#### MAREK REWIZORSKI<sup>1</sup>

University of Gdańsk

ORCID: 0000-0001-8075-8388

**ZOFIA ZYCH** 

University of Gdańsk

ORCID: 0009-0006-8450-0396

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# Selected Political Parties in the Face of the Challenges of Reconstruction and Development of the Maritime Economy in Poland

#### Introduction

What can political parties and the sea have in common? It turns out that something can however. For centuries, the maritime economy has been an important element of the development of countries. In Poland, its role took on particular significance in the interwar period, when the historic decision was made to build a port in Gdynia. It was then that the potential of the Polish coast was noticed. After the end of World War II, in the times of the Polish People's Republic, the maritime economy was, like any other area of economic activity, part of the centrally planned economy. However, during the period of political transformation in Poland, the economy also underwent its own transformation, entering the free market economy. Decisions and actions taken by political parties began to have an impact on the maritime economy sector. From the 1990s to the present, especially in the field of port infrastructure, shipbuilding industry, maritime transport and fisheries, the political context of the party has shaped and continues to shape, although today less and less, the directions of development of maritime policy. The aim of this article is to analyze the role of political parties in the process of the rebirth and development of the Polish maritime economy, taking into account the strategic decisions that were taken as part of the state's economic policy. The following research questions were asked: what decisions made by political parties after 1989 had had an impact on the development of the Polish maritime economy, how political parties were involved in maritime economy matters and what were the effects of this, what provisions of the election programs of Polish political parties concerned the maritime economy. The research methods that will allow for answering the questions posed are the content analysis method, existing data, institutional and legal analysis. The following sources were used: documents, scientific articles, laws, regulations, yearbooks on maritime economy, programmes of political parties and press materials. The article consists of an introduction (which includes objectives, research



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questions and research methods), three parts (which present the history of the Polish maritime economy, the impact of the system transformation on the maritime sector and the importance of the maritime economy for political parties in Poland) and a summary (with final conclusions).

# Polish maritime economy after the end of II world war

When analysing the issue of the rebirth and development of the Polish maritime economy, one should start by looking at the period between 1945 and 1989. After the end of World War II, the economic situation in Poland was not easy – several years of war, huge losses and wasted opportunities. The post-war beginnings were certainly very difficult for the entire country and especially for the maritime economy. Almost completely destroyed port infrastructure, wrecks at the entrance to ports preventing ships from calling the ports, not to mention the shortages in the Polish own fleet. As an example, look at the port in Gdynia. When the war ended, an estimate was made of the technical condition of the port in Gdynia. The loading infrastructure was destroyed to a very high degree, with 90% of breakwaters and 45% of quays lost (Szermer, 1984, p. 86–108). Reconstruction of the port lasted until 1964. However, the port was already operational by the end of 1945. A significant event was the recovery of the German battleship Schleswig-Holstein in 1947, which cleared the waterway. The reconstruction was accompanied by modernization processes. However the port in Gdynia didn't reach its pre-war level of cargo handling until 1965.

Vessels entering the Gdynia's port Vessels entering the Gdynia's port

Figure 1. Vessels entering the port of Gdynia in the years 1945-1953

**Source:** The authors study based on *Rocznik statystyczny gospodarki morskiej 1945–1968*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warszawa 1969, p. 6.

Such a difficult situation forced the Polish authorities to take real actions aimed at organising the maritime economy completely from scratch. A number of investments were made during the period of the Polish People's Republic that brought Poland to a completely different level of development. Main investments for the future port activity took place in the 1958–1974 period. These investments included construction

Sea transport ships

25
20
15
10
5
0
1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1951 1952 1953
— Sea transport ships

Figure 2. Seagoing ships launched, sea transport ships above 100 DTW belonging to the Polish fleet in the years 1945–1953

**Source:** The authors study based on *Rocznik statystyczny gospodarki morskiej 1945–1968*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warszawa 1969, p. 8.

of a deep-water port in Świnoujście and construction of the Northern Port in Gdańsk, which enabled the achievement of a high result of over 60 million tons of transshipment in Polish ports per year in the late 1970s (Nikołajew, Leśniewska, 2013, p. 131). Moreover, several companies were established, whose tasks oscillated around cargo and passenger transport or fish processing. Polish Ocean Lines or Polish Steamship Company are companies carrying out long-distance liner cruises and are responsible for maritime trade based on their own fleets. The Polish shipbuilding industry was equally promising, being the fifth largest ship manufacturer in the world and the second largest in Europe in 1999 (Perzyński, 2008, p. 47). Despite initial setbacks in the maritime sector (failure to implement economic plans), the recovery of the maritime economy from the post-war regress became a reality. Sea navigation, fishing or shipbuilding industry, and specifically the development of these areas, resulted not only in economic but also in social profits as well, providing employment to people and contributing to the development of the coastal part of Poland.

# Impact of the systemic transformation on the Polish maritime economy

Ownership transformation, the transition from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy was a difficult period for the Polish maritime economy. For the shipbuilding industry, finding new sales markets and maintaining competitiveness with other entities that had been participants in the free market for a long time proved to be a blow. Despite initial attempts to adapt to market needs, incorrectly conducted financial policy ultimately led to the collapse of the Polish shipbuilding industry (Nikołajew, Leśniewska, 2013, p. 133). Maritime navigation also faced many problems, such as decreasing fleet tonnage or excessively high operating costs in relation to the revenues obtained. According to the data, in 1985, the Polish sea transport fleet consisted of 278 ships, and in 1995, it was only 167 (*Rocznik...*, 1969, p. 101). A sig-

nificant problem arises here, which should be related to the Polish party system that was developing at that time, i.e. in the early 1990s. The political parties that developed in 1991 (the first fully free parliamentary elections) became, in a way, responsible for participating in shaping the country's maritime policy. Political parties in Poland could be divided in the years 1991–2004 according to the genetic and programmatic criterion into: post-PRL parties, post-Solidarity parties, extra-Solidarity parties, historical parties and new parties (Sokół, Żmigrodzki, 2005, p. 191). At that time, Polish political parties did not have a specific position on restructuring of the maritime sector. The lack of vision and failure to take the necessary actions led to the regression of previously functioning entities of the maritime economy. The restructuring of the Polish maritime economy was necessary, but the way it was carried out turned out to be inappropriate, mainly due to the failure to determine the possibilities of using the maritime economy entities in the economic policy of the state (Mickiewicz, 2018, p. 84). Leaving the maritime sector without the interest of political elites resulted in the disappearance of economic activity in the maritime sector. However, an important stage in the rebirth of the Polish maritime economy was certainly the adoption and entry into force of the Act of December 1996 on sea ports and harbours (Ustawa..., 1996). This Act constitutes the formal basis for the functioning of Polish sea ports in the new political and economic realities. This document can be considered as legal support for port operations. However, the question arises whether it was really a support or only a necessity to create such a legal act. Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 made that, as the Polish maritime economy became a part of the European maritime economy. Poland, becoming a subsystem of Europe's maritime economy, participates in the creation and implementation of an integrated maritime policy. Maritime policy understood as a set of actions aimed at, among others: increasing the competitiveness of the maritime sector, creating conditions for the development of the maritime economy, and increasing the standard of living of residents of coastal towns and villages (Christowa, 2022, p. 5-7).

#### Maritime politics and economy – the importance for political parties

In order to analyse and define the role of political parties in maritime economy matters, it is necessary to present briefly the functions fulfilled by parties in the political system of the state. According to Klaus von Beyme, political parties fulfil four basic functions. First of all, parties define their goals by creating election programs. They are responsible for articulating social interests, they engage society in matters present in the public debate and also shape political elites and create governments (Beyme, 1985, p. 7–11). The visions for the future activities of political parties are set out in their programs. Political party programs form the basis for ideas, actions and potential decisions, and are also a very important element of election campaigns, highlighting the differences between competing parties (Woźniak, 2017, p. 42). An important way of communicating with voters is through election slogans. Therefore an attempt was made to find slogans, elections program postulates or political party programs of the few former and current political parties referring to the maritime

economy or maritime policy. The review of current and previous election programs of political parties was performed by searching for the following key words: maritime economy, maritime policy, sea, Baltic Sea. The first analysis was conducted on a party called the League of Polish Families, which was formed from several political groups that finally united under the above-mentioned name in May 2001. The political party called the League of Polish Families did not have postulates regarding the maritime economy in its elections programs. Only members of this party tried to engage themselves in the defence of Polish economic interests, casually referring to the Baltic Sea and seaports (Płoski, 2016, pp. 74, 273). Another party, the Democratic Left Alliance, does not include any provisions concerning the maritime economy, maritime policy or the Baltic Sea in its program entitled *Tomorrow without fears*. The party's program includes proposals concerning public finances, facilitating business operations and technological progress.

In the official election programs of 2023 of the political parties available online neither the Polish People's Party, nor the Civic Platform nor the Confederation mentioned maritime policy, maritime economy or economic or political ties with Baltic Sea. Program of the Polish People's Party from 2019, called *New Green Deal*, discusses culture, education, family and other issues, but does not mention the maritime economy or the Baltic Sea. In the program of the Civic Platform political party, entitled *Your Poland*, includes a one sentence concerning the Baltic Sea in the context of the military and security of the Baltic Sea. Next, the Confederation of Freedom and Independence's program named *On the polish side*, in the chapter on the economy, are information about inflation, agricultural production and opposition to the restriction on the sale of combustion engine cars. Here, as before, there is no mention of the maritime economy.

The program of the New Left Electoral Committee (also from 2023) refers to security in the Baltic Sea and to increasing cooperation to protect infrastructure and the maritime economy itself<sup>2</sup>. The left wing party's website, in the section devoted to the party's program, mainly contains information on social policy issues, with no references to the economy or any provisions concerning maritime policy or the maritime economy. There is much more on this topic in the election program of the Law and Justice from 2019. It calls for further reconstruction of the maritime economy, presents in details the concept of the Vistula Spit Canal, a plan of rebuilding the Polish shipbuilding industry and use of the potential of Polish inland navigation.<sup>3</sup> What is more, the word "Baltic" appears twice, each time in reference to Polish seaports. Several pages on maritime economy were also devoted to this topic in the conference materials from the Law and Justice Program Convention in July 2019.

A slogan that was already present in the public space, adopted the wording "Poland from sea to sea." This is a reference to the pre-war concept of the "Three Seas initiative" or 'Intermarium', which former Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck was an enthusiast. The concept refers to the economic cooperation of the countries located on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Electoral program of the New Left Electoral Committee, p. 32, https://klub-lewica.org.pl/images/program Lewica 2023.pdf, 9.02.2025.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The Law and Justice's electoral program=, pp. 94–96, https://pis.org.pl/dokumenty?search=program&sort=latest&tag, 9.02.2025.

the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea (see Zenderowski, 2023). This slogan appeared once in the narrative of one of the parties, the Law and Justice, and even became the reason for organizing several events promoting this idea. The conflict of interests and the low importance of Poland as a potential leader of this project makes it impossible to implement. Nevertheless politicians from the Law and Justice saw this concept as an increment in Poland's importance in Europe and in the European Union itself (Leszczyński, Szczerski, 2017).

Current political parties, especially those represented in the Polish Parliament, do not consider matters related to the maritime economy as priority matters. The current situation related to many threats has caused that the main subject dealt with by the parties is security. Referring to the previously mentioned division of political parties, they can be categorized whereas the approach of individual parties to maritime issues can be briefly characterized. The Polish People's Party that should be considered a historical party, remains faithful to the areas of its activity and activities. Poland 2025 and Razem can be considered new parties. Neither Szymon Hołownia's party nor Adrian Zandberg's party (that is not a part of the ruling coalition) conducts active policies related to the maritime economy. On the other hand, the Law and Justice party should be assigned to the post-Solidarity parties. For this political party the maritime economy was quite an important area, especially in the previous term of the Parliament. However, since the last general election, in October 2023, politicians from the Law and Justice are less involved in maritime issues, although President Karol Nawrocki, supported by this party during the election campaign gave an interview about possible future actions of the president in areas related to the sea. An important political entity is, of course, the Civic Platform, that can also be perceived as a post-Solidarity party. The party's approach to maritime issues is at a low level. Increased activity can only be seen in the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Infrastructure (Department of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation), who comes from this party. After more than a year of the current coalition's rule, on the 16th of April 2025, a post appeared on the official site of the Civic Platform on the Facebook informing observers about this, quote: "the development of the maritime economy is one of our priorities."4 It is to be hoped that these words will be the beginning of intensification of activities for the development of the Polish maritime economy by all political parties forming the ruling coalition.

Polish maritime policy lacks coherence, specifics and reflection of maritime policy assumptions in real actions. Nevertheless, in Poland the shape of maritime policy is determined by the European Union's Integrated Maritime Policy. This document sets out the most important aspects of maritime policy as well as planned actions such as: barrier-free European transport, environmental protection, legal facilitation for the maritime sector and the need to develop national integrated maritime policies by Member states of European Union (*Zintegrowana polityka morska...*, 2007, p. 3). In addition, there are documents such as strategies, plans and development programs in Poland. One example worth paying attention is the document adopted by a resolution of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Civic Platform, https://www.facebook.com/PlatformaObywatelska/photos/-rozw% C3%B3j-gospodarki-morskiej-jest-jednym-z-naszych-priorytet%C3%B3w/1361494948681899/, 21.04.2025.

Council of Ministers on 17 March 2015, entitled Maritime Policy of the Republic of Poland until 2020 (with a perspective until 2030). It is important for Poland to implement the provisions of such strategies to the fullest extent possible. Also important for maritime policy and its development directions is the legislative initiative *Yes! For Polish Ports* signed in October 2025 by the President of the Republic of Poland. It is an idea to strengthen Poland's potential in the Baltic Sea in economic and military terms. In Polish literature, the issue of maritime policy is discussed in greater detail by the authors of numerous publications on this subject, Tomasz Szubrycht, Piotr Mickiewicz and Włodzimierz Januszkiewicz.

#### **Summary**

Promoting, supporting and setting trends in the state's maritime policy by politicians and political parties is an important factor for the development of the Polish maritime economy. It should be remembered that the changing situation in the world may constitute a shift towards the maritime economy. It is therefore important for both maritime policy and the maritime economy sector as well to keep up with these changes. Creating favourable conditions for the functioning of maritime economy entities will be an incentive not only for state initiatives but also for private investors. Moreover, creating legislation facilitating operations in the maritime sector will provide a sense of economic stability for entrepreneurs. Political parties should also work to increase Poland's integration with the EU's structures. The European Union, by creating regulations, strategies and a community maritime policy, can serve as a good model for shaping Polish maritime policy. Not all solutions will be appropriate for Polish economic realities, but it may be worth implementing individual assumptions into one's own maritime policy. As one might think, is it indicate that the appropriate development of the maritime economy depends on several factors. It is worth paying attention to the factors such as (Christowa, 2007, p. 76):

- 1) Political activities on the domestic and international arena that determine the competitiveness of the Polish maritime economy;
- 2) The existence of a need to promote and educate personnel in maritime professions;
- Raising awareness of the importance of the maritime sector in society and active action at all levels of state administration conditioned by the creation, implementation and updating of maritime policy;
- 4) Defining detailed principles and methods of financial assistance from the state in the development of maritime infrastructure.

After 1989, these factors were not sufficiently taken into account, both in the programmes of the political parties and in the documents forming the basis of the country's economic development. It were private entrepreneurs, without specific support from the state, who took care of keeping some maritime entities alive. Port policy was also not an area in which political parties interfered. Such a decision was right in this case. Although if one looks at who in Poland appoints the port boards responsible for shaping port policy, one may no longer be so sure about the correctness of this solution. To clarify it should be added that according to the Act on Sea Ports and

Harbours of 1996, the boards of sea ports are appointed by supervisory boards whereas the members of these supervisory boards are appointed by the minister responsible for maritime economy. So although in this way one can find the role of political parties some of which are dominant in the appointment of the relevant minister. At this point, it is worth noting that the current government has not decided to create the Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation that may be another obstacle to further development in the history of the Polish maritime economy.

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#### **Summary**

Main focus of the article is promotion and support of the state's maritime policy by politicians after 1989 as an important factor in the development of the Polish maritime economy. The lack of a coherent state maritime policy and related neglect of infrastructure, finances and personnel resulted in a decrease of both competitiveness and the pace of development of the Polish maritime economy, especially in the period immediately following the political transformation in Poland. The aim of the article is to draw attention to the creation of favourable conditions for functioning of entities of the maritime economy, which is an element of the national economy. Creation of legislation supporting the activities of the maritime economy and promoting maritime traditions present in Poland since the interwar period are equally important. The involvement of political parties in issues related to Poland's membership in the European Union can also constitute support for the European maritime policy. The Baltic Sea is important to the state for many reasons – especially economic, strategic, but also social and political ones. The activities of political parties should focus on strongly emphasizing the need to recognize and

invest in the maritime economy treated as a broad, multidimensional area, not forgetting about environmental issues.

**Key words:** political parties, sea, maritime economy, development, challenges

# Wybrane partie polityczne wobec wyzwań odbudowy i rozwoju gospodarki morskiej w Polsce

#### Streszczenie

Głównym celem artykułu jest promocja i wsparcie polityki morskiej państwa przez polityków po 1989 roku jako istotnego czynnika rozwoju polskiej gospodarki morskiej. Brak spójnej polityki morskiej państwa i związane z tym zaniedbania infrastrukturalne, finansowe i kadrowe doprowadziły do spadku zarówno konkurencyjności, jak i tempa rozwoju polskiej gospodarki morskiej, zwłaszcza w okresie bezpośrednio po transformacji ustrojowej w Polsce. Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na tworzenie korzystnych warunków dla funkcjonowania podmiotów gospodarki morskiej, będącej elementem gospodarki narodowej. Równie istotne jest tworzenie ustawodawstwa wspierającego działalność gospodarki morskiej oraz promowanie tradycji morskich obecnych w Polsce od okresu międzywojennego. Zaangażowanie partii politycznych w sprawy związane z członkostwem Polski w Unii Europejskiej może również stanowić wsparcie dla europejskiej polityki morskiej. Morze Bałtyckie jest ważne dla państwa z wielu względów – przede wszystkim ekonomicznych, strategicznych, ale także społecznych i politycznych. Działania partii politycznych powinny koncentrować się na silnym akcentowaniu potrzeby dostrzegania i inwestowania w gospodarkę morską traktowaną jako obszar szeroki i wielowymiarowy, nie zapominając o kwestiach środowiskowych.

Słowa kluczowe: partie polityczne, morze, gospodarka morska, rozwój, wyzwania

#### **Author Contributions**

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Marek Rewizorski, Zofia Zych

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Marek Rewizorski, Zofia Zych

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Marek Rewizorski, Zofia Zych

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Marek Rewizorski, Zofia Zych

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