one. In addition, many activists of the Maritime and River League, which was then known as the Maritime and Colonial League, fought under the Polish flag during World War II. Thus, when it comes to the connection of the Maritime and River League to the Navy, one cannot limit oneself to the approximate date of their inception but should also emphasise their beautiful traditions, which have been continued to this day.

On this occasion, an exhibition devoted to the activities of the Maritime and River League was opened on 25 November 2016 in the main building of the Library of the Naval Academy in Gdynia. In addition to the historical outline of the LMiR (photo 10), the boards shows at the exhibition were devoted to the activities of the League for the development of the maritime economy (photo 11), the publishing activity of the League (photo 12), the symbolism and the people honoured with the Haller's Ring, which is the highest level of distinction granted by the League, and the close relation between the LMiR and the Navy (photo 13). Exhibition entitled: *Liga Morska i Rzeczna w przededniu stulecia, czyli Trzymajmy się morza (The Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary, or let's stick to the sea)* was available in AMW until the end of February 2017, and then was transferred to the Marshal Józef Piłsudski Central Military Library in Warsaw (photo 14–17) where on 7 March 2017, on occasion of the 97th anniversary of the



Photo 10. Exhibition boards
(Source: own photo)



Photo 11. A board presenting the subjects of
the maritime economy in the period 1918–1939
(Source: own photo)

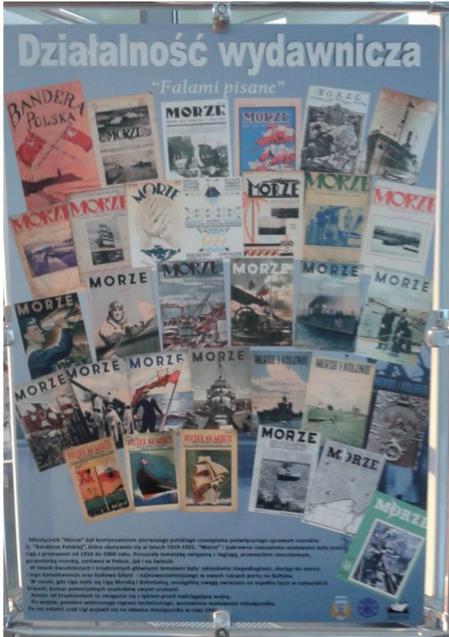


Photo 12. A board presenting the publishing activity of the League
(Source: own photo)



Photo 13. A board presenting the relationship between the League and the Navy
(Source: own photo)



Photo 14. The exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary” in the Central Military Library
(Source: photo M. Szubrycht)



Photo 15. The exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary” in the Central Military Library
(Source: photo M. Szubrycht)



Photo 16. The exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary” in the Central Military Library
(Source: photo M. Szubrycht)



Photo 17. The exhibition “Maritime and River League on the eve of its 100th anniversary” in the Central Military Library
(Source: photo M. Szubrycht)

Poland’s wedding to the sea, a meeting “Sea, our sea” devoted to the history of the Navy, its present condition and future prospects and the relation between the Maritime and River League and the Navy, was organised. Apart from providing a lesson of history, the meeting was also an educational task to raise the maritime awareness among the public. In accordance with its goals, after the visit to Warsaw, the exhibition is going to Tomaszów Mazowiecki on 1 April and then it is going to travel all over Poland for two years to finally return to Gdynia. The aim of this is to teach history to the living generations and deepen the awareness of Poles from all the corners of Poland how strategically important it is for the political and economic interests of the State to have not only an access to the sea but also a strong Navy. Understanding the importance of owning both merchant and military fleets for the economic interests of Poland and for the average Pole is becoming a key issue, as it is impossible to resist the impression that the matter of having an access to the sea and the benefits accruing from this fact is being pushed aside by major decision makers. For ages, Poles had fought for access to the sea, which had long been the main transport route for the international trade of goods and raw materials. A strong Navy, capable of responding to a dynamically changing situation, is required for the security of transport, escorting and the protection and defence of the maritime state border. For this reason, Polish ships should be equipped with devices and combat systems that can match modern technologies. However, it should be borne in mind that ships consist not only of metal hulls and equipment but, above all, a crew, who requires proper training to carry out their

tasks. Therefore, not only do we need social awareness but also ships and crews of high-class professionals capable of acting effectively in every situation.

It should be emphasised that the most important task of the League was to promote the idea of Maritime Poland. The League had seen the need to expand the merchant fleet and the Navy throughout its existence. And importantly, these were not just verbal assurances but also initiatives reflected in the actual efforts to build new ships and vessels. The will and initiative are two key ingredients of the successful efforts undertaken throughout 99 years of its existence, as evidenced by the words of the President of the Maritime and River League, PhD engineer and international navigation captain Andrzej Królikowski, who ended the lecture “Activities of the Maritime and River League for the Polish Navy” in the Central Military Library with the following word: “*The chain of goodwill and compromise means as much as every one of its links in isolation... Let’s stick together*”.

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