

## **THE SEJM LIBRARY 1919 – 2009**

Round anniversaries of establishing different important institutions usually bring about some reflections on origin, history and the present status thereof. Due to the course of history, 2009 is the year of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of setting up the Sejm Library, the oldest establishment providing services to the Polish legislative chambers.

However, drafting an outline of its history is fraught with major difficulties, mainly due to a lack of sufficient and reliable sources. The Sejm archives were almost completely destroyed in the World War II period, and data contained in publications are limited to some minor references and scarce data on the quantity and value of the library's collections. What have left are sparse accounts of former employees, gathered mostly at the end of their lives, which proved sometimes to be contradictory. The available sources on the post-war period, being dispersed and fragmentary, are not in much better shape, and it is only since the 1990s that more complete documentation has been available to us.

For the purposes of a popular publication, it seems reasonable to divide the history of the Sejm Library into four periods, each of them being related to some milestone dates in the Poland's history. The first one is the 1919-1939 period, a time that witnessed the establishment and relatively stable development of the Polish parliamentary system despite its various ups and downs. The second one falls on the World War II disaster, experienced by the Library in a literal sense, between the autumn of 1939 and late 1944, a period for which the whereabouts of the book collection can be tracked only on the meagre basis of fragmentary German documents, as the library had no institutional existence at the time. The third period is the dark era of the communist regime (1944-1989), with the Sejm as a supreme body of the state authority (formally from 1952), while in fact it was deprived of any decision-making power and was given merely a token role in the totalitarian system, for which neither a library itself nor expert resources were actually necessary. Finally, the fourth period starts after 1989, when democratic changes triggered a real growth of demand for information fuelling political debate and the law-making process, and the decision-making centre moved from party executives to the state constitutional bodies, i.e. also the Parliament as such.

## The Second Republic 1919-1939

At the time when parliamentary libraries were being established in Europe, Poland did not exist as an independent state (1795-1918), and the stormy experience of 19th century parliamentary bodies on Polish territories was not conducive to the development of any sustainable facility supporting deputies' work. The only exception was the Galician National Sejm (1861-1914), which enjoyed a substantial degree of freedom owing to the autonomous arrangements adopted by the Habsburg Monarchy. The Sejm appointed the National Department (*Landesausschusse*) as its governing and executive body, whose remit included, among other things, all that seemed necessary for parliamentary sittings. As early as in 1866, the Sejm passed a resolution setting up the Department Chancellery, the structure of which encompassed a number of administrative agencies, as well as a reference book collection. It must have been created *via facti*, as there is no mention thereof in any internal regulations except the note stating that the responsibilities of the head of the Department Chancellery included supervision of "locations, furnishings and books". Hence, while the establishment of a library was not envisaged when the Sejm was being organised, the actual needs of the deputies and the chancellery officials made it necessary to bring such a facility into existence. The book collection was not provided with due care and apparently it was not organised well enough. In December 1898, the Ukrainian deputy, Dr. Teofil Okuniewski, supported by 16 colleagues, filed a motion to the National Department, stating that books in the library lay scattered on the floor unbound, and there was no reading room, "as if the deputies were illiterate and have never needed to look through a book."<sup>1</sup> He asked if and when a reading room for deputies would be arranged, and the book collection would be put in order. The deputies were filing their complaints repeatedly<sup>2</sup> until the 1907 budget of the Sejm made a provision under item 11 for 400 crowns for the library. At the same time the resolution was passed, saying: "The Sejm instructs the National Department to submit, at the next parliamentary session, relevant proposals for the location of its library, as well as a reference library of the Sejm, so that the

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<sup>1</sup> *Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z Rozpraw Galicyjskiego Sejmu Krajowego 1898/9* [Verbatim Record of the Proceedings of the Galician National Sejm 1898/9], pp. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup> *Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z Rozpraw Galicyjskiego Sejmu Krajowego 1907* [Verbatim Record of the Proceedings of the Galician National Sejm 1907], p. 2647.

deputies could use the libraries without the inconveniences and obstacles that currently prevail.”<sup>3</sup>

Due to unavailability to source materials, we do not know what the condition of the library was at the close of the activity of the Galician National Sejm, but it should be borne in mind that it was in fact the first Polish parliamentary library, and that part of its collection was taken over by the Sejm Library after Poland regained independence in 1918.

At this point, it is worth noting that the Polish deputies to the Russian Duma, forming what was called the Polish Group, had a dedicated book collection for their own use, part of which was included in the collection of the Sejm Library as late as in 1925.

What is considered to be the library’s founding act is a proposal from a group of 18 deputies of the peasant party (PSL-Piast) headed by Jan Dąbski, submitted to the Marshal of the Sejm in March 1919, requesting that “the Sejm library be established and provided first with the most necessary works, and then be gradually expanded”<sup>4</sup>.

Given the enormous amount of work facing the first Sejm of independent Poland and the timing of the proposal (the Sejm met in plenary on 10 February 1919), it can be taken for granted that it was an expression of a conscious need and concern of the law-makers for the establishment of a research and documentation base necessary to support legislative work that was to give shape to the reviving state. What might have been of significance is that some of the movers had had previous parliamentary experience – four had been deputies to the Galician National Sejm, and two had been members of the State Council in Vienna. They must have been more aware than the parliamentary newcomers of the benefits arising from the existence of a library as an auxiliary research facility attached to the parliament.

In organisational terms, the library was a part of the Sejm Office, and as long as the Legislative Sejm was a unicameral parliament sitting as a Constituent Assembly, it used to be called the Legislative Sejm Library (*Biblioteka Sejmu Ustawodawczego*) (1919-1922). When two separate chambers were set up at the end of 1922 – the Sejm and the Senate, the Sejm Office was transformed into the Sejm and Senate Office, and the Library became the Sejm and Senate Library. The office had three organisational units working for both chambers (shorthand office, financial and economic department, and the library), and each chamber had its own chancellery. In

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pp. 1323-1324.

<sup>4</sup> Legislative Sejm of the 2nd Republic, Publication No. 229.

1928, the existing office structure was divided into two autonomous and independent units, with joint use of the library by the members and personnel of both chambers, and the maintenance cost of the library was charged to the Sejm's budget.

At the turn of the 1930s, after 12 years of the Sejm's activity, it became necessary to organise the growing archival resource consisting of both the records of parliamentary work, mainly the legislative process, as well as administrative files produced by the offices. The Library's structures were used for this purpose. In September 1931, the Marshal of the Sejm issued an order promulgating the Organisational By-laws of the Office of the Sejm of the Republic, which expanded the existing scope of the library' activity by setting up the Sejm and Senate Library and Archives. The By-laws applied as the operational rules of the library until the outbreak of World War II, defining it as a body auxiliary to the Sejm and the Senate, and, as such, keeping a collection of various publications concerning the work of the Sejm and Senate, with special focus on publications in the field of social sciences, legal and economic sciences. The Library was to provide relevant information and materials, operate a reading room of daily newspapers and periodicals, and to collect and store all files and documents produced and to be produced as a result of the proceedings of the Sejm and the Senate.<sup>5</sup> The Library and Archives was headed by the director, who reported directly to the Marshal of the Sejm in administrative matters, and received instructions regarding the book collection and the archives from the Marshals of the Sejm and the Senate. The staff of the Sejm and Senate Library and Archives consisted of officials and lower-rank employees filling job positions under different contracts within the limits set by the budget of the Sejm. The Marshals of the Sejm and Senate are known to have issued special regulations setting forth detailed rules of procedure providing a basis for the operation of the Library.<sup>6</sup> Analogous regulations, except for the paragraph concerning the Library's personnel, were issued by the Marshal of the Senate.<sup>7</sup> According to the witnesses' accounts, special rules of procedure were issued, but they disappeared without trace after the war.

In the total absence of archival documents, the first acquisitions of the Sejm Library are not easy to identify. It seems that the first books came from a collection kept by

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<sup>5</sup> *Monitor Polski* 1931, No. 234, item 318.

<sup>6</sup> *Monitor Polski* 1931, No. 234, item 318, § 13 and § 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Monitor Polski* 1931, No. 234, item 319.

Dr. Henryk Kołodziejski for the purposes of the Parliamentary Constitutional Committee of the Provisional Council of State (a body existing in 1917, whose mission was to prepare the foundations of Polish statehood) consisting of about 3,000 volumes, which were acquired by the Sejm. The Library took over book collections (and in most cases just mere parts thereof) from several liquidated institutions which represented Polish interests *vis a vis* the annexationists or had no statutory successors. Hence part of the book collection of the former Poznań Province (*Regierungsbezirk Posen*) was taken over, as well as a collection of official journals from the above-mentioned National Department's library in Lvov. Other collection's pieces spurred argument in the Sejm, which took a vote and decided to leave them with the Lvov University.<sup>8</sup> In spring 1924, about a dozen thousand volumes were brought also from Lvov, previously held by the library of the Governorate (i.e. an office representing the Emperor of Austria in Galicia). Sources also mention the acquisition of a small number of books from the library of the former Ministry for Galicia in Vienna. Finally, in autumn 1925, the book collection of the Polish Group in the former Russian Duma was recovered. A considerable number of titles came from Warsaw library duplicates – mainly the Public Library for the Capital City of Warsaw and from the library of the Warsaw School of Economics. The Sejm Library was also supplied with donations from private individuals, such as the book collection of the late deputy Henryk Radziszewski (800 volumes), donations by deputy Tadeusz Reger, senators Władysław Jabłonowski, Stanisław Rosner, and others.

Intensive efforts aimed to increase library acquisitions soon yielded results. The Library was granted a mandatory copy of each official publication, and a meeting of booksellers and publishers, convened on the initiative of its director, resolved to provide it free of charge with one copy of each publication dealing with subject matters corresponding to the collection profile. While the performance of the resolution had its ups and downs – which was especially the case with low-circulation and expensive books – savings could be made on the library's budget, which were allocated for the purchase of foreign-language titles.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Legislative Sejm of the 2nd Republic. *Sprawozdania Stenograficzne* 32 [*Verbatim Records* 32], sitting of 12 April 1923, ł.7.

<sup>9</sup> J. Kramm *Henryk Kołodziejski jako bibliotekarz. Wspomnienia*. *Przegląd biblioteczny* [*Henryk Kołodziejski as a librarian. Memories. Library Review*], 1955, Fascicle 2, p. 158.

The Sejm and Senate Library was also developing international cooperation through exchange. Upon Poland's ratification of the Brussels Convention of 15 March 1886<sup>10</sup>, the country began receiving from and distributing to many foreign parliaments some general parliamentary materials (publications and verbatim records). Enhanced cooperation was also stimulated by the establishment in 1925 of an editorial office attached to the Library, for the publication of "*Exposé sommaire des travaux législatifs de la Diète et du Sénat Polonais*", containing complete texts or abstracts of Polish legislative acts translated into French. The publication, created on the initiative of the marshal of the Sejm Maciej Rataj, benefited to overcoming the language barrier, and it was welcome and highly appreciated by foreign partners. It is worth noting that the editorial staff consisted of prominent lawyers, and the director of the Library was the secretary of the editorial office. Until 1936, seven volumes appeared, covering the period from November 1918 to August 1937.

Apart from parliamentary documents, publication journals of a number of states were collected. With regard to the former annexationists (Austria, Prussia and Russia) and several Western European states (Belgium, France, Great Britain), historic collections dating back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were purchased. The Library was also the Polish depository of the publications of the League of Nations and the Carnegie Foundation. It received publications of the International Labour Office, the International Institute of Agriculture, the International Institute of Trade, and many other organisations. The resource was expanded by a collection of Martens' treaties (1494-1926), a collection of French diplomatic documents (the Yellow Book 1856-1923) and a collection of diplomatic documents of the German Reich (*Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914*).

From the very beginning, the Sejm Library adhered to its collection profile. In addition to legal norms and official publications, it collected books in the field of law, with special focus on constitutional or rather public law, as well as economics, politics, social sciences, and the then contemporary history. Special emphasis was also put on political doctrines and the history of parties and political movements. The Library kept a vast collection of books on Bolshevism, comprising 900 titles, a unique resource in Europe.

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<sup>10</sup> Monitor Polski 1921, No. 151

According to 1927 data, the book collection consisted of about 16,000 works in 35,000 volumes, and the regular acquisition of periodicals included 473 publications in Polish and 309 in foreign languages.<sup>11</sup> The last documents to be published before the war reported that as of 15 December 1938 the collection of the Sejm and Senate Library consisted of 36,928 works in almost 48,000 volumes and 3,025 titles of periodicals in about 30,000 volumes.<sup>12</sup> The resource placed the Library at the average European level, but owing to the specialisation and abundance of official, including parliamentary, publications made it one of the libraries best fitted to perform its tasks.

In the first year of its existence, the Library had no premises that would allow it opening a reading room and start organising and processing the materials received. At the end of 1920, two rooms situated nearby the plenary hall were allocated to the Library, which enabled it to open the most needed reading room with the press and official documents, and to undertake the processing of the collection. By 1929, its location within the Sejm building changed several times, which involved much inconvenience. The moves were caused by changes in the configuration of parliamentary clubs in the course of the term of office. The multiplication of what often were ephemeral existences always induced turbulence in the parliamentary back-rooms, and groundless reassignments of rooms involved substantial effort on the part of the staff of the Sejm offices. Finally, after the new plenary hall and a hotel for deputies and senators were commissioned in 1928, the Library was provided with appropriate space. The reading room was left in the old building, while the periodical reading room, the resource storage facilities – equipped with modern shelving and protected against fire – were situated in the new building. The changes made it possible to fully satisfy the readers' needs<sup>13</sup>, and supposedly enabled the Library's scope of activity to be expanded by archival functions. It is worth mentioning that a small, but carefully selected and arranged reference book collection was then put in the round meeting room of the Budget Committee, containing comparative materials on the theory and practice of the budget law of other states. Today, this room is the main reading room of the Sejm Library.

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<sup>11</sup> Parlament Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1919-1927 [*Parliament of the Republic of Poland 1919-1927*], ed. H. Mościcki, W. Dzwonkowski, Warsaw 1928, p. 58

<sup>12</sup> 5th Sejm of the Republic of Poland, Publication No. 100.

<sup>13</sup> J. Kramm op. cit., p. 159.

The staffing of the Library evolved throughout the 20 years of inter-war period. Initially, beside the manager, and then director, Dr. Henryk Kołodziejski, a qualified librarian and a messenger were employed. At the end of 1921, there were already 6 persons employed, in 1928 – 13 persons, and by 1939 the number increased to 20 employees. The personnel were periodically supported by 2-3 trainee librarians, and assistance was also provided by voluntary workers. From the establishment of the Library till 1939, it was headed by Dr. Henryk Kołodziejski, an economist by education and librarian by vocation, and also a social activist and a member of the Masonic lodge. He embarked on his librarian career in 1915 at the Public Library of the City of Warsaw, where he served as manager of the bibliography department. Two years later he became involved in compiling the above-mentioned book collection for the purposes of the Parliamentary Constitutional Committee of the Provisional Council of State, which was tasked with the drafting of the future Constitution and the Sejm electoral law. As already mentioned, the books became the nucleus of the Sejm Library's collection. To a great extent, it owed its fast growth and development to the knowledge, energy and determination of its director. Kołodziejski drafted developed proposals for the improvement of library work and enhanced methods of providing prompt and exhaustive information to the users. By establishing a branch catalogue, he rejected the decimal classification system, which he considered too formal and inadequate for a parliamentary library. Instead, he conceived and developed a framework catalogue comprising 3 main branches: law, socioeconomic sciences, and historical-political sciences. It encompassed 24 branches and more than 300 sub-branches marked with digits and letters. A catalogue of books was complemented by references to a special catalogue of periodicals and documents in the form of descriptions of major events covered by the domestic and foreign press. Dr. Kołodziejski took personal care of correct classification of materials and expansion of the catalogue framework, as new issues were covered in writings.

In late 1920s and early 1930s, two teams (sections) were set up in the Library for auxiliary work on parliamentary bills, justification of proposals and preparation of substantive speeches – the Legal Section and the Socioeconomic Section. The duties of the Library's employees included the collection of statistical data, preparing comparative summaries, drawing up budget statements and performing other work requested by deputies or senators in consultation with the director. The deputies



were highly appreciative of the Library's information work, as indicated by the report of the Budget Committee on the preliminary budget estimates for the Sejm and the Senate of January 1930: "its personnel are performing services that go far beyond the scope of library work: searching and preparing materials and data at the deputies' request, make often complicated statistical calculations, provide various information, especially on foreign legislation (...). Of course, this is only a modest beginning of the future "preparatory work office for the deputies and senators" which will hopefully evolve from our Library. We already have an embryo of such an office in the form of the Legal Section of the Library, which should be complemented by a "statistical and economic" section as soon as possible. Last year, in addition to its normal information role, the Legal Section acquired and put together (...) the whole material concerning precedents and events of procedural significance. This has initiated the organisation of the Polish common parliamentary law. These gradual transformations of the Sejm and Senate Library into an auxiliary apparatus of the parliament should be considered justified or even indispensable"<sup>14</sup>. The quote proves that as early as in 1930 a thought was given, apparently not without Dr. Kołodziejski's inspiration, to transform the Library towards today's parliamentary expert offices. The course of historic events prevented full implementation of this idea.

According to the Library's rules of procedure, its resources were available at the reading rooms and materials could be borrowed mainly by the deputies and senators, and also by employees of the Sejm and Senate offices, journalists – members of the Parliamentary Reporters' Club, authorised officials of ministries and central offices, researchers, and even students authorised by university authorities and, under certain conditions, "ordinary people from the street". Source materials mention the openness and friendly attitude of the Library's employees to the users: "Everyone could, if necessary, obtain (...) scientific advice or bibliographic guidance from director Kołodziejski, who spared no time and friendly assistance in spite of the multitude of public matters he was involved in. Therefore the director's office used to be truly besieged by people who often took advantage of his great kindness."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sprawozdanie Komisji Budżetowej o preliminarzach budżetowych Sejmu i Senatu na rok budżetowy 1930/31. Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Okres II, Druk nr 700 [*Report of the Budget Committee on preliminary budgets of the Sejm and the Senate for the budget year 1930/31. The Sejm of the Republic of Poland, Term II, Publication No. 700*].

<sup>15</sup> J. Kramm, Henryk Kołodziejski..., op. cit., p. 160.

As already mentioned, the Library operated two reading rooms – the main one and the publication reading room, both situated in the Sejm building complex. The custom of working on plenary days until the end of proceedings consolidated at the time, and it has been continued to this day. The attendance of deputies was increasing slowly yet steadily. We know that despite the fact that the number of deputies and senators was reduced by the authoritarian Constitution of April 1935 by 46%, reading room attendance dropped by only 21%. Also the number of borrowings from the storage facilities (i.e. disregarding reference book collections) was 517 in 1935, 522 in 1936 (the figures concern only deputies and senators). In the 1930s, attendance of users from outside the parliament was also increasing at a fast rate. In 1933, there were 750 people a month, in 1935 – 900, and in 1937 – 1050 a month.<sup>16</sup>

Entering its twentieth year of existence, the Library, together with the Sejm and Senate Archives, was already a strong and dynamic centre of scientific information in the field of law and politics, well suited to performing its tasks and continuously improving the methods of work for the parliament's purposes. It also enjoyed the opinion of a respectable information and research facility in Poland, and one of the best-managed libraries in Warsaw. The outbreak of the war in 1939 put an end to its existence.

### **The disastrous years of the war and occupation**

During the campaign of September 1939, most of the Sejm building was destroyed (including the plenary hall and the adjacent building with the main reading room, catalogues and inventories of the Library), while the periodical reading room and most of the storage facilities situated in the modern building with reinforced concrete floors survived. The lowest storeys accommodating archives were flooded with water which probably came from firefighting on upper floors. As long as the building was accessible in the first days of September, director Henryk Kołodziejcki and the employees gathered every day, making efforts to protect the collections. Among other things, some of the most valuable archival files were then evacuated to the east. They survived the war and were returned by the Soviet authorities in 1956. After the capitulation of Warsaw, an effort was made to move the library resources to the

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<sup>16</sup> Sprawozdanie Komisji Budżetowej o preliminarzach budżetowych Sejmu na rok 1937/38. Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Okres IV, Druk nr 300 700 [*Report of the Budget Committee on preliminary budgets of the Sejm and the Senate for the year 1937/38. The Sejm of the Republic of Poland, Term IV, Publication No. 300*].

undestroyed Chamber of Industry and Commerce building situated nearby, but the work was interrupted by the Germans, who also prohibited the Library staff from entering the remaining Sejm buildings. When the same employees were hired in February 1940 to put to order the flooded Sejm archives, they found out that the book collection had disappeared, but they did not manage to establish when and where it had been taken away. The surviving archive records were moved to a central repository designated by the Nazis, where they were burnt in November 1944. It is worth noting that during the 7 months of recovery work efforts were made to effectively “remove” some of the materials (especially personnel records) from the resource in order to prevent their possible use by the Gestapo.

It is very difficult to reconstruct the fate of the book collection of the Sejm Library after September 1939 owing to a fragmentary nature or unavailability of archival sources. Nevertheless, thanks to the studies by A. Mężyński, we can at least partly track the wartime whereabouts of the books.<sup>17</sup>

As early as on 23 September 1939, SS Head Himmler instructed Department II of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA – *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*), called “Ideological Research and Evaluation”, to organise a unit whose responsibility would be to “protect prehistoric finds and prehistoric sites in Poland”, also branded by the SS men “The Operational Unit for the Protection of Scientific Values and Fine Arts”, best known as “*Kommando Paulsen*”, named after its commander, professor of prehistory at the University of Berlin and SS Untersturmführer, Peter Paulsen. Before his first expedition to Poland, head of RSHA Department II, SS Standartenführer Alfred Franz Six, a philosopher by education, instructed Paulsen to “protect all cultural goods in Poland which are of any value and significance for the German cause, and to bring as many items from those resources to the Reich as possible”.<sup>18</sup> Thus the terms of reference of *Kommando Paulsen* were expanded to cover not only excavated finds and prehistory, but virtually all works of art. It is worth noting that Paulsen brought an impressive loot to Berlin from his first trip to Poland (1-14 October 1939) – St. Mary’s Altar, hidden in the vaults of the Sandomierz Cathedral, a masterpiece carved in

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<sup>17</sup> A. Mężyński *Okupacyjne dzieje księgozbioru Biblioteki Sejmowej*, Przegląd Sejmowy [The occupation history of the Sejm Library’s book collection, Sejm Review], fasc. 4/8/1994; idem: *Kommando Paulsen, październik-grudzień 1939 r.* [Kommando Paulsen, October-December 1939], Warsaw 1994, idem: *Kommando Paulsen. Organisierter Raub polnischer Kulturgüter während des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Köln: Dittrich, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted after A. Mężyński, *Okupacyjne dzieje...*, p. 192

Cracow by Veit Stoss, a sculptor born in Nurnberg, and hence considered by the SS boffins a German piece of art.

At that time, the decision-makers of RSHA Department II must have conceived the idea of organising their own library to provide an information resource for the work carried on by the "Ideological Research and Evaluation" Department. The library was to be built around "political" book collections brought from the conquered countries and those confiscated in the Reich. Paulsen's activities in Poland confirm this hypothesis, as although he visited large libraries in Warsaw and Cracow, he only packed and took to Berlin several smaller "political" libraries, including the book collections of the institutes operating in Warsaw (Hungarian, Danish, and French), the Jewish Institute, the Ukrainian Institute, and the Institute of Foreign Relations. In doing so, he followed the instructions of RSHA Department II to take out of the country "church and political, Marxist, Jewish or Masonic libraries, in Polish, German, French and English." The book collection of the Sejm Library was Paulsen's largest loot. The decision to move the Library to Germany was taken in early November 1939. The first three trucks (including two with trailers) operated by the transport company of Richard Schultze, reached Berlin on 17, 18 and 23 November. Then 4 railway wagons were dispatched, the last of which reached Berlin on 2 December. The data coming from German documents suggest that the whole surviving book collection, i.e. about 48,000 volumes, was taken out of the country. The collection of newspapers and magazines was partly burnt in the Sejm garden, and partly recycled at the Warsaw paper mill. In 1940, the metal shelving was dismantled and taken out to Germany, which was the Germans' frequent practice in the occupied countries.

In Berlin, the books were deposited at the head office of RSHA Department II at Eisenacherstrasse 12. By the way, it was the former building of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons in Germany ("Grosse Landesloge der Freimaurer von Deutschland"). Kept in the basements and in one of the rooms (No 18), they were being processed unhurriedly by just one employee, a man named Joachimski. The book collection remained at the disposal of the head of Department II A. F. Six, who probably gave the order to catalogue the collection. In 1941, the RSHA Department VII (as the former Department II was called after 1 January 1941) proceeded with organising its own library. In the spring of 1942, it employed about 25 individuals, and the collections fell into 3 groups: "German Reich and General", "The Opponent" and "Foreign Countries". We do not know how many books from the Sejm Library were

incorporated in the new library, how many were retained as duplicates, and how many were deemed useless. The few copies that returned to Warsaw after the war bear shelf marks "Ausl" (Foreign Countries) or MI (German Reich and General), assigned according to criteria that are not quite clear.

At an unknown point in time, part of the collection robbed from the Sejm Library was taken out of Berlin and hidden from the Allied bombing raids at the Houska Castle in the Czech Sudeten. A hypothesis can be ventured that those were the books incorporated in the resource of the RSHA library and catalogued. In August 1945, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the President of the State National Council with somewhat exaggerated optimism that the "library of the Polish Sejm and Senate" was found in Czechia. In February 1946, a repossession agreement was concluded between Czechoslovakia and Poland, under which transports with items including the discovered library collections started arriving in March of that year. Reports of government agencies mentioned 38,000 volumes from "different libraries, mainly the Sejm and the Senate". 176 cases with books brought from Prague in two wagons reached the Sejm building in December 1946. By the end of the year, 115 cases containing 10,109 volumes were unpacked, of which only 3,340 were the property of the Sejm Library. In a letter dated 10 March 1948, addressed to the Main Directorate for Libraries (made up at the Ministry of Education), the director of the Sejm Library, Zofia Hryniewicz, wrote that 3,477 volumes had been brought from Czechoslovakia in the first shipment (i.e. a number close to the one stated above), and in the second shipment 4,820, which meant 8,297 volumes in total (a copy of the typescript is held in the Sejm Library's resource) from the book collection taken out of the country by *Kommando Paulsen* in the autumn of 1939, i.e. about 17.3 %.

Different figures are provided in a letter by the same director of the Sejm Library dated 15 March 1950, addressed to the Restitution Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to a question about the value of the books recovered. She stated that the 100 cases received contained 10,405 volumes, of which 6,627 came from the Sejm and Senate Library. Of this number, 5,230 volumes were incorporated in the resource (a copy of the typescript is held the SL archives), i.e. less than 11% of the lost book collection.

Most probably, not all of the volumes brought from Czechoslovakia had reached the Sejm Library; however, it has not been disclosed to date whether any Polish library holds a major number of books bearing ownership marks of the pre-war

parliamentary library. It was also established that the Germans did not take all the books seized in 1939 to the Sudeten. The RSHA building at Eisenacherstrasse 12 survived bombing and the storming of Berlin in condition good enough to be used by the US occupation army.<sup>19</sup> The books deposited in the basements survived – in July 1945 their number was estimated at 50-60 thousand volumes. The US commanding officer ordered that “the libraries that can be identified should be returned to their lawful owners”. The task was carried out by the German civilian administration, which noted in a report of February 1946 that “it was ordered to transport the libraries to the bishop, the supreme church council, the Jewish community and the lodge. When the work was in progress, the US commanding officer closed the whole building and prohibited the removal of any further items”.<sup>20</sup> There was no mention of the Sejm collection. It is most likely that the collection was dispersed. Several volumes were found in the book collection of A. Weiland, a German communist who was involved in reviewing and sorting the RSHA books from June 1945 to February 1946. Some of them were distributed to other German libraries during the war as duplicates, and some might have decayed due to poor storage conditions. In spite of the searches undertaken, it has not been established so far whether a major collection of books from the Sejm Library was taken over by some German library after the war.

### **The Sejm Library under the communist rule of 1944-1989**

In view of the fact that the Library was almost completely destroyed by the Germans, the post-war reconstruction started from scratch. The State National Council, a law-making quasi representation of society, set up by the communists during the occupation, already had a book collection which is known to have been compiled in the autumn of 1944 in Lublin, and was then moved to Warsaw, where it was managed by the Library of the State National Council, a department of the SNC Presidium Office. The status of the Library was established by a low-level instrument, a circular letter of the SNC Presidium Office director of December 1945. After the opening of the Legislative Sejm in February 1947, the Library was also commissioned. It was customarily called the Sejm Library, as in the 1946 referendum rigged by the communists the Senate was formally abolished and until 1989 the

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<sup>19</sup> S. Kubina *Die Bibliothek des Berliner Rätekommunisten Alfred Weiland (1906-1978)*, Köln 1949, p. 19

<sup>20</sup> Quoted after S. Kubina, *Die Bibliothek...*, p. 21

parliament remained unicameral. The organisation by-laws of the Chancellery of the Legislative Sejm conferred on 11 September 1948 by the Marshall of the Sejm preserved the name of the Library, and recognized it being merely one of the six Chancellery offices reporting to the Chief of the Chancellery of the Sejm, and not a unit reporting directly to the Marshal, as was the case in the interwar period.

Following the adoption of the Stalinist Constitution (22 July 1952), the hitherto separate chancelleries of the State Council and the Sejm merged, and though the Sejm became formally the highest state authority, the new body was named the Chancellery of the State Council. Its organisational framework encompassed, among numerous offices, also the Sejm Library. The Provisional Organisation By-laws of the Chancellery of the State Council provided that the Sejm Library consisted of autonomous sections: General, Acquisitions, Collection Processing, Reading Room, and Reference Library.<sup>21</sup> Characteristically, the Library was then the only organisational unit to retain the adjectival form of the word "Sejm" in its name.

In the wake of partial abolishment of Stalinism – as a part of the "thaw" that followed October 1956, a separate Chancellery of the Sejm was reinstated, with the Library included in its structure. The reorganisation was viewed as a symptom of an increased role and independence of the parliament in a modified system. In the years to come, the organisational position of the Sejm Library remained unchanged. Today, it remains an internal unit of the Sejm Chancellery and it is financed from the Chancellery's budget. This is not to say that the organisation of the Library itself and its position in relation to other Polish libraries have not changed.

As it is widely known, centralisation was a tendency characteristic of the communist rule. A heavily centralised administration tended to organise all domains of social life under the same pattern, including science and culture. From the late 1940s, suggestions were made that the Library should have taken up the role of an administrative head office for official libraries. Those concerned, that is the librarians, did their utmost to avoid putting those ideas into effect.<sup>22</sup> In 1951 the Central Board of Libraries, supported the very Presidium of the Council of Ministers, proposed that the Sejm Library should assume supervision and instructional care of the libraries of the Voivodship National Councils. It was as late as until 1953 that the director of the

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<sup>21</sup> Resolution of the State Council of 5 August 1952 on the integration of the Chancellery of the State Council with the Chancellery of the Legislative Sejm, *Monitor Polski*, 1952, No A-73, item 1158, § 12, par. 2

<sup>22</sup> Library meeting at the Sejm of 21 October 1949, typescript held by the SL., s. 3

Sejm Library promised that the Library would “seek to fulfil the proposal (...) of the Central Board of Libraries”<sup>23</sup>, but no steps had ever been taken to that effect. The Sejm Library was often referred to as “central”, “specialised”, and even the “Central Legislative Library” and the “representation of state libraries”. This was intended to enhance its prestige and encourage budget appropriations. In practice, it did not mean much. The status of the Sejm Library was determined by the successive Statutes of the Chancellery of the Sejm and the organisational by-laws issued on their basis, which it is not necessary to mention here. To emphasise that the Library was not just one of the many offices of the Chancellery of the Sejm, in April 1976 the Presidium of the Sejm adopted a resolution conferring Statutes on the Library. It was a load of ideological gibbering like: „*The library shall work (...) for the purposes (...) of socialist education of society*” and rules of order, specifying the periods for which books and publications could be borrowed. At the same time, it described the tasks of the Library and the scope of the materials collected. They were to deal with the history and theory of the parliamentary system, parliamentary practice, political sciences and legal sciences, in particular in the field of state law and administrative law, the workers’ movement, and social sciences. The Library was also expected to collect and provide materials directly connected with the activities of the Sejm, i.e. parliamentary publications and verbatim records. As the Library was recognised as a scientific establishment by resolution of the Council of Ministers of 1968, its Statutes created the Scientific Council as an advisory and opinion-making body chaired by a deputy. By the way, the Council was completely inactive.

Already some time before, the management of the Library had been taking up initiatives aimed to strengthen its position, mainly with a view to procuring appropriate premises. This was to be supported by the appointment of the library committee attached to the Marshal of the Sejm, which consisted mainly of deputies and academics, forming a kind of library promotion lobby. The first petition on this issue was submitted at a special meeting on library matters, which was held with the participation of the Vicemarshal of the Sejm and deputies in autumn 1949. The appointment of such a committee was also widely supported at a conference on library matters held in December 1960 under the chairmanship of the Marshal of the

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<sup>23</sup> Wytuczne prace Biblioteki Sejmowej na rok 1953 [*The Sejm Library Work Guidelines for 1953*], typescript held by the SL, p. 1



Sejm. Despite the unanimity of positive views and numerous examples of other parliamentary libraries being referred to, the committee was never appointed.

As already mentioned, after the wartime disaster the first book collection of the Sejm Library started to be put together as early as the autumn of 1944 in Lublin, where the State National Council was provisionally headquartered. The first manager of the SNC Library, Kazimierz Zieleniewski, was authorised by Bolesław Bierut to take over books with political, social and reference information content from a repository set up by the Germans in Lublin at ul. Szopena 28.<sup>24</sup> About 2,000 volumes from that resource were later selected for the Sejm Library.

After it moved to Warsaw, the Library resumed activity in autumn 1946. According to a surviving December report, the reading rooms were visited by 281 persons who borrowed 473 books. At the time, the book collection contained 17,485 volumes.

The acquisition policy sought to maintain the line set before the war by director Kołodziejcki, and until the end of the 1940s it was claimed that the “present Sejm Library is drawing on the tradition of an excellently organised pre-war library”<sup>25</sup>, while there were also differences arising from a different structure of state power, with political leadership being exercised by the communist party. As the communist dictatorship was gaining foothold, references to the pre-war tradition disappeared, and the acquisition policy placed an increasingly great focus on the acquisition of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin as well as Vyshinsky, Molotov, Zhdanov and others, and newly acquired documents from international organisations started to be predominated by those from “world federations” (of trade unions, democratic youth, women, peace defenders), in other words entities whose existence was to prove the reach of communist influence throughout the world.

By the end of the 1940s, more than 100,000 library items had been gathered, of which about 70,000 were incorporated in the collection. About 15,000 of them were parliamentary and UN publications. Such a great increase of resources over a short period was possible owing to unusual ways of acquisition in the period immediately following the end of the war. Apart from purchases, donations and exchange, libraries benefited from what was called “allocations” from the Central Board of Libraries.

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<sup>24</sup> Letter from the Chairman of the State National Council to the Head of the Labour, Social Welfare and Health Department dated 14 November 1944, typescript held by the SL.

<sup>25</sup> Z. Hryniewicz, *Narada biblioteczna w Sejmie [Library meeting at the Sejm]*, 1949, typescript held by the SL.

Those were books from former German libraries, collections abandoned by landowners forced to leave their homes by the land reform (manor book collections), those whose owners could not be identified after the war, and books handed over following the liquidation of libraries attached to state establishments or the liquidation of those establishments themselves. Books were bequeathed based on administrative decisions, often without any kind of selection or reflection on their usefulness for the libraries concerned. The Sejm Library, as the one operating within an organisational and administrative framework of state authorities, was given a priority in those allocations. This resulted in a rapid increase in the number of volumes held and the need for continuous selection of book acquisitions. The collection of the Ministry of Recovered Territories liquidated in 1949 was taken over (about 3,500 volumes), as was the book collection of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers containing many items in line with the parliamentary library profile (12,383 volumes), and many other, smaller collections. There was also a German book collection consisting of allocations from the Chief Directorate for Libraries, estimated in 1953 at approximately 100,000 books, 60% of which were intended to be incorporated in the Sejm Library's resource.<sup>26</sup> The work plan for 1954 provided for the selection of items for the Sejm Library's collection, their disinfection, and partial processing, and putting 1 copy of the "Hitleriana" at the disposal of the Central Board of Libraries, separating items suitable for collection by other libraries, and sending the rest for recycling at a paper mill. In 1959, unprocessed German publications still consisted of 19 559 volumes. Some of them (7,893 volumes – mainly official publications) were handed over in the same year 1959 to the State Library of the German Democratic Republic in Berlin in collaboration with the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the GDR embassy in Warsaw. It can be added that it was not until the 1990s that remaining items from that collection were put to order.

Among the acquisition methods specific to the communist period, which give a fair view of the atmosphere of those days, it is worth to mention the acquisition of books and magazines from the Main Control Authority for the Press, Publications and Performances, in other words the censor's office. In 1953, the office supplied 15% new book acquisitions (790 titles) and a sizeable number of copies of newspapers

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<sup>26</sup> Wytuczne pracy Biblioteki Sejmowej na rok 1953 [*The Sejm Library Work Guidelines for 1953*], typescript held by the SL.

and periodicals.<sup>27</sup> In 1954, the Library obtained donations of 387 volumes, of which as many as 342 came from the Main Control Authority for the Press, Publications and Performances. The cooperation, praised by the librarians for the quantities supplied and the speed with which new publications were delivered, was limited in 1967, when the management of the censor's office decided that only periodicals would be permitted to be supplied. "This reduced the number of books received by the Library free of charge."<sup>28</sup> The way the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the foreign press acquisition process was similar, albeit much more labour-intensive for the librarians. Once or twice a year, 3-4 tonnes of newspapers and magazines were brought, from which issues missing in the Library's resources were laboriously picked or complete series were formed.<sup>29</sup>

The Library was trying to expand the acquisition process through the exchange of publications. While the 1886 Brussels Convention was formally in force, exchange suffered numerous disturbances, mostly for political reasons. For example, when the communist authorities closed the British Information Centre in Warsaw, the Britons retorted e.g. by stopping the supply of parliamentary materials to the Sejm Library. Moreover, in the 1950s all contacts with foreign institutions were subject to scrutiny or mediation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which often impeded or slowed down the exchange. In order to maintain the continuity of parliamentary publications, the Library was forced, for several years, to buy e.g. British, Austrian, German, Israeli and Yugoslav documents, using its modest allocation of hard currency. After 1956, the situation started to improve. In 1959, the Library was already receiving official and parliamentary publications from 34 states, and this continued at a similar level until the late 1990s, when printed matter was replaced by parliamentary and official databases. Obviously, exchange was the main method of acquiring those publications, and as no type of contact with foreign bodies could exist under the communist rule without official surveillance, in 1960 an exchange committee was established, chaired by the Chief of the Chancellery of the Sejm, who exercised appropriate, albeit incomplete, political supervision over its activities. For example,

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<sup>27</sup> Sprawozdanie za rok 1953 [*Report for 1953*], p. 11, typescript held by the SL.

<sup>28</sup> Sprawozdanie z działalności Biblioteki Sejmowej za okres IV kadencji Sejmu PRL 1965-1969 [*Report on the Activities of the Sejm Library during the 5<sup>th</sup> Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland 1965-1969*], p. 6, typescript held by the SL.

<sup>29</sup> Konferencja na temat: Polityka kompletowania księgozbioru Biblioteki Sejmowej [*Conference on the Policy for Gathering the Book Collection of the Sejm Library*], 1957, p. 9, typescript held by the SL.

each dispatch of materials to The New York Public Library and each piece of correspondence required a separate consent from the Chief of the Chancellery of the Sejm. He even released a special instruction on the exchange of Sejm publications. Due to political pressure, the exchange committee also decided to stop sending Polish parliamentary publications to the Bundestag Library. For four years, the exchange used to be unilateral, until when at the beginning of 1965 the Germans ceased sending the Bundestag documentation to Poland, since they had not received any response to their letters nor materials from Polish authorities. An attempt at restoring the contact was harshly opposed by the Polish MFA, which banned the renewal of exchange “under the present political situation”.<sup>30</sup> It was not reinstated until after 1970. The interference of the authorities with the acquisition policy was quite common throughout the 1950s and 60s. For example, in 1954 the State Committee for Economic Planning removed a number of foreign periodicals from the subscription list without bothering to consult the Chancellery of the State Council or the Library. The quality of service provided by “Ruch”, a state monopoly distributing foreign periodicals, was miserable. The Sejm Library was also plagued by the withdrawal of books considered harmful for ideological reasons. At the end of the 1940s, the Central Board of Libraries drew up a list of banned titles, and a special committee had them withdrawn from the Library’s resource and scrapped. In view of the fact that the Library had no precise records of book publications at the time, it is today hard to determine the scale of what the Library’s director Zofia Hryniewicz described as a “pogrom”<sup>31</sup>.

For the sake of a more complete picture of the situation, it should be added that after that action, in September 1950 the Minister of Education issued an order on the acquisition, keeping and making available in libraries, on an exceptional basis, of printed matter withdrawn from circulation.<sup>32</sup> In the wake of the Nazi atrocities, destruction of books has had definitely bad connotations, hence the option was chosen to designate a group of privileged libraries (including the Sejm, National, and Central Military Libraries), which were allowed to keep banned publications.

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<sup>30</sup> Sprawozdanie z działalności Biblioteki Sejmowej za okres III kadencji Sejmu PRL. 1961-1965, załącznik 3 [*Report on the Activities of the Sejm Library during the 3rd Sejm of the Polish People’s Republic 1961-1965, Appendix 3*], p. 9, typescript held by the SL.

<sup>31</sup> Z. Hryniewicz, Konferencja na temat: Polityka kompletowania księgozbioru Biblioteki Sejmowej [*Conference on the Acquisition Policy for the Book Collection of the Sejm Library*], 1957, pp. 10-11, typescript held by the Sejm Library.

<sup>32</sup> Monitor Polski, 1950, No. A-99, item 1249

Supervision over such publications was the personal responsibility of the library director; a separate inventory was to be created as well as a separate catalogue inaccessible for ordinary readers. Physically, those publications had to be placed “in a separate room, which the library director should personally keep under lock and key at all times”. In 1954, the list of authorised libraries was expanded and they were instructed to submit an annual report on the activities of the prohibited publications department.<sup>33</sup> After October 1956, the regulations were repealed, and it was decided that “in the interests of the public, the scope of access to certain categories of publications should be strictly limited by the library’s internal regulations to scientific research, studies, as well as literary, journalistic and official activities”.<sup>34</sup> In the Sejm Library, books belonging to this category were marked – ironically enough – “Cim” (for “cimelia”), and the collection was not included in the general resource until the 1990s. Yet even before that, Tadeusz Kozanecki, who managed the Library in the years 1971-1981, was known to have made the “prohibited matter” widely available to researchers, journalists and deputies.

A period of rapid growth of the resource was followed, in mid-1950s, by relative stable acquisition of 3,500-4,000 book publications per year. As the documents preserved refer to different methods of calculating the acquisitions (volumes, copies, fascicles, library units, etc.), a detailed description of the acquisition process would require special studies and often complicated calculations.

The number of 300,000 volumes in the Library’s resource, mentioned in a 1957 internal document, seems, for various reasons, to be a largely overstated estimate.

More realistic figures are available as late as from 1959, and, put at their briefest, they are as follows (the figures stated correspond to the sum of volumes of book publications, parliamentary and official publications, publications of international organisations, periodicals, and cartographic publications):

No.	Year	Overall inventory at year end, in volumes
1	1959	156,681
2	1964	190,281
3	1968	204,898
4	1973	207,456

<sup>33</sup> Monitor Polski, 1954, No. 12, item 130

<sup>34</sup> Order of the Minister of Culture and Art of 8 January 1957, Monitor Polski, 1957, No. 7, item 56

5	1979	211,163
6	1985	237,811
7	1989	253,595
average annual acquisitions: 3,231 volumes		

Given that the collection started to be built from scratch at the end of 1944, the outcome of the first 15 years of service was impressive. Yet it should be borne in mind that a large part of the resource was not properly recorded and catalogued. The slowdown of growth in mid-1960s was attributable to several factors. Administrative “allocations” of books were discontinued, and many of those allocated previously were withdrawn from the resource as duplicates or items that did not match the collection profile. The authorities no longer insisted on the collection of many copies of multiple-volume ideological publications (Marxist-Leninist literature), outdated annual volumes of periodicals were disposed of, and finally selection was necessitated by limited storage space and lack of prospects for its expansion.

Despite the difficulties and above-mentioned obstacles in the exchange of parliamentary materials, the desirable acquisition model was successfully defended. In 1989, the resource comprised, among other items, 55,621 volumes of official, parliamentary, and international organisations’ publications, being in many instances the only copies in the country, the collection of which was deemed to be part of the core mission of the Sejm Library. It is worth adding that among the book publications gathered, the percentage of foreign-language items usually exceeded 50% of the acquisitions, an infrequent phenomenon in the communist bloc countries.

Since it was established with the Sejm, i.e. formally the highest organ of power, the Library was allowed a certain degree of autonomy in gathering foreign-language materials, as well as appropriate allocations of hard currency for their purchase. A mandatory copy of official publications was also obtained in the form of official journals of ministries and voivodship national councils.<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that the copies were sometimes hard to come by, especially those supposed to be provided by ministries, it was finally possible to collect almost a complete set thereof. From its resumption of activity after the war, the Library also remained a UN depository library, and despite proposals to waive the deposit it has maintained that status to date.

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<sup>35</sup> Circular letter of the Chairman of the Copuncil of Ministers No 17 of 21 April 1950, Monitor Polski 1950, No. A-53, item 605

Throughout the period concerned, one of the major aspects of librarian work, i.e. processing, was subject to critical evaluation. With a large inflow of materials, the relatively small number of employees were unable to ensure the taking of inventory and both formal and subject cataloguing on a regular and ongoing basis. For years, the processing department was overburdened with the massive inflow of publications from the period of post-war organisation of the Library. Backlogs, neatly concealed in reports, were reflected in nonsense work plans and “operational guidelines” for the next years, which provided for cataloguing anew the same resources for years. In 1959 the director of the Library still complained in a semi-official document: “It used to happen in past that professional librarians were employed to serve the sittings of the Sejm, to substitute absent secretaries, and to work elsewhere – from digging up to harvesting.”<sup>36</sup>

Cataloguing foreign parliamentary materials, often the only such specimen in Poland, was not an easy a task. The principle of corporate authorship (institution name) was adopted for the purpose. Index cards were arranged by state, and, for each state, by institution. This sometimes led to incorrect inclusion of books published by parliaments as parliamentary documents. Efforts were made to catch up on the backlog, e.g. in 1961-1965, apart from the processing of 2,744 volumes of parliamentary publications on a current basis, also 1,502 outstanding volumes were catalogued. Yet the main reason for the growing backlogs was insufficient staffing. The situation became critical in late 1960/early 70s, when collection processing backlogs reached several years, and the number of volumes completely unprocessed rose to about 30,000 (almost 15 % of the entire collection).

In order to find a remedy for that situation, probably on the initiative of new Library director Tadeusz Kozanecki (who assumed the post in December 1971), a librarian expert committee prepared a report titled *Biblioteka Sejmowa, stan obecny, wnioski, propozycje* [*The Sejm Library. Present status, conclusions, proposals*]. In the report, the poor accommodation conditions were described (the Library occupied an area of about 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, while that considered necessary was 4000 m<sup>2</sup>). Moreover, it was proposed to increase the number of personnel (from 17 to 29 line employees) and to reorganise the structure according to one of two options. The need was indicated to

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<sup>36</sup> Z. Hryniewicz: Konferencja na temat: Polityka kompletowania księgozbioru Biblioteki Sejmowej [*Conference on the Policy for Gathering the Book Collection of the Sejm Library*], 1957, p. 20, typescript held by the SL.

select serial publications, mainly the press, and to establish a team in charge of acquisition policy. The summary of the Report contained the following statement: “if the Sejm Library is left in its existing state, (...) this will lead to deterioration of its capability to provide information. Only immediate support given to the Library by the authorities of the Sejm can ensure necessary conditions for its development”.<sup>37</sup> One of the results of the report was a meeting of the librarian lobby with the Chief of the Chancellery of the Sejm and its senior officials. The attendants included the directors of the two largest libraries in Poland (National and Jagiellonian), the director of the Library of the Warsaw School of Economics cooperating with the Sejm Library, and the author of the report. Issues were tackled, which had been discussed previously on many occasions, with the old dilemma of the parliamentary library’s collection profile at the forefront: should the formation of a distinctly specialised resource be aimed at (parliamentary documentation, legislation, law), or – giving in to pressure from the deputies – expand the collection scope so as to include the majority of issues of interest to the parliament. Those present were in favour of specialisation and selection of collections, reorganisation of the Library and strengthening of its human resources, and, what is more, acceptance was obtained from the management of the Sejm Chancellery.

The work resulted in partial reorganisation of the Library, with the establishment of a parliamentary documentation department, which was tasked with a documentary analysis of parliamentary documents and book publications dealing with the practice and theory of the parliamentary system, and with the provision of related information to users. Human resources were strengthened. While in 1973 there were 21 employees, in 1974 their number increased to 27, and the staffing did not change significantly for the next 15 years, that is to the end of the period described.

Throughout the post-war period, the Library was mainly focused on serving the deputies and the parliamentary bodies (committees). The categories of the users served in 1947-1989 did not change much. Apart from government members, deputies and members of the State Council, personnel of both chancelleries, the users also included researchers, journalists, writers, and senior-year students, provided with a greater or smaller scope of service depending on the intensity of the

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<sup>37</sup> M. Jasińska, W. Piusińska, A. Romańska, Biblioteka Sejmowa. Stan obecny, wnioski, propozycje. Raport Komisji Bibliotekarzy-Ekspertów [*The Sejm Library. Present status, conclusions, proposals. A report by the Expert Librarian Committee*], October 1972, p. 15, typescript held by the SL.



Sejm proceedings. In the 1944-1949 period, the number of readers ranged between 5 and 50 a day, but no detailed statistics were kept. In 1953, the reading room was visited by 1,914 readers. In the report for that year, it was complained that owing to activities of the Sejm building security “the opinion prevailed that the Sejm Library is a closed, hardly-accessible library”, and demands were raised to publish a dementi thereto in the press. In 1956, the number of reader visits was already close to 9 thousand (8,819), to then range over the next thirty years between 7,500 and 13,500 visits a year. A characteristic decline was witnessed in 1968 (down to 6,100), as in the wake of the turmoil at universities (March 1968), students’ access was limited by administrative decision (simply enough, no passes were issued from the end of February to mid-August).

For any parliamentary library, the number of deputies using its collections is an important indicator of its usefulness. We have no complete data in hand, but we do know that in 1959-1968 the library was visited, on average, by 140 deputies (of the total number of 460 deputies) annually.<sup>38</sup> In the latter part of the 1980s, the deputies represented 6 to 11 % of the users.<sup>39</sup> It is worth adding that the percentage of the deputies and senators increased rapidly in the first years following the 1989 transformation. In 1991, the reading room was visited by 320 deputies and senators who accounted for nearly 20% of all users. From today’s point of view, that level of the deputies’ attendance was good. However, the management of the Library found it unsatisfactory and often considered ways of improving it. What was believed to be one of the reasons was a lack of a separate reading room for deputies, preferably more comfortable than the one accessible to the public. Besides, there had always been a dilemma of whether to focus on strict adherence to the collection profile

<sup>38</sup> 1959 – 142; 1964 – 147; 1968 – 140

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No.	Year	Total number of visits	Of which deputies	%
1	1985	7,394	831	11
2	1986	8,450	466	6
3	1987	8,828	723	8.2
4	1988	8,660	581	6.7
5	1989*	9,022	1,082	10.8
6	1990	11,899	2,020	17.0
7	1991	9,569	1,676	20

\* As of July 1989, Senate consisting of 100 members was established. The Library provided services to the Senate’s members on the same terms as for the Sejm deputies.

adopted or to cater for the needs reported by the deputies, which often included belles-lettres.

To obtain acceptance for the collection scope, working methods, and accommodation needs, conferences were hosted or initiated with the participation of the Sejm authorities. Such meetings were held in 1949, 1960, 1964 and 1972. In spite of support declared at the meetings by high-ranking officials, the Library's matters got bogged down in administrative procedures and lack of budget resources. Perhaps only the 1972 meeting mentioned above triggered concrete action. Work was then undertaken on a concept of automation of the library procedures. The use of IT technology both in the Sejm and in the Library was initiated and ardently advocated by the director of the Library Tadeusz Kozanecki. In September 1972, a working committee was appointed, chaired by the deputy scientific secretary of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which prepared a report titled "Forum – a computer system for the purposes of the Sejm".

The system was intended to provide comprehensive information services to the deputies, parliamentary committees and the Presidium of the Sejm, and it was supposed to improve the information status of the Sejm, e.g. by eliminating information noise while ensuring automatic, wide access to desired information. The Library became the coordinator of that extremely ambitious project. Intensive studies were conducted, trying to ensure compatibility with what was conceived as a gigantic state system for Specialised Scientific, Technical and Organisational Information (SINTO). The function of the Sejm Library was planned to be developed to become the "Main Centre of Legislative Information". The Programme Council for the Automated Information System „Sejm Library – Main Centre of Legislative Information was even appointed, which consisted of 16 members (and as such, it was practically unable to operate effectively). At the beginning of 1975, the IT Section was established at the Library (1975 – 4.5 jobs, 1976 – 12 jobs), tasked with designing and implementing a concept of the proposed Main Centre of Legislative Information. As work progressed, costs were calculated and necessary expenditure was compared with potential benefits with the use of the computer technology available at the time, elements of the monstrous system were abandoned one by one (e.g. full texts of statutes), and the plans boiled down to an electronic address system on the current Polish legislation and that applicable in the past (back to 1918). In practice, the system was to select normative instruments that contained legal

provisions relating to a specific subject matter, and to answer if and what instruments were available regarding the interpretation and application of those provisions. The completion of what was, by today's standards, an uncomplicated system was scheduled for 1985. It can be added that the IT Section was transformed in a few years into the IT Centre, which was separated from the Library organisation, and became an independent unit.

Apart from a register of normative instruments, the system was to comprise the Central Catalogue of Legal Literature containing information on books, periodicals, parliamentary, official and international organisations' publications as well as subordinate publications in the field of law held in the collection of the Sejm Library and 17 other law libraries (including 8 libraries of university law faculties). In order to facilitate the coordination of work, in 1979 the Library was granted the Central Legislative Library status, which theoretically involved a number of responsibilities related to the acquisition and processing of collections. However, since no financial support followed the general declarations, no special success was reported in the field.

In parallel, work was undertaken with a view to automating the legislative processes. In 1977, an "analysis of the Sejm Library system" was drawn up, which defined the basic organisational, training and research activities necessary to perform in replacing the traditional library methods with IT methods. The crisis of the late 1970s brought further work to a halt, which rendered its output completely obsolete in view of the progress in computer technology.

Throughout the post-war period, the Library was struggling with the lack of adequate library storage and processing space. In 1946, storage facilities were arranged in the rooms occupied in 1928-1939, and the reading facility was accommodated in an adjacent round room of the budget committee. The Library has been occupying those premises to this day. The furnishings of the reading room were designed by the world-famous interior architect Jan Bogusławski. He won the Grand Prix of two world exhibitions (Paris 1937 and New York 1939) for interior designs presented in the Polish pavilion. He gained wide acclaim for the design of a cradle for the Dutch princess Beatrix (1938), and the furnishings of the reading room of the Sejm Library is considered to be one of his best achievements.<sup>40</sup> Initially, the Library occupied

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<sup>40</sup> K. Grobelska, *Meble i wnętrza Jana Bogusławskiego {Jan Bogusławski's furniture and interiors}*, *Architektura*, No. 5/2002, pp. 55-58

about 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>, and over time the area increased to 1,500 m<sup>2</sup>, but most of the time there were problems both with the storage space and with the space available to the users and employees. The storage space issue was dealt with through resource selection (mainly by handing collected and bound press over to other libraries) and by increasing the height of shelves – in reasonable limits of course. For many years, demands had been made for rooms to cater for a reading space for the deputies – also formally tabled by the deputies themselves – but to no avail. While the post-war reconstruction plans provided for a separate library building in the Sejm complex, when was actually commissioned, it was put to other uses, e.g. offices of the State Council members and the central archives of the communist party. Now it accommodates the Senate. After the Stalinist constitution of 1952 was adopted, the communist authorities completely lost interest in further reconstruction of the Sejm buildings as designed, and another building planned for the library was never built. Until 1989, the Library's several proposals for the acquisition of new rooms in the existing buildings had also failed to be satisfied, and the technical facilities (shelving, lifts, lighting and heating, fire protection) remained as they were in the 1950s.

### **In a free Poland – the Sejm Library after 1989**

The partly free elections of 4 June 1989 led to a change in the position of the parliament within the system of state power. Once a meaningless body formally carrying out decisions taken by the communist party, the Sejm was becoming what seemed to be the most important place for resolving matters of key importance for the public and the state. An unprecedented intensification of work was witnessed of the parliament sitting in permanence (instead of the previous system of two sessions in a year). The Chancellery of the Sejm faced completely new and multiple challenges, both in terms of quantity and quality of the services delivered to the chamber. Owing to the change of the Sejm's work style, there has been a marked growth of demand both for information and for day-to-day expert support. It became necessary to set up both its own Research Bureau and to strengthen and unify the information and documentation facilities of the Sejm.

The Sejm Library remained an organisational unit of the Chancellery of the Sejm, but its remit was expanded. Pursuant to an agreement between the Chiefs of the Chancellery of the Sejm and a separate Chancellery of the Senate, the senators and the Senate staff became the users of the Library on the same terms as the deputies.

The Library continued to be financed exclusively from the budget of the Chancellery of the Sejm. The first years of transformation saw an expansion of the Library's structure through the establishment or integration of new agencies.

In view of the intensification of the Sejm's proceedings and the need to ensure space for the purposes of day-to-day activities of the Sejm committees, the idea to establish the Museum of the Polish Sejm, which had already been developed for several years, was abandoned in 1990, and the team involved in its organisation was taken over by the Library, where it formed the Museum Division. The division has been involved in the collection and museum processing of works of art, cultural heritage assets and antique books related to the past of the parliamentary system. It also organises temporary exhibitions, usually to mark important anniversaries celebrated by the Sejm. Currently, the Museum Division's resource is close to 6000 pieces (objects of art, documents, and numismatic items). In response to the deputies' demand for media information, the Media Resource Centre was established in 1991, which deals with recording, processing and presentation of audiovisual recordings of the sittings of the Sejm and major news and feature programmes broadcast by several television channels. Its services became popular with the deputies, who had their speeches recorded on video cassettes, and, more recently, on DVDs. A press information section was also set up, which produces a hardcopy daily and weekly press review about the Sejm, based on a wide selection of newspapers and magazines, both central and regional. In 2005, an electronic press information service was launched, which provides direct access to a collection of press clippings with a full-text search facility.

Following the self-dissolution of the communist party, part of its property remained idle and there was no clear concept as to its future. This also concerned libraries. One of them, attached to the former Archives of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (taken over by the state archives, but without its book collection) – was incorporated in the Sejm Library on the Chief of the Sejm Chancellery's decision in April 1991. This arrangement probably saved the collection from dispersion, but it required a major organisational effort. A large part of the volumes was stored in piles in the basements of the building currently converted for the purposes of the Senate, without any logic or topographical guidance whatsoever. After almost a year of organisation work, the resources were again made available to readers. They are characterised by considerable diversity of subjects – ranging from

amply represented Marxism and left political movements to a collection of underground press of the occupied Poland. A further development of the collection consisting of nearly 145,000 volumes was planned, with special focus on the transformations taking place in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, as well as left political and social movements. This makes reference to the pre-war tradition, when the Sejm Library kept a collection of works devoted to Bolshevism. In addition, the acquisition of documents concerning the political life was undertaken, including occasional publications of political parties and trade unions (programmes, charters, election leaflets and posters, etc.), the collection of which has already exceeded 14,300 items. The library taken over forms a separate Social History Collection Division.

The Sejm Archives, incorporated in the Sejm Library in September 1992, also forms a separate division. It acquires, processes, preserves and provides access to archival records produced by the Sejm, its bodies, deputies' offices and the Chancellery of the Sejm. Also in this case, reference was intentionally made to the tradition of the Second Republic, but the arrangement was also dictated by the desire to concentrate the Sejm's documentation facilities in a single organisational unit and by utilitarian concerns (elimination of multiple acquisitions of certain materials, easy access for archivists to source materials kept at the Library, etc.). In 2008, the Archives' resources contained more than 1000 running meters of files, about 54,000 audio and video recordings (tapes and cassettes), and more than 1,500 sets of photographs.

The closing step in the development of the Sejm Library's structure was the establishment in 2002 of the European Information and Documentation Centre as a new division of the Library, tasked with the provision of information support concerning the EU documents and legislative acts. In view of setting up the Centre, the scope of acquisition of EU literature, periodicals and documents was expanded. A website was created, offering an extensive set of constantly updated information on the European Union and the EU information sources, and on the activities of the Sejm related to European integration. In the period around the accession (January-July 2004) the number of user visits to the EIDC website was 87,771. EIDC also participates in the Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange (IPEX) project.

The main challenge facing the Library in the past two decades was the automation of library work, defined as a total change of working tools aimed at increasing the effectiveness and speed of user service, and, what may be comparable to the

invention of print, expanding information access online. In 1992, a decision was made to finally reject the concept mentioned above, which theoretically provided for the creation of gigantic IT systems, but practically only enabled the implementation of non-compatible fragments with minimal applicability in real life. On one hand, the ideas rooted in the 1970s were conditioned on the development level of the available computer technology and, on the other hand, on the infrastructure of a communist state that was determined to maintain central control over the entire system and thus restricted the development of its components.

It was decided to purchase off-the-shelf software of the integrated library system class, marking a major breakthrough in the automation process planned and already implemented. Following a competitive bidding process, in autumn of 1993 the ALEPH system was installed, which, though a medium-class solution, fully satisfied the projected needs of the Sejm Library. The flexibility and modular structure of the system, corresponding to the basic library functions (acquisition, processing, provision and information on collections) made it possible to automate all the library processes, and at the same time to gradually put additional modules into service. Such a strategy was adopted by the Sejm Library, as neither its hardware facilities nor the bulk of work involved in the Polish localisation of the English-language system and customising it for the purposes of the Library allowed work to start in all the modules at the same time. The operation of the system started with the cataloguing of new acquisitions, in order to make its most visible fragment – the catalogue of the latest collection – available to the users (and decision-makers) as soon as possible. By 1997, all modules of the system had been rolled out. In parallel, work was in progress on a retrospective conversion of card catalogues into three automated catalogues. This extremely laborious and difficult task, carried out by the Library's employees in different forms, was divided into a number of stages steadily completed year by year. In the course of the process, the working methods changed from time to time, and its intensity was varied, which was determined by the development of computer technology and the bibliographical environment, but in 1998, 96% of the items searched by users were already to be found in the automated catalogue – a result that confirmed that the original assumption behind the project had been right, given the relatively low cost involved. In 2008, the retroconversion of books in the main collections was completed, and 2010 is expected to see the completion of the retroconversion of books from the resource of the Social History

Collection Division. Simultaneously, work is in progress on a retrospective conversion of descriptions for serials.

Major challenges in the automation process included the choice of the information retrieval language corresponding to the needs of a parliamentary library. Following a 1992 analysis of several languages used both by the Chancellery of the Sejm and by several Polish libraries, works started on developing a proprietary uniform information retrieval language, matching both the content of parliamentary documents (including legislative instruments), and the requirements of the automated system. Within two years, "Stebis", a uniform thesaurus system was developed, based on Eurovoc – a multi-lingual thesaurus of the European Parliament. The system has been continuously updated and developed (about 11,300 descriptors in 2009), and the ongoing cooperation with the Eurovoc thesaurus team has involved, among other things, proposing new descriptors and delivering in 2005 for the purposes of the European Parliament the official Polish language version of the thesaurus (since July 2005 it has been available online on the Eurovoc Thesaurus website).

The use of an integrated library system requires its user to implement updated versions thereof, especially where this means a generation change. In 2003, after ten years of operating the text system ALEPH 300 and almost a year of preparations (change of a hardware platform and training to a personnel), the Library started implementing the graphical system ALEPH 500. Due to completely changed system architecture and a new method of data recording and displaying, the change necessitated the writing of proprietary conversion programs, which involved a substantial effort by system administrators and librarians. At the end of 2003, the new method of operation was fully mastered in all the modules, and at the same time all day-to-day work was carried on as usual. Currently, the Library is finalising the preparatory work for the implementation of Version 18 of ALEPH, which has again required a reconstruction of the hardware platform and the provision of extensive training to the personnel.

14 databases have been maintained in ALEPH 500 for several years, including 10 available to the general public via a website. In 2008, the number of records in all the databases was 509,630 and the number of user visits exceeded 145,500.

Digitisation of library and archive materials has been in progress since 2002. Having considered possible options of the digitisation process, a programme was adopted to provide a broad user group with the access to a set of images presenting mainly



Polish parliamentary documentation from the Second Republic period (1919-1939). This is unquestionably a part of the Sejm Library's mission, and it concerns materials used most frequently and therefore preserved in poor condition. Scanned verbatim records and parliamentary documents in paper format have been preserved and withdrawn from current use. The next stages of the programme will include the digitisation of parliamentary documents from the 1944-1993 period (1993 marks the start of the full-text database maintained by the IT Centre), followed by going back to the years 1807-1918 (the Sejm of the Duchy of Poland, the Sejm of Congress Poland, the Galician National Sejm). The implementation of the programme should lead to the creation of a broad and, more importantly, public source database on the history of the Polish parliamentary system.

In its acquisition policy after 1989, the Library has been trying to consistently follow two criteria. The first one – of a formal nature – concerns, of course, Polish and foreign parliamentary and official publications as well as those from selected international organisations. The second criterion – content-based – allows the Library to choose from Polish and foreign publications those that best cater for the needs of the Sejm (its legislative and scrutiny functions) and a broad-based research, advisory and information resources. The second criterion is obviously more difficult to fulfil, but it should be noted that new opportunities opened up after 1989, in the face of elimination of constraints of an ideological and political nature (lifting the bans on publications) and partly economic nature (end of the pie-in-the-sky communist economy and practical convertibility of currency).

The rules organising and disciplining the collection process were defined in 1992 and slightly modified in 1999. Special bibliometric research made it possible to adjust the set of foreign periodicals in the field of law, extensive selection of the book collection is carried out, and purchases of foreign literature are decided by a committee composed of public law professors of international repute. It can also be added that the Library's financial capability was adjusted in the 1990s to the actual publication purchase needs, and about 40% of the books acquired were donated (a particular increase was witnessed after an online catalogue was launched). About 40% of all acquisitions are publications in foreign languages.

The writings collected according to content criteria mainly concerned law, in particular constitutional, parliamentary, administrative, local-government, and international law, the philosophy and sociology of law, the principles of law-making and interpretation.

Also publications concerning the state and political systems, international relations and organisations, political sciences, economics and history were acquired in complete sets or in extensive selections. Reference was made to the pre-war collection profile, and the selection of book publications involved items falling outside the profile, and, to some extent, communist propaganda literature. Correctness of the assumptions made has been confirmed by a minimal number of borrowings from other libraries on request of the deputies and senators.

During the 1991-2008 period, the Library's resource increased by 94,500 volumes of books, periodicals and official publications. Yet it should be borne in mind that as a result of a selection process running in parallel, the criteria of which were tightened in 1995, nearly 59,000 volumes were removed from the collections. These figures mean that an enormous amount of work was done to keep the collections complete and up-to-date within the collection profile adopted.

What also affected the selection process was the fact that the storage space within the Sejm buildings could no longer be expanded. While the Library acquired several hundred square meters of new storage space, in view of the rate of collection growth it was necessary to replace the fixed shelving system with a mobile compact system. The work performed over the 1993-1996 period in all the rooms where this was economically viable, increased the storage capacity by about 50%, which made it possible to maintain minimum reserve shelf space. Despite very difficult accommodation conditions of the Chancellery of the Sejm, in the post-1989 period, the Library also managed to acquire new rooms and arrange them into logical "production lines" connected with the operation of the automated system, and to improve the librarians' working conditions compared with the previous period.

After 1989, fundamental changes took place as regards the way deputies exercise their mandates, requiring the parliamentarians to be by far more involved in the legislative process in the Sejm, and at the same time to be constantly active in their electoral districts. The deputies were also given the opportunity to employ auxiliary personnel, whose responsibilities include gathering information and performing various studies for the employer. However, those developments did not decrease the use of the Library's services by deputies. Having accurate data in hand for the 1990-2008 period, we can see that the reading rooms have been visited by 284 deputies a year on average, and the number of their visits in a year averaged 2,153. As the average annual number of visits was 11,995, deputies represented 18% of the users

of the Library, which meant a significant increase compared with the 1985-1990 period, when deputies accounted for 10% of all users. Previously existing rules of readers' access to the collection were maintained. The User Service Rules adopted in 1997 defines in detail the categories of users, which, apart from the bodies of the Sejm, deputies, senators, employees of both Chancelleries, and parliamentary clubs, also include other persons and institutions, whose research, professional or information needs can be satisfied by the Library's unique collections. In practice, the Library is trying to pursue a "semi-open door" policy", determined both by its small reading room (28 seats), and by security requirements on the days of plenary sessions of the Sejm. It can be added that over the recent years the average daily number of readers has dropped from 60 to 50 people, which is mainly due to an increasingly wide access to parliamentary databases through the Internet.

From the early 1990s, the Library has been developing its publishing activities. Small-volume translations of legislative acts, bibliographical and information summaries published in literally microscopic numbers of copies (e.g. 30) have been replaced by professionally edited and commercially distributed publishing series, such as translations of constitutions of 37 states, preceded by a substantive introduction, *Zeszyty Ośrodka Informacji i Dokumentacji Europejskiej* [*Fascicles of the European Information and Documentation Centre*] (9 issues), *System Tezaurusów Biblioteki Sejmowej STEBIS* [*The Sejm Library's Thesaurus System*] (23 fascicles), or the bibliographical dictionary *Posłowie i senatorowie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1919-1939* [*Deputies and Senators of the Republic of Poland 1919-1939*] (4 volumes so far, covering surnames starting with A-M). In addition, the *Przegląd Sejmowy* [*Sejm Review*] magazine has published, since 1993, a bibliography of publications of the Sejm, the Senate, the National Assembly, the Commissioner for Civil Rights Protection, the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Chamber of Control (*Bibliografia Publikacji Sejmu, Senatu, Zgromadzenia Narodowego, Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich, Trybunału Konstytucyjnego i Najwyższej Izby Kontroli*), which provides a comprehensive view of books, continuous and official publications of major institutions connected with the parliament.

The effective performance of tasks required appropriate strengthening of human resources. In 1989, the Library employed 37 people, and the subsequent development of its structures and change of working methods (automation) necessitated both the increase and retraining of the personnel. Apart from librarians,

the new employees included museologists, archivists, IT specialists, and specialists in European studies. In 2008, there were 76 persons employed, a vast majority of them with very high professional qualifications. Since the early 1990s, the job recruitment process has been taking into account both education and certified foreign language competence, and, in addition to a special annual training provided by the Chancellery of the Sejm, new employees are required to do internships with all the departments of the Library.

For a parliamentary library operating in a unitary state, other parliamentary libraries are the most natural partners for sharing experience. Of course, this does not mean a lack of cooperation with domestic libraries; yet international relations are of key significance owing to the similarity of resources, user groups, and working methods. For many years, the Sejm Library has been involved in various forms of international exchange, demonstrating either greater or smaller activity, depending on external circumstances. As early as in the 1940s, before the Iron Curtain fell, a representative of the Library had managed to attend two IFLA conferences, but between 1950 and 1970 direct international contacts virtually ceased to exist. It was only in 1978 that a representative of the Library again started to regularly participate in IFLA conferences and in the proceedings of the parliamentary library section, and relations with librarians of some of the communist bloc countries (especially Czechoslovakia and Hungary) and the Nordic states (Norway and Sweden) became slightly more intensive. Qualitative changes in these areas, as well as in many others, followed the abolishment of political barriers in 1989.

In the early years of transformation, the Library received support from Western parliaments. What proved especially effective was the assistance from the House of Representatives of the US Congress, known as a Congressman Frost's program, carried out by a special team of the Congressional Research Service, called the Frost Task Force under substantive management of William H. Robinson. Continued until 1996, the assistance provided to the parliaments of 12 CEE states included the supply of publications, computer hardware, delivery of training and seminars. The activities were aimed at modernising the libraries and establishing impartial information and research facilities in the parliaments - programme beneficiaries. Modernisation processes were also supported by the Library of the House of Commons and by the European Parliament.

Subsequent international activities of the Sejm Library have taken in 5 vital directions. The first one is the participation in the work of the IFLA Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section. The second one covers different forms of activity within the framework of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), whose correspondent is residing at the Library. In 1993, the Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services working group held its 9<sup>th</sup> meeting in Warsaw. A representative of the Sejm Library has been actively involved in the maintenance and development of the Eurovoc thesaurus, and one of the seminars dedicated to the thesaurus in an automated environment was held in Poland in 1996. In 1997, also in Poland, the Section for Archives of Parliaments and Political Parties of the International Council on Archives (ICA), of which the Sejm Library is a member, held a meeting. Since 2004, the Library has been actively participating in the Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange (IPEX), and since 1993 it has regularly participated in the work of the International Consortium of ALEPH Users (ICAU-IGeLU), which enables it both to be up-to-date with the development of the system, and to lobby for its improvement. In 1998, an ICAU seminar was held in Warsaw, and it was hosted by the Sejm Library.

Major international programmes include the European Legislative Virtual Library (ELVIL 2000). The programme, financed by the European Commission and coordinated by the Stockholm University Library, has contributed to expanding the access to parliamentary databases and promotion of the parliamentary system, especially among young people in many countries of Europe. It was implemented in 1999-2001, and its Polish component was ranked highly by a representative of the European Commission.

Apart from the a/m international activities, the Library has taken part in a number of other projects, always believing this is necessary for the verification of one's own competence for the performance of tasks and provides an opportunity to draw on the knowledge and experience of other parliamentary libraries.

Since mid-1990s, the Library has been providing training and internships for employees of information centres and libraries from Eastern European and Asian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Cambodia, etc.), driven not only by the desire to share the knowledge gained, but also by the memory of the assistance that we were given at the beginning of the past two decades.

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For 90 years, the Sejm Library has been supporting the Polish parliament in performing its legislative and scrutiny function. The existing collection of parliamentary documents already is and will continue to be a basic source for researchers on the parliamentary system, political system and law. Preservation of this heritage and providing access thereto on one hand, and furnishing the legislature with up-to-date, reliable and comprehensive information on the other hand, set the goals and determine the functions of the Library.

In its present organisational shape, which refers to the times of the Second Polish Republic, the Library fulfils three tasks (library, archive and museum), all of which form the information/documentation facility of the Sejm. The ample and carefully profiled library resources, meticulous archival records, and a collection of works of art and cultural heritage assets enable the parliamentarians and other users to answer most inquiries. The Library's collection has provided a basis for many major dissertations in the field of law, political science and history.

Owing to computer technology, the Library's resources have been accessible outside the reading room or the archive room for quite some time now. But along with the use of advanced forms of information – prompt, reliable and, regrettably, dehumanised, the Library is seeking to enable both the deputies and the general public to commune with manuscripts, antique books, original documents, and works of art. Numerous exhibitions have presented the Polish parliamentary traditions, important events in the history of the Sejm and in the history of Poland. The exhibits put on display at the Sejm, at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, in Helsinki, Vilnius, Riga, Strasbourg and Brussels were aimed to give the visitors an understanding not only of historical facts, but also of the spirit and flavour of or more or less remote ideas or events. The memory of tradition combined with urge to deploy state-of-the-art IT technologies is characteristic of the Sejm Library of today. We leave it to our readers to judge whether the synthesis presented is accurate.