

JORDAN SIEMIANOWSKI

Toruń

**THE STRUGGLE FOR THE NORWEGIAN SHIPPING FLEET
AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NORTRASHIP
/NORWEGIAN SHIPPING AND TRADE MISSION/**

It goes without saying that WWII constitutes one of the most significant periods in the history of the Norwegian shipping fleet. Owing to both its engagement in maritime transport and the income such engagement brought about, the Norwegian freight made possible for the Norwegian government to function also in exile. Also, in the face of the fact of Norway having little military force at her disposal, the freight in question comprised an important contribution in Norway's warfare. Still, before this tonnage got under the management of the Norwegian state powers, the Norwegian shipping fleet had to be protected first against the designs of not only the Third Reich but also the allied forces.

The intention of this article is to present the actions of Norwegian diplomats and government aiming at accommodating the Norwegian shipping fleet to the purposes, first, of the Norwegian state and then those of the allied forces. In order to demonstrate this, the article discusses the establishment of the Nortraship, the biggest maritime navigation organization existing during WWII, along with the factors which led to this organization's initiation as well as the circumstances of preparing The Stuguflåten Temporary Regulation by the law of which the Norwegian government commandeered the local maritime freight.

The chronological scope of this work covers the period from April 9, 1940, that is, the date of the German invasion on Denmark and Norway, till April 26 when the Norwegian navigation organization was established.

With the exception of Norwegian researchers, the question of the Norwegian shipping fleet during WWII has hardly been discussed in the literature on the subject. One of the most tangible reasons for this must be that the majority of such literature as well as archival documentation have been made in Norwegian. On the other hand, Norwegian historians have vastly researched the subject in question.

One scholarly study of this subject is the 5-volume work entitled *Handelsflåten i krig 1939–1945*¹ edited by Tore Lie Nilsen and Atle Thowsen (A. Thowsen also published two other books I make a use of in this work²). This study was completed in 1997. Though voluminous and detailed, it never discusses any concrete issues relating to the Norwegian shipping fleet. Instead, it comprises a catalogue of facts and events thus becoming a synthesis of the history of the Norwegian shipping fleet during WWII.

Numerous works on the subject have been written by Norwegian navigation activists engaged in the discussion of the notion of the Norwegian shipping fleet in the period in question. The studies by John Oskar Egeland entitled *Gjennom brott og brann. Den storpolitiske kamp om handelsflåten under den annen verdenskrig* (Oslo 1968), and by Erling Mossige entitled *Storredieriet Nortraship. Handelsflåten i krig* (Oslo 1989) which include full version of quoted documents turned out particularly useful.

Also, one needs to mention the Chief of the Statistical Department of the Nortraship New York office, Kaare Petersen who has authored the following publications: *Handelsflåten i krig*, in: *Norges krig 1940–1945*, vol. 2, ed. S. Steen (Oslo 1948); *Norsk skipsfart Gjennom de siste 50 år*, “Norwegian Shipping News”, 1959, 15), and *The Saga of Norwegian Shipping. An Outline of the History, Growth and the Development of Modern Merchant Marine* (Oslo 1955).

Attention should also be paid to the memoirs of two Norwegian ministers of foreign affairs. The first of them, Halvdan Koht authored *Norway. Neutral*

¹ This work comprise the following study: A. Thowsen: *Nortraship. Profit og patriotism*, vol. 1, Oslo 1992; B. L. Basberg: *Nortraship. Allier tog konkurent*, vol. 2, Oslo 1993; G. Hjeltnes: *Sjømann lang vakt*, vol. 3, ed. by T. L. Nilsen, Oslo 1995; idem: *Krigsseiler. Krig, hjemkomst, oppgjør*, vol. 4, ed. by T. L. Nilsen, Oslo 1997; L. Petersen: *Hjemmeflåten. Mellom venn og fiende*, vol. 5, ed. by T. L. Nilsen. 1992.

² A. Thowsen, *Den norske Krigsforsikring for Skib-Gjensidig Forening 1935–1985*, vol. 1, Bergen 1988; idem: *Fra nøytral til alliert. Norsk skipsfartspolitik under den annen verdenskrig til og med etableringen av Nortraship*, Bergen 1985.

and Invaded (London 1941), whereas the second, Halvdan Trygve Lie wrote the books entitled *Leve eller dø* (Oslo 1955) and *Med England i ildlinjen 1940–1942* (Oslo 1956).

The remaining remembrance literature is also of value. The most significant in this group are the publications by Eric Andreas Colban, Erling Dekke Næss and Benjamin Vogt.³ An article by the chief of the Norwegian shipping fleet, Øivind Lorentzen⁴, a study by Lisa Lindbæk⁵ as well as the documents from the publications of the Norwegian Research Committee (Undersøkelsekommissjonen).⁶

1. The significance of the Norwegian shipping fleet

Soon after regaining her independence in 1905, Norway chose neutrality as the main direction of the state's foreign policy. Weak, with small military potential, and economically dependent on such European superpowers as Great Britain or Germany, Norway thus intended to remain in the background of all armed conflicts. Yet, it soon turned out that the direction of foreign policy which Kristiania⁷ had adopted demonstrates as very difficult to fulfill. This was primarily because, with the WWI raging, Norwegian common opinion held that such a small state as Norway (less than 2,500,000 citizens) could not possibly manage both to protect the shipping fleet from war conflagration and preserve her neutrality.

The double undertaking having been successfully finished, Norway counted her tonnage losses. These losses amounting to nearly a half of the quantity of the Norwegian maritime freight (in WWI 829 Norwegian ships of the tonnage amounting to 1,240,000 BRT⁸, that is, as much as 49.6% of Norway's shipping fleet, were scuppered) could nevertheless be filled in with vengeance owing to 3,5 billion crowns earned on lucrative war contracts. Accordingly, in 1939 the Norwegian shipping fleet, having 4,833,813 BRT at its disposal came in fourth

³ E. A. Colban: *Femti år*, Oslo 1952; E. D. Næss: *Shipping – mitt liv*, Oslo 1981; B. Vogt: *Vår sære og vår avmakt*, Oslo 1967.

⁴ Ø. Lorentzen: *Norway, Norwegian Shipping and the War*, "America in a World at War", 1942, 25, pp. 1–32.

⁵ L. Lindbæk: *Tusen norske skip. En antologi over norske sjøf innsats i den annen verdenskrig*, New York 1943.

⁶ *Innstilling fra Undersøkelsekommissjonen av 1948. Den norske regjeringens virksomhet. Fra april 1940 til 2 juni 1945. Departaments meldinger*, vol. 6, Oslo 1948.

⁷ Kristiania was the name of Norway's capital until 1924.

⁸ BRT (Brutto Register Tonne) is a gauge to measure the ship's capacity which is counted in gross register tons. 1 gross register ton – 1 register tone = 100 cubic feet = 2.83 square metres.

in the world ranking after Great Britain (17,984,000 BRT), the United States of America (12,003,000 BRT), and Japan (5,630,000 BRT).⁹ Of all the Norwegian tonnage 260 units¹⁰ amounting to 2,000,000 BRT¹¹ constituted tankers, modern and well-equipped, for as much as 65% of them were less than 10 years old before WWII.¹² Per contra, modern and new ships of Great Britain and the USA amounted to 22.8% and 7.7% of these countries' shipping fleets respectively.¹³ It needs to be added that the third of the Norwegian maritime freight was propelled by the then modern Diesel engines.¹⁴

At the outbreak of WWII Oslo declared neutrality in the hope that the coming conflict would be similar in character to the previous war. As before, also this time the problem of the Norwegian shipping fleet cropped up as the most significant one. On November 11, 1939 the Norwegian Shipowners' Association¹⁵ and London signed a tonnage contract which authorized the British to hiring 150 tankers of 1,500,000 DWT¹⁶ thus suggesting that, when it comes to foreign contracts, Great Britain comes before the Third Reich. This contract constituted a tangible factor reinforcing Norwegians' conviction that in the ongoing world conflict the Norwegian maritime freight would also gain significant funds from servicing the allied forces. Furthermore, Norway would preserve her neutrality never becoming directly engaged in the war. Therefore, the Third Reich's attack on Norway occurring on April 9, 1940 came as a complete surprise for Norwegians.

⁹ E. A. Steen: *Sjøforsvarets organisasjon, oppbygning og vekst i Storbritannia. Handelsflåten selvforsvar*, in: *Norges sjøkrig 1940–1945*, vol. 5, Oslo 1959, p. 111.

¹⁰ M. Skodvin: *Krig og okkupasjon 1939–1945*, Oslo 1990, p. 26.

¹¹ C.A.R. Christensen: *Okkupasjon sår og etterkrigstid*, in: *Vårt folks historie*, ed A. Coldevin, T. Dahl, J. Schreiner, Oslo 1961, p. 415.

¹² M. Skodvin: op. cit., p. 26.

¹³ L. Lindbæk: op. cit.

¹⁴ M. Skodvin: op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁵ The Norwegian Shipowners' Association (*Norges Rederforbund – NRF*), or, from 1984, the Norwegian Navigation Societies' Association was established in 1909 as an organization protecting shipowners from state encroachment in technical, financial and organizational issues of the Norwegian maritime freight. See B. Kolltveit, J.G. Bjørklund: *Norsk sjøfart i det 20. Århundre*, in: *Norsk sjøfart*, vol. 2, ed. by B. Berggren, A. E. Christensen, B. Kolltveit, Oslo 1989, p. 171; P. Selvig: *The Norwegian Shipowners' Association*, "Norwegian Shipping News", 1959, 15, p. 6.

¹⁶ DWT (Dead Weight Tonne) – the ship's carrying capacity measured as a difference between the loaded and empty ship's displacements (weights). 1 DWT = 1 metric ton = 2240 English pounds = ca. 1016 kg.

2. The situation of the Norwegian fleet at the time of the Third Reich's aggression on Norway

The chaos which the Norwegian shipping fleet had to cope with from day one of WWII took place again as soon as Germany attacked Denmark and Norway.¹⁷ Before this happened, however, the Third Reich was deeply concerned about the actions undertaken by the Norwegian maritime freight. In the trade war against Britain waged until that moment Germany sank as many as 58 Norwegian ships and about 400 Norwegians lost their lives in these catastrophes. Attacking Norway, the Third Reich aimed at more than mere gaining the biggest part of the Norwegian freight. The factors resulting from Norway's strategic geographical location¹⁸ played a more vital role in Germany's decision to attack this country, for taking over the whole of the Norwegian shipping fleet was impossible to attain anyway. Therefore, the Third Reich's focus was on appropriating such a part of the tonnage which could be capable of travelling between Norway and the rest of Germany-controlled areas.¹⁹

During the invasion on Norway the following four institutions attempted to take control of the Norwegian maritime freight:

- Norwegian government which at the time in question tried to survive by escaping in the northern parts of the country;
- British government;
- dignitaries representing both the Norwegian authorities and the maritime freight abroad, particularly in London, New York, and Stockholm;
- German authorities and Vidkun Quisling.²⁰

On April 9, 1940 the majority of the Norwegian maritime freight was globally deployed²¹ and a vital part of it participated in deliveries on already planned

¹⁷ The German intentions of invading Denmark and Norway were known both to London (see J. Pertek: *Morska napaść na Danię i Norwegię* [The Maritime Attack on Denmark and Norway], Poznań 1986, p. 19) and Oslo as early as the realization stage of the Weserübung plan. For example, H. Koht learnt about them on April 8, 1940. See E. D. Næss: op. cit., p. 92.

¹⁸ From the point of view of the Third Reich, Norway constituted an ideal territory from where to commence an attack on the British Isles.

¹⁹ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 97.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 100; idem: *Business Goes to War: The Norwegian Merchant Navy in Allied War Transport*, in: *Britain and Norway in the Second World War*, ed. by P. Salmon, London 1995, p. 54; T. L. Nilsen, A. Thowsen: *Handelsflåten i krig ...*, p. 45.

²¹ It is interesting that the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Halvdan Koht, knew little about the domestic shipping fleet. On August 26, 1939 a meeting took place with the participation of Vice-President Arne Bjørn-Hansen, Head of the NRF Wilhelm Klaveness who worked with the Nor-

Scandinavian water routes. At the time of their Norwegian warfare, Germans managed to take over the control over about 15% of the Norwegian tonnage, the latter including Norwegian and German fairway ships or Germany-controlled ports.²² Among historians, such a tonnage is referred to as “domestic fleet” (hjemmeflåten), whereas the remaining 85% – as “foreign fleet” (uteflåten). According to the Norwegian Central Statistical Bureau (Statistisk Sentralbyrå) soon before April 9 1940 the Norwegian shipping fleet comprised 4363 ships of 4,887,200 BRT of which number 3311 units of 822,100 BRT were moored at home.²³ Ca. 500 shipowners or companies administered by 6000 officers were in charge of these units. The majority of those offices which managed the Norwegian maritime freight were situated in domestic ports.²⁴

Both Berlin and V. Quisling wished for the Norwegian shipping fleet serviced needs of the allied forces to as small a degree as possible. Also, it was planned to keep Norwegian water routes the utilization of which made the avoidance of the violation of Swedish neutrality possible and which were the only ones Germany could actually make use of.²⁵ Aiming at the quickest possible putting a halt to

wegian Foreign Minister, Minister of Transport and Navigation Halvdan Trygve Lie, Head of the Navigation Traffic Erling Bryne and Foreign affairs Advisor Jens Bull. In the course of the meeting the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs who was also present there announced that he requested that representatives of the Norwegian Shipowners' Association should consult him so as to bring ships into Norwegian or neutral ports and in such a way as to make it impossible for Germans or England to commandeer these units. A. Bjørn-Hansen and W. Klaveness immediately retorted saying that at that time the government did not wish to publish any formal supplement. Signing contracts, the shipowners already made legal ties and they wanted to develop their business. The idea was rejected. See J. O. Egeland: *Gjennom brott og brann. Den storpolitiske kamp om handelsflåten under den annen verdenskrig*, Oslo 1968, p. 91. On the day of the German aggression on Denmark and Norway in the ports belonging to the Third Reich there were no more than 3 Norwegian ships of the joint tonnage amounting to 8 130 BRT tons, 78 000 BRT tons were moored in Danish harbours and these ships also became controlled by the occupier. In Sweden there were 100 00 BRT tons, the ships Germans could not make use of, yet, with the Third Reich controlling the Kattegat and Skagerrak taking the control over by the allied forces demonstrated as impossible, too. Approximately 550 000 was moored in Norwegian ports. Further 4 000 000 was sailing the seas at the time in question. See K. Petersen: *Handelsflåten i krig*, in: *Norges krig 1940–1945*, vol. 2, ed. by S. Steen, Oslo 1948, p. 270; idem: *Skipsfinansiering i medgang og motgang. Redernes skibskreditforening 1929–1979*, Kristiansand 1979, p. 85; C. A. R. Christensen: op. cit., pp. 415–416.

²² On April 9, 1940 900 Norwegian trade ships and major whalers as well as 150 smaller whalers were deployed outside the Third Reich-occupied area. See E. Mossige: *Storredereiet Nortraship. Handelsflåten i krig*, Oslo 1989, p. 11.

²³ L. Lindbæk: op. cit., p. 19.

²⁴ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship...* p. 100; T. L. Nilsen, A. Thowsen: op. cit., p. 45.

²⁵ K. Petersen: *Handelsflåten ...*, p. 270; H. Koht: *Norway. Neutral and Invaded*, London 1941, p. 178; H. T. Lie: *Leve eller dø*, Oslo 1955, p. 179.

Norwegian institutions in charge of the national maritime freight, the Third Reich desired to block all possible communication channels existing between “foreign fleet” (uteflåten) ships and those belonging to Norwegian shipowners. It was also hoped that Norwegian captains would be compelled, be it by promises or threats, to use neutral harbours as their destinations where on behalf of Norwegian shipowners Germans would commandeer their units. Thus the first attempts were undertaken at separating Norwegian ships from the allied forces.²⁶

Among the Norwegian navigation associations the first which experienced German pressurizing was the Norwegian Shipowners’ Association. As early as April 9 at midnight future occupiers of Norway demanded the chief of this association, Arne Bjørn-Hansen to order all Norwegian ships to immediately call at neutral or domestic ports. Arne Bjørn-Hansen refused to do so²⁷ yet, on the following day Germany-controlled radio announced that domestic ship crews should call at the nearest domestic ports, returned home, or else moored at Italian or Spanish harbours.²⁸

The German invasion of Norway provided the allied forces with an impulse to take up more decisive – although not less chaotic – actions towards the Third Reich. The English government managed to summon a meeting to discuss Norway’s and Denmark’s situation only as late as April 9 on the early morning. Apart from the problem of the military aid which could stop the German war machine the issues such as the question of the Norwegian and Danish shipping fleet were touched upon. Similarly to the previous war, also this time the intention was to put both freights to own use.²⁹

At the beginning the allied forces limited themselves to sending monitory reports. The first of these reports came from the Admiralty which as early as April 9 at 13.47 announced to the Danish and Norwegian ships that they had been taken care of by the British. That night the announcement was conveyed to the Norwegian ships harboured outside the Scandinavian and Baltic ports.³⁰

On the very same day of April 9 the British attaché to Mardid reported to Norwegian crews that the Oslo orders which had come earlier were made by

²⁶ J. O. Egeland: op. cit., p. 75.

²⁷ E. Virkesdal: *Handelsflåten, Krig 1939–1945*, Bergen 1991, p. 2.

²⁸ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, pp. 107–108; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 17.

²⁹ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 13.

³⁰ J. Rustung Hegland: *Nortrashipsflåte*, vol. 1: *Krigseilasen under den allierte defensive 1940–1941*, Oslo 1976, p. 13. K. Petersen: *The Saga of Norwegian Shipping. An Outline of the History, Growth and the Development of Modern Merchant Marine*, Oslo 1955, p. 121.

the German commissary to Norway. Immediately, Thor Søstebj, an activist in the Norwegian Sailmen Association (Norsk Sjømannsforbund – NSF) warned Norwegian sailors on the BBC radio against putting to use any Oslo information. On the following day the BBC sent to Danish and Norwegian crews six reports informing them that British ports awaited and guaranteed them protection and payments.³¹

Also on April 9, 1940 the War Cabinet requested the British Ambassador to Norway, Sir Cecil Dormer, to inform the Norwegian government of the British state authorities having taken care of the Norwegian maritime freight. Additionally, it was announced that until Britain-controlled Norwegian ships did not get released from the English ports, the situation would not clarify. Taking over and escorting Norwegian ships on high sea was delegated to the Royal Navy units. Yet, London intended for more than this. Due to the fear of the Norwegian authorities annulling the tonnage contract of November 11, 1939 in protest against mining Norwegian water routes³² a plan to take over the entirety of the Norwegian maritime freight long before April 9.³³

Simultaneously a Norwegian diplomat E. A. Colban, a key character in orchestrating Norwegian-British relation who resided in London at the time, met the British Foreign Minister, Lord Halifax and his Secretary Sir Orme Sargent so as to discuss the question of the Norwegian shipping fleet. It was obviously too early to consider that meeting an event decisive for the future of the problem in question. Yet, in a letter dated for the following day E. A. Colban read that the instructions he had received included a suggestion for Sir Cecil Dormer to let the entire Norwegian shipping fleet fly the British colours.³⁴ This British approach resulted from the fear they had of the Third Reich which pressurized neutral states to make it difficult for Norwegian ships to navigate seas. Consequently, if the Norwegian maritime freight navigated under the British colours, then it would be protected by the English law.³⁵ In such a case, however, the contribution of the Norwegian shipping fleet to the ongoing war would be less visible.

³¹ J. Rustung Hegland: op. cit., p. 14.

³² A part of Norway's territorial waters was mined by the allied forces on April 8, 1940 as an element of the Wilfred operation.

³³ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship...*, p. 104; T. L. Nilsen, A. Thowsen: op. cit., p. 47.

³⁴ E. Mossige: op. cit., pp. 13–14; E. A. Colban: op. cit., p. 159.

³⁵ K. Petersen: *Handelsflåten ...*, p. 270.

Additionally, the instructions for Sir C. Dormer included a proposal for the Norwegian government to indicate a person who would consult the British regarding taking over by the allied forces of the Norwegian tonnage.³⁶

The problem of employment, impossible to influence in any way at the time of war constituted yet another question which the Norwegian authorities and shipowners had to tackle. First and foremost it was feared that the shipowners would be dominated by Germans, a sufficient reason for the allied forces to treat them as “technical enemies”.³⁷

In the meantime the Britain-controlled or immobilized in the English ports Norwegian ships preserved their national banners. This meant that they belonged solely to Norway. In needs mentioning that, according to London, the Danish, having surrendered to Germany on the first day of the realization of the ‘Weserübung’ operation, supported the enemy and their ships were treated as “technical enemies”. Therefore, Great Britain resolved to confiscate these units and put up her own national symbols on them.³⁸

Desperately attempting at taking over the entirety of the Norwegian tonnage, the British soon resolved to change the tactics. At that time the Foreign Office, instead of employing a political solution, decided to push the Norwegian so that they willingly put up British colours on their ships. The War Cabinet supported this decision by pointing (April 10) to the British Ministry of Transportation the actual – high – value of Norwegian tankers. At the time in question these tankers had such a huge significance for the allied forces that despite unsatisfactory perspectives it was resolved within 11 hours to convince the Norwegian government to handing over the entire domestic shipping fleet for the use of the allied forces.³⁹

These drastic plans by the British pushed E. A. Colban to sending, on April 11, an addressed response to Sir O. Sargent in which he clearly defended the independence of the domestic maritime freight, despite the impossibility of contacting his own government regarding that matter. Thus, he wrote about the truly big impact the shipping fleet had for Norway’s existence. As he later explained, the incompetent resolutions concerning the Norwegian maritime freight could bring far-reaching, negative economic effects thus worsening the situation of thousands of workers employed in this branch as well as of a vital part of the Norwegian

³⁶ E. A. Colban: op. cit., p. 159.

³⁷ K. Petersen: *Handelsflåten ...*, pp. 270–271.

³⁸ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, pp. 104–105; B. Kolltveit, J. G. Bjørklund: op. cit., p. 214.

³⁹ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, pp. 105–106.

society.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, E. A. Colban's argumentation and protest in this matter met with little response.⁴¹

Apart from the disturbing plans of the British one more problem to solve was the question of the uncontrolled by the Nazi Norwegian State Broadcasting (Norsk Rikskringkasting – NRK). Shortly after receiving the message about the German radio announcement from Oslo, E. A. Colban resolved to wire the Norwegian authorities in Stockholm and request the instant reporting this announcement to the government. The Foreign Office, too, was informed about the German reports. The allied forces agreed to consider the situation very grave. On the same day Sir O. Sargent came to E. A. Colban to inquire about a possibility of broadcasting on the BBC radio an explanation of the situation. In the light of the well-known fact of Germany occupying Oslo, the Norwegian diplomat refused. Only apparently is this decision weird; the announcement would be superfluous for units sailing to New York or returning from Hong Kong or Shanghai. Furthermore, the experience of September 1939 clearly demonstrated what kind of economic consequences such announcements might bring to ships, shipowners and charters. At that time they were helpful only for crews travelling on European water routes leading to war-affected countries.⁴²

All reports and telegrams to globally dispersed captains and diplomats were coming via consulates, in particular the ones with offices in Washington D. C. and London. Unfortunately, few had been answered.⁴³ It needs to be mentioned that among the incoming captain announcements of April 1940, many expressed protest against putting up the British flag on Norwegian ships.⁴⁴

Eventually the Foreign Office resolved to broadcast for Norwegian ships without the aid of E. A. Colban. At the time the Office considered it significant that all demands should warn addressees against German announcements broadcast from Oslo. The British also feared that in neutral ports Norwegian ships might succumb to the pressurizing performed by Third Reich ambassadors who resided in these ports. Ergo, the problem of directing the biggest Norwegian tonnage to ports controlled by the allied forces was of high significance, particularly

⁴⁰ E. Mossige: op. cit., pp. 14–15; E. A. Colban: op. cit., p. 160.

⁴¹ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 107.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 108–110.

⁴³ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 15.

⁴⁴ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 109.

that at the time in question the allied forces controlled no more than the fourth of the Norwegian “foreign fleet” (uteflåten) with only the fifth of its tankers.⁴⁵

E. A. Colban’s refusal regarding the broadcast of the announcement settled the issue of the British changing their attitude towards the matter. Consequently, they ordered their foreign representatives to pressurize other Norwegian diplomats. The British envoys were requested to immediately find their Scandinavian colleagues and explain to them clearly why it is so important for the Norwegian freight to sail under the colours of the allied forces. The envoys were also supposed to advise these diplomats to encourage domestic ships to call at ports controlled by the allied forces and awaited further instructions there.⁴⁶

Soon after that numerous and questionable instructions began coming into Norwegian foreign offices. It was difficult to establish which Norwegian ships they concern. Wilhelm av Munthe Morgenstjerne, Norwegian Ambassador to the United States of America and the main character as regards Norwegian interests in Washington D. C. warned sailors-his compatriots against returning to domestic harbours advising them instead to call at “safe ports”, yet not the ones controlled by the allied forces.⁴⁷

Among foreign diplomats, it was precisely the Norwegian Chargé d’Affaires to Tokyo, Arnoldus Kolstad seemed to be the one who succumbed to the British requests the most easily. During the German invasion of Norway he ordered all the 12 ships harboured in Japanese ports to leave them on April 13. Two days later he ordered on the radio Norwegian crews at sea not to call at neutral harbours lest the lack of other possibilities. Also, he ordered them to move towards ports controlled by the allied forces.⁴⁸

3. The activity of Erik Andreas Colban and Ingolf Hysing Olsen

On the Wednesday afternoon of April 11, 1940⁴⁹ shipowner and representative of the Norwegian Shipowners’ Association I. Hysing Olsen⁵⁰ whom E. A. Colban awaited for long eventually appeared. His willingness to help his compatriot was

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 110–111.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁹ Erling Mossige gives the date of April 12, 1940. See E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 114.

⁵⁰ E. A. Colban: op. cit., p. 161.

not accidental. Educated in England, I. Hysing Olsen had numerous friends there who could be of help when need be. Also, his experience in negotiating with the British that he gained in the course of WWI and WWII was not without meaning, either.⁵¹ On arriving in London, the diplomat brought the instructions with him to be handed over to his compatriot. He was subsequently acquainted with both the position of the British and the efforts undertaken by E. A. Colban regarding the keeping of the Norwegian flag for the purposes of the domestic shipping fleet.⁵²

Both interlocutors agreed to struggle for the Norwegian maritime freight and to win the cause.⁵³ On the same day I. Hysing Olsen arrived in London, that is, April 11, 1940, two Norwegian dignitaries had a meeting with Sir Cyril Hurcomb at the British Ministry of Shipping (MOS), the meeting which ended with a decision to keep the national flag for the Norwegian maritime freight.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the initial aim of the British: gaining strong control over the ships sailing their territorial waters or moored in neutral ports had been attained.⁵⁵

On the following day, April 12, I. Hysing Olsen met William G. Weston⁵⁶, a representative of the MOS. During the audience, the Norwegian opposed the British intention of keeping Norwegian ships dispersed in various ports while at the same time agreeing to the necessity of escorting them and continuing their voyages. He also conformed, not without reservations though, to the radio announcement ordering Norwegian captains calling at British ports. He simultaneously added that the announcement should be complemented by the information on a possibility of his advising captains when necessary.⁵⁷ Furthermore, a temporary project solving the question of insurance appeared and the British eventually assented to it. The project which the British proposed of granting E. A. Colban the proxy of the Norwegian government was accepted by the Norwegian.⁵⁸

Reaching the consensus with the Norwegian pushed the British to undertaking further actions. On the same night the British Ministry of Shipping agreed on the shape of the insurance fit for the Norwegian ships moored in neutral ports, one which had to be confirmed by the Treasury. In order to do this a wire request-

⁵¹ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 18.

⁵² E. A. Colban: op. cit., p. 161.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., p. 115; E. A. Colban: op. cit., p. 161.

⁵⁵ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., p. 115; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 18.

⁵⁶ Erling Dekke Næss gives the name of "Bill". See E. D. Næss: op. cit., passim.

⁵⁷ E. Mossige: op. cit., pp. 18–19.

⁵⁸ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., p. 118.

ing British consuls all over the world to inform Norwegian captains of Great Britain wish to cover their maritime and war insurance had been sent from the Foreign Office. Additionally, another announcement had been issued ordering ships to call at the ports of allied forces without stopping in neutral harbours on the way.⁵⁹

A day later, on April 13, 1940 the Admiralty sent to Norwegian captains a dispatch informing of granting the Norwegian ships war insurance, yet, on condition that they would be provisioning French or British ports. The amount of this payment was equal to the then rates. These guarantees were supposed to be valid for 48 hours counting from the moment a ship called at a port controlled by the allied forces and never concerned the ships which previously called at a neutral port.⁶⁰ A note was also there that the wire in question had been discussed with the representative of Norwegian shipowners, I. Hysing Olsen.⁶¹

One cannot forget that realizing insurance for the Norwegian maritime freight was advantageous for the British, much as it was for the Norwegian ships moored in the English or French ports. The Norwegian could no longer call at neutral harbours for, as we already know, the insurance proposal was valid for only as long as 48 hours after the ship called at the port controlled by the allied forces.⁶² Consequently, London could be quite sure that Norwegian ships would sail either solely to England, or nearby. The promises concerning indemnities demonstrated London as a site with convincing means at its disposal. Few Norwegian captains might have dared to give up the chance to sail on without the English insurance confirmed by the representative of the Norwegian Shipowners' Association ready at hand.⁶³

Still, Norwegian diplomats residing in London never got rid of all their problem in this way. The next step was to contact the Norwegian government which, due to the war and own exile, remained practically unavailable. The only place via which a contact could be made with the Norwegian authorities was Stockholm. On April 13, 1940 a meeting was organized in the British Ministry of Shipping to

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The text of the entire document in question was published by Erik Anker Steen. See E. A. Steen: *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁶¹ E. Mossige: *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁶² K. Petersen: *Handelsflåten ...*, p. 276.

⁶³ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, pp. 118–119; K. Petersen: *The Saga ...*, p. 123.

make good use of the English and Norwegian dignitaries residing in the capital of Sweden at the time in question.⁶⁴

The participants of the meeting comprised, apart from I. Hysing Olsen, E. A. Colban whereas the English party was represented by the Minister of the English Shipping Fleet, Robert Spear Hudson and Sir Arthur Salter, Member of the Parliamentary Secretariat for the Affairs of the Ministry of the Shipping as well as numerous English dignitaries.⁶⁵ The course of talks had been recorded in the form of a short paper delivered by E. A. Colban.

According to this paper, R. Spear Hudson presented a plan of taking over the entirety of the Norwegian shipping fleet and making it a part of the British colours. He also explained that the Norwegian government, then hardly pushed by the Third Reich, could easily have become Nazi-managed. Thus a jeopardy existed that the ships moored in neutral Norwegian ports would be serviced by forces other than allied. Additionally, R. Spear Hudson presented a proposition which, when accepted, would allow E. A. Colban to both gain the proxy of his government and inform Germany-pressured Norwegian shipowners about the way to hand over the instructions indispensable for the cooperation with the allied forces. After the meeting was over, E. A. Colban and I. Hysing Olsen conferred about this affair eventually considering it the right solution.⁶⁶

The next meeting took place on the same day between 21:00 and 22:00 hours. It was then that a wire addressed to the British representative in Stockholm was prepared in the British Ministry of Shipping. The wire expressed the concerns which the British Ministry of Shipping had about the chaos characterizing the then situation of Norwegian ships. Also, it stated that the situation in question had been discussed with the Norwegian representative in London (E. A. Colban) who expressed his protest against the taking over of the Norwegian ships and making them fly the British colours. The British demanded, too, that the Norwegian government should hand over the proxy for E. A. Colban, an act which would enable the man to giving instructions necessary for Norwegian ships on behalf of the Norwegian authorities. These instructions were supposed to be made in cooperation with the British Ministry of Shipping and I. Hysing Olsen. Furthermore, the wire advised the Norwegian government to never trust the announcements sent directly from Norwegian shipowners. The message ended with the information

⁶⁴ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., p. 120.

⁶⁵ E. Mossige: *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

that I. Hysing Olsen and the British government had prepared maritime and war insurance for Norwegian ships and their cargoes. A promise had been also sent of contacting the Norwegian representative in Stockholm with regard to the said postulates.⁶⁷

The above depicted report was radio broadcast in English and Norwegian on the night of April 13–14.⁶⁸

In the course of the meeting I. Hysing Olsen made efforts to receive compensations vested in agents servicing Norwegian ships. One did not need to wait for the reaction of the Ministry of Shipping long as on April 15 this ministry sent the following instructions to consulates and the remaining British diplomatic agencies: Payments needed for Norwegian ships home and abroad. According to this disposition, a ship representative in need of any financial support should seek aid at the nearest office of the Ministry of Shipping. On the other hand, in a situation when a ship was not harboured in Great Britain a particular British consulate was supposed to fulfill the role of such an office. Therefore, in the British ports situated outside Great Britain the Colonial Office, the Dominion's office, the India Office and the Burma Office had been established. All subsidies were promised to be paid via English agents, also obliged to inform Norwegian consuls about the undertaken steps.⁶⁹

4. Establishment of Nortraship (Norwegian Shipping and Trade Mission)

Researching the activity of the Nortraship, an organization which Leif Vetlesen demarcated as the “state of shipowners established for the purpose of managing the free Norwegian shipping fleet during the war”⁷⁰, one has to remember that this organization was perceived as the enemy of not only the Axis. WWII made the Norwegian maritime freight a target for quite different forces, ones which attempted to mercilessly take advantage of this fleet. The subsequent maneuvering between Great Britain and the United States of America comprised a task difficult for both the Nortraship managers and the Norwegian government in exile who oftentimes argued about the direction of the company's loyalty. One

⁶⁷ For the rest of the document see *ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

⁷⁰ L. Vetlesen: *Reis ingen monumenter: kampen om Nortraships hemmelige fond*, Oslo 1981, p. 21.

thing was certain though – none of these parties wished to work to the allied forces' bidding.

Initially the problem was that not all of British high officials realized the significance of the Norwegian maritime freight. For example, the way British diplomats and Admiral Philip Vian acted when, together with representatives of the French and Norwegian government, they organized a meeting to draw up an official contract on the utilization of the Norwegian shipping fleet. The then Minister of the Norwegian Trade and Navigation, H. T. Lie, informed Admiral P. Vian that the King of Norway, Haakon VII wished the Norwegian government to commandeer all domestic ships navigating outside Norwegian territorial waters. In reply to Admiral's question of the number of these units, H. T. Lie stated that this number oscillates between 1000 and 1100, an amount which evidently impressed the British and made Admiral P. Vian remark that it was an "impressive offer".⁷¹

As early as April 11, 1940 Bjørn Kverndal who was in charge of insurance affairs asked the President of the Norwegian Trade Section (Det Norske Handelsskammeret – DNH) in London to select a common authority responsible for the situation of the shipping fleet. In the course of the meeting held on the following day the Special Shipping and Insurance Committee (SSAIC) was established. Gabriel Conradi, chief Norwegian consul in London was elected for the committee's chair. At that time he was given the task of keeping his finger on the pulse of the affairs of the Norwegian maritime freight, its insurance affairs in particular. Also, a decision was made to inform E. A. Colban and his co-employee I. Hysing Olsen of the establishment of a new unit and an attempt to contact the domestic Ministry of Shipping.⁷²

It was the memorandum of April 13, 1940 that initiated the negotiations between Olaf Kverndal, the brother of the already mentioned Bjørn, and I. Hysing Olsen on the establishment of an organization converging Norway's all navigation interests.⁷³ The Norwegian government promised to grant all proxies necessary for the realization of this latter aim. In the case when contacting the domestic authorities were impossible, the question of other particular competences to be received by the organization should be resolved. One of the tasks of the proposed institution would be managing navigation agents. The note including this postu-

⁷¹ H. T. Lie: op. cit., pp. 179–180; F. Kjell: *Ulvetiden krig og samarbeid*, Oslo 1990, pp. 197–198.

⁷² A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 121; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 37.

⁷³ J. O. Egeland: op. cit., p. 121.

late with the enclosed proposition to call an immediate founding conference comprised of representatives of local authorities, consul general and the remaining representatives of the Norwegian maritime freight was sent to E. A. Colban. Yet, neither the addressee of the note, nor I. Hysing Olsen enthusiastically accepted the O. Kverndal project. In their view, a dialogue between I. Hysing Olsen and the Norwegian authorities on one hand and the British Ministry of Shipping on the other should be established first.⁷⁴

It needs to be emphasized that E. A. Colban and I. Hysing Olsen lacked both the governmental instructions as well as those prepared by the Norwegian Shipowners' Association; instructions which would indicate the position to be assumed in a situation like this. Among all the contacts only those kept with the British were treated as formal. In such circumstances all that remained to do for both O. Kverndal and the rest of the Norwegian maritime circles was to become a part of this unpleasant and delicate affair.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, it was only with great effort that E. A. Colban and I. Hysing Olsen managed to refuse the propositions of O. Kverndal. At that time London was a place where the main representatives of the Norwegian maritime freight resided. For example, apart from G. Conradi, such distinguished men as shipowner Leif Brodahl, shipowner and navigation agent Fredrik Holst, the already mentioned President Bjørn Kverndal, Head of passenger fleet C. O. Skappel and navigation activist Knud Sømme were members of the already mentioned committee. One cannot omit the shipowners working for the Bergen Steamship Society (Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskab) such as Fredrik Olsen and Wilhelm Wilhelmsen. The significant positions these activists held compelled E. A. Colban to augment the demands he had towards the Norwegian government.⁷⁶

Even though disagreements, and manifold at that, did exist among representatives of the interests of the Norwegian shipping fleet in London, still, the principal aim, namely, the creation of an independent organization managing the Norwegian maritime freight mitigated all such controversies.⁷⁷ In the course of a meeting held on April 16, a meticulous project of the Norwegian navigation organization in London by O. Kverndal was submitted. Also, a document was issued by way of which I. Hysing Olsen, G. Conradi, L. Brodhal, and B. Kverndal

⁷⁴ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, pp. 121–122.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 122–123.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123; E. Mossige: *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁷⁷ E. Mossige: *op. cit.*, p. 37; J. O. Egeland: *op. cit.*, p. 124.

were proposed to organize a conference on the following night. On the same night the project was sent to E. A. Colban.⁷⁸

On April 18 another meeting was organized in the course of which L. Brodahl, B. Kverndal and K. Sømme were offered to assist I. Hysing Olsen in his work. This time the group of G. Conradi could cherish a warm welcome of their idea for E. A. Colban and his friend agreed for the establishment of a new navigation office in London, though not without hesitation.⁷⁹

As soon as April 19, 1940 B. Kverndal and K. Sømme contacted the owner of the place situated at Leadenhall Street 144 who on the same day let them a fully furnished floor amounting to 500 square metres with the possibility of renting additional space on two highest floors. On the following day, that is, April 20, the rented place was divided into smaller offices. At first the staff of the newly established institution comprised twelve workers – experts on insurance or navigation.⁸⁰ This agency was named the Norwegian Shipping and Trade Mission, better known for its address, that is, Nortraship.⁸¹ It began its activity on April 26, that is, 16 days after the German aggression of Norway.⁸² E. A. Colban and I. Hysing Olsen established Nortraship on their own responsibility.⁸³

On the same day in which the Norwegian Shipping and Trade Mission opened its offices, the following persons arrived in London: its Head Øivind Lorentzen equipped with the proxies regarding the Norwegian shipping fleet,⁸⁴ Secretary

⁷⁸ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., p. 123.

⁷⁹ E. Mossige: op. cit.; E. A. Colban: op. cit., pp. 161–162.

⁸⁰ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., pp. 125–126; H. T. Lie: *Med England i ildlinjen 1940–1942*, Oslo 1956, p. 46.

⁸¹ O. Riste: *Norway in Exile: The Formation of Alliance Relationship*, “Scandinavian Journal of History”, 1987, 12, p. 321. Apart from the name “Nortraship” there existed other propositions for naming this new organization. Suffices to mention the following names: “Norway”, “Normission”, “Norsetrade”, or else “Norseship”. See B. Vogt: op. cit., p. 23.

⁸² K. Petersen: *Handelsflåten* ..., p. 277. Øivind Lorentzen gives the date of April 25, 1940. See Ø. Lorentzen: op. cit., p. 22. On the other hand E. A. Steen concurs that Nortraship was established on April 18, 1940. See E. A. Steen: op. cit., p. 114.

⁸³ H. Koht: op. cit., p. 179.

⁸⁴ B. Kolltveit, J. G. Bjørklund: op. cit., p. 215.

General Benjamin Vogt who was responsible for the administration of the shipping fleet and banker Arne Sunde.⁸⁵

I. Hysing Olsen loyally supported Ø. Lorentzen, yet, he preferred to return to his own office in the Ministry of Shipping where he could act as a go-between of this Ministry and Nortraship. Unfortunately, he was already assigned the function of a member of the advisory committee at the Norwegian Maritime Mission.⁸⁶ It needs to be emphasized that Ø. Lorentzen arrived in London with the intention of establishing a navigation organization.⁸⁷

Two days later, that is, on April 28⁸⁸, also Peter Simonsen and Odd Gogstad, two new additions to the staff of the Nortraship arrived in London. The first of them took over legal affairs of the firm whereas the second began managing the tanker department. On the same day shipowner Hilmar Reksten arrived in the capital of England, too. Soon after him other shipowners and officers of navigation companies willing to cooperate with the newly established Norwegian office appeared. At that time the staff of the Nortraship comprised the following men as well: Bjørn Kverndal (Head of the Insurance Section), Knud Sømme (in charge of crew and whalers affairs). H. Reksten and Leif Brodahl shared the responsibility for tramp freight whereas engineer Erling Riple who worked for the Arnesen, Christensen and Smith company in Newcastle organized the technical section of the firm in question. Regarding financial transactions and accountancy, the charter-accounting company Layton Bennett & Co. took these departments over. Thus a month after it had been established the Nortraship was composed of about a hundred officials, of mostly British origin.⁸⁹

The WWII biggest shipping fleet concern of Nortraship⁹⁰ came under the Norwegian Ministry of Shipping.⁹¹ The organization could manage 241 tankers, 553 transporters of dry goods and 12 whalers, that is 806 ships in toto. These were the units referred to in the April 22 document (see next subsection). Added to this

⁸⁵ K. Petersen: *Handelsflåten ...*, pp. 277–278; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 45; E. A. Colban: op. cit., p. 163; H. T. Lie: *Leve ...*, p. 185; B. Vogt: op. cit., p. 23.

⁸⁶ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 37.

⁸⁷ J. Sverdrup: *Inn i storpolitikken 1940–1949*, in: *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, vol. 4, Oslo 1996, p. 46.

⁸⁸ In the study entitled *Innstilling fra Undersøkelseskommison av 1945*, vol. 6, Oslo 1947 the date of April 29, 1940 is quoted. See *Innstilling fra ...*, p. 119.

⁸⁹ E. Mossige: E. op.cit., pp. 45–46; B. Vogt: op. cit., pp. 23–24.

⁹⁰ Ø. Lorentzen: op. cit., p. 22.

⁹¹ J. Nygaardsvold: *Beretning om den norske regjerings virksomhet. Fra 9 april til 25 juni 1945*, Oslo 1947, p. 21; *Innstilling fra ...*

are the next 81 units and 107 whalers also covered by the said instruction. The 30 ships moored in Swedish ports awaited commandeering as well. On the whole 1024⁹² ships amounting to 4,045,617 BRT were supposed to be commandeered yet the Nortraship never had such an extensive freight at its disposal.⁹³

5. The Norwegian government commandeers the Norwegian shipping fleet

The first two weeks of the German aggression of Norway passed in doubt and uncertainty. The country was, to use a euphemism, far from stability. Worse still, the British did not know how to aid King Haakon VII and his government, both “on the run”, sot o say. The jeopardy was that the Norwegian authorities would be taken captive by the aggressor or else they would be unwilling to hold any talks whatsoever with the British.⁹⁴ Only among the Norwegian navigation circles did counting for the aid of the British assume a more general character.⁹⁵ This situation must have affected the Norwegian shipping fleet to the degree that the latter could have lost its national flag.⁹⁶

Simultaneously the Norwegian government understood that in such circumstances it is impossible to manage the Norwegian tonnage, particularly that the shipowners from the southern part of the country could not navigate their ships. The shipowners also feared becoming subordinated to the German as well being treated, due to their residing on the enemy-occupied territory, by the British as a “formal enemy”. This latter question was a serious obstacle when it comes to the conviction of the Norwegian authorities that shipowners should receive the British indemnities.⁹⁷

During the first days of the war in Norway any actions undertaken with regard to the Norwegian maritime freight presented themselves as vital for the Norwegian government. Accordingly, the Norwegian Prime Minister Johan Nygaardsvold supported the proposition submitted by an influential shipowner

⁹² Nils Simonsen states that the Nortraship had 1052 ships at its disposal. See N. Simonsen: op. cit., p. 1.

⁹³ B. Dannevig: *Skip og menn. Den norske handelsflåtens krigsinnsats 1939–1945*, Oslo 1968, pp. 44–45.

⁹⁴ J. Rustung Hegland: op. cit., p. 15.

⁹⁵ B. Kolltveit, J. G. Bjørklund: op. cit., p. 215.

⁹⁶ J. Rustung Hegland: op. cit., p. 15.

⁹⁷ K. Petersen: *The Saga ...*, p. 120.

Johan Ludwig Mowinckela of appointing Øivind Lorentzen Head of the Norwegian shipping fleet.⁹⁸ We need to emphasize that in the first phase of the German aggression of Norway such a cooperation played the key role in the relations of the government and this company. In this way a common ground was supposed to be agreed on as regards the realization of a contract signed with the British authorities in 1939. These actions at once created the foundation for the subsequent official negotiations on the question of the navigation policy.⁹⁹

It was only as late as April 14 that the contact of the Norwegian Prime Minister's cabinet with British and French diplomats got improved, which took place in Otta where the Norwegian government made a stop on its escape. As one could expect, this time, too, the allied forces submitted a demand to take over the Norwegian maritime freight. The Norwegian party categorically rejected these claims only to call a session of the government which would resolve about the project to commandeer the shipping fleet.¹⁰⁰

On the night of April 15 in Otta, and to discuss the future of the Norwegian shipping fleet, its tankers in particular, H. Koht met the experts on maritime freight, that is, an employee of the Nordic Shipowners' Association (Nordisk Skibsrederiforening – NSR), attorney Peter Simonsen and an employee of the Leif Høegh & Co. A/S Oslo shipping company, O. Gogstad. Soon after that P. Simonsen sent to London a wire signed by H. Koht (it was the first document informing Norwegians residing in London that their government still fulfilled its duties¹⁰¹) who presented in it the administrative division of the Norwegian maritime freight and illustrated huge communication problems that the Norwegian government had been facing since April 9¹⁰² (The only instructions directed at Norwegian crews came from London rather than Washington D. C. then¹⁰³). It needs to be added that the wire never explained the principles according to which the institution to be established by E. A. Colban and I. Hysing Olsen should function. Not only that, the wire also uncovered the faulty expertise of the Norwegian

⁹⁸ J. O. Egeland: op. cit., p. 92.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 92–94.

¹⁰⁰ A. Thowsen: *Den norske ...*, p. 366; idem: *Fra nøytral ...*, p. 42.

¹⁰¹ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰² A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 131; T. L. Nilsen, A. Thowsen: op. cit., p. 54; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 22; J. O. Egeland: op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁰³ J. Sverdrup: op. cit., p. 45.

authorities regarding maritime policy, a factor which pushed P. Simonsen and O. Gogstad to perform service for their own government.¹⁰⁴

Similarly to the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, both O. Gogstad and P. Simonsen were in the possession of enterprises which dealt with tankers and which were associated to the enterprises concerning both the remaining part of the shipping fleet and their country. Yet, the difference between these men and H. Koht was that the former had a better grasp of the situation of the Norwegian tonnage. Thus the project of organizing the administration of the Norwegian maritime freight they had prepared was based on intuition and experience of many years. As it turned out later, the administration of the Norwegian maritime freight was divided between London and New York as early as in the summer of 1940. On the other hand, the whole undertaking was so functional and practical that it served the Dutch as a model for organizing their own shipping fleet.¹⁰⁵

On April 16 neither E.A. Colban, nor I. Hysing Olsen, not even the British were inclined to give up the plans of centralizing the Norwegian authorities in London.¹⁰⁶ The main Norwegian foreign posts which then functioned as chief agents did it according to the same plans. For a short time they played a role of a go-between of the British government and J. Nygaardsvold's government when it comes to the creation of the Norwegian navigation policy. From April 16 to April 18, 1940, while sitting pretty in Stockholm, the agency of the Norwegian authorities made a huge effort to directly contact its government. The plans then submitted by the Norwegian post in Sweden concerned convincing the state council that the idea of centralizing the Norwegian shipping fleet was the only right way to solving administrative problems of the Norwegian maritime freight. The difficulties with sustaining a regular connection on the Stockholm-Norwegian government line compelled these diplomats to undertake own actions. In the days to follow this agency was strengthened with the persons of Jens Bull, Christopher Smith, C. J. Hambro, J. L. Mowinckel as well as a part of Norwegian shipowners.¹⁰⁷

Starting from April 12, the Norwegian agency in the capital of Sweden received numerous wires from E. A. Colban. The most important of them, of

¹⁰⁴ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., p. 131; T. L. Nilsen, A. Thowsen: op. cit., p. 54; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 22; J. O. Egeland: op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁰⁵ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., pp. 131–132; T. L. Nilsen, A. Thowsen: op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁰⁶ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 25; A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., p. 132; J. Sverdrup: op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship* ..., pp. 132–133; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 23.

April 17 strongly criticized the idea of dividing the management of the shipping fleet between London and New York, that is, as indicated by the wire signed by H. Koht.¹⁰⁸ In this document the Head of the Norwegian MFA emphasized the necessity of establishing in London of an office controlling the Norwegian maritime freight. The financial help for ships which E. A. Colban and I. Hysing Olsen already discussed was supposed to be provided by the British, yet, only when their control were limited to the capital of England. Therefore, it was stressed that the division of the administration of Norwegian maritime freight between London and New York was not a good idea for it would only deepen the chaos. It was also suggested that certain rights in administering the Norwegian shipping fleet should be received by E. A. Colban.¹⁰⁹

Due to the pressure which the British exerted upon Norwegian delegates in the Swedish capital, C. J. Hambro, Head of the Ministry of War Economy sent to Stockholm was requested to immediately solve the problem of the Norwegian maritime freight. On April 18, that is, one day after he arrived in Stockholm, C. J. Hambro received a letter from the British delegate to Stockholm who precisely depicted the “point of view of H.R.H. [...] which was to be realized with reference to the Norwegian shipping fleet”.¹¹⁰ Only then a necessity was realized to issue as quickly as possible an appropriate document specifying the management of the Norwegian maritime freight. The wartime hustle and bustle prompted, however, the choice for the managerial posts in question of people who were not sufficiently industrious or skilled to do the job. Accordingly, the negotiators comprised the already mentioned C. Smith as well as the following professors: Frede Castberg and Wilhelm Keilhau. Also, J. L. Mowinckel and shipowners Sigvald Bergesen and Erling H. Samuelsen participated in the talks.¹¹¹

The said committee never worked without pressure being exerted upon it. This is because the British kept sending aide-mémoires in which they clearly suggested that the division of control of the shipping fleet between London and New York was unacceptable for them. They also referred to a possibility of causing more chaos than expected in this way. In return London required, too, that the Norwegian government should grant E. A. Colban the proxy necessary for controlling the Norwegian shipping fleet. In one of the sent documents the following

¹⁰⁸ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 28–29.

¹¹⁰ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, pp. 133–134; J. O. Egeland: op. cit., p. 99.

¹¹¹ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 134.

quotation was highlighted: “Therefore two questions are important – stated aide-mémoire – (1) granting Colban the right to control the Norwegian fleet, or (2) granting Colban the right to commandeer this fleet.”¹¹²

As a result of thus taken up talks in the Swedish capital, the Norwegian diplomats advised its government to make necessary decisions enabling the realization of the first of the points mentioned in the British aide-mémoire.¹¹³

On the same day, namely, April 18, 1940 the committee selected in Stockholm drew up the guidelines of the project of future temporary instruction regarding the organization of the Norwegian shipping fleet. The instruction proposed that the control and right to manage the entire Norwegian shipping fleet taken over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be handed over to E. A. Colban. The Norwegian diplomat would also receive the proxy both to execute this control and manage all Norwegian ships and their current and expiring contracts.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, the committee in question considered the Norwegian government the body entitled to commandeering the domestic shipping fleet. Of the same opinion was a British diplomat residing in Washington D. C. who on April 13, 1940, having consulted American beforehand, presented his position towards this affair.¹¹⁵ The reason for such a state of affairs was the fear of the Third Reich commandeering Norwegian ships moored in neutral ports.¹¹⁶ The project which the Stockholm committee prepared under the pressure from the British, E. A. Colban and I. Hysing Olsen was sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs H. Koht on April 18.¹¹⁷

The question of commandeering the Norwegian shipping fleet was taken up also among the cabinet members of Head of the Norwegian MFA at the meeting held in the Norwegian Sandbu in Vågå on April 19. On the same day¹¹⁸ the British and French diplomat announced to H. Koht that their governments wished to take over the entirety of the Norwegian shipping fleet. Naturally H. Koht maintained that such a solution of the problem of the Norwegian freight was out of question and that a fairer move would be for his government to take over the entire of the Norwegian maritime freight. It needs to be added that the Norwegian Minister

¹¹² Ibid., p. 134.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.; idem: *Fra nøytral ...*, p. 43.

¹¹⁶ Idem: *Nortraship ...*, p. 136.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.; T. L. Nilsen, A. Thowsen: op. cit., p. 55.

¹¹⁸ Jacob Sverdrup gives the date of April 18, 1940. See J. Sverdrup: op. cit., p. 45.

of Foreign Affairs also contacted members of his government. For example, he phoned the Minister of Transport and Navigation H. T. Lie, then residing in Stuguflåten. These talks quickly gave fruit in the form of an issued resolution by which law the government appropriated all Norwegian ships of the BRT exceeding 500.¹¹⁹

On the following day, that is, April 20, also in Stuguflåten, H. T. Lie selected a committee in which he entrusted the task of preparing a temporary resolution commandeering the shipping fleet. The committee comprised Doctor of Law Arnold Ræsted, journalist and economist Ole Colbjørnsen, attorney C. A. Stang, and W. Keihlau¹²⁰ who, incidentally, had only two days to come to Stuguflåten from Stockholm. The day after that government members joined the committee, H. Koht among them. On the night of the same day King Haakon VII arrived. Thus on April 22 the full committee could begin its session.¹²¹

The four point document issued then assumed the name known in the historiographical studies as The Stuguflåten Temporary Resolution or else The Temporary Resolution on the Norwegian Freight in WWII and, according to John Oskar Egeland¹²², was made as early as April 20, 1940 and approved an slightly changed by the state council then in session two days later.¹²³

According to this document¹²⁴ all Norwegian ships exceeding 500 BRT had been commandeered¹²⁵ so that they could support both war actions and the Norwegian, British, and French authorities.¹²⁶ Moreover, in accordance with the earlier signed contracts, the Norwegian government joined in shipowners' obligations and their legal borrowers. In order to this instruction into effect the Norwegian Ministry of Transportation announced the establishment in the capital of England of a special navigation office with the chief of the Norwegian shipping fleet as its head.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 136; E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 32.

¹²⁰ H. T. Lie: *Leve ...*, p. 186.

¹²¹ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 34; A. Thowsen: *Nortraship ...*, p. 139.

¹²² J. O. Egeland: op. cit., p. 100.

¹²³ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 32.

¹²⁴ The content of *The Stuguflåten Temporary Resolution* was published by Erling Mossige. See E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 32.

¹²⁵ J. Sverdrup: op. cit., p. 45.

¹²⁶ E. A. Steen: op. cit., p. 114.

¹²⁷ E. Bull: *Klassekamp og felleskap 1920–1945*, in: *Norges histories*, vol. 13, ed. by K. Mykland, Oslo 1979, pp. 432–433; Instilling FRA, p. 89.

It needs to be emphasized that the instruction never mentioned the nationalization of the Norwegian maritime freight but it was made after former consultations with Norwegian shipowners, and on their request at that.¹²⁸ Also, the events of April 20–22, 1940 eventually brought the Norwegian tonnage to servicing the allied forces.¹²⁹

The said document had also an “explanation” attached which was longer than The Stuguflåten Temporary Resolution. From this attachment we can learn that on April 9, 1940 in Elverum the Norwegian government endowed itself with the “absolute power” to make all war decisions. Also, the significance of the shipping fleet in securing deliveries and supporting Norway’s war actions was highlighted, a statement which led to a conclusion that the government should manage the entire Norwegian tonnage to sail the seas at the time in question. Regarding the British and French governments, it was stressed that they required the tonnage Norway needed to be handed over and left at their disposal. The maritime freight these government needed comprised both trade and passenger ships as well as whalers. For the purpose of accelerating the implementation of these principles a resolution was made to create a separate management of the shipping fleet with the head office in London. Additionally, a decision was made of the conditions of commandeering ships to be announced either by consulates or state powers. What is more, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs obliged itself to publish instructions indispensable for Norwegian consulates.¹³⁰

Shipowners’ salaries were supposed to be paid within free areas either monthly, or in concordance with the number of sea voyages performed. On the other hand, the shipowners from occupied territories were guaranteed the salaries vested in them to be paid within three months after these territories would have been liberated. The Norwegian government also obliged itself to gather ships for shipowners from Germany-occupied territories as well as to deposit them in the names of their owners in the Norwegian Bank (Norges Bank). Insurances for shipowners residing within free areas were supposed to be paid out after the insurance payments of shipowners from Germany-occupied territories had been made. Soon after that the Norwegian Ministry of Transportation obliged itself to issue a temporary regulation including these postulates.¹³¹

¹²⁸ E. Virkesdal: op. cit., p. 3.

¹²⁹ E. Mossige: op. cit., p. 35.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 36.

After some time Øivind Lorentzen who kept in constant touch with H. T. Lie came to Stuguflåten. He was selected to be future Head of the new office in London. Even though there was a possibility to alternate Ø. Lorentzen with I. Hysing Olsen, yet, it is doubtful whether he wished to fulfill this function.¹³²

Soon after that Ø. Lorentzen went on a British war ship from Åndalsnes to London. He brought the documents with him such as The Stuguflåten Temporary Resolution, the permit to sign contracts with the British and French governments concerning the charter of the Norwegian maritime freight and in agreement with the already mentioned temporary instruction as well as the proxy to break all contracts and take further steps facilitating the establishment of the new navigation office.

* * *

The depicted events have demonstrated that it was hardly the lack of an effective connection only which caused the actions of Norwegian shipowners. Apart from securing the Norwegian shipping fleet from the designs of the Third Reich the curbing of endeavours of the British was an issue, too. Accordingly, the establishment of an organization which would take over Norway's all navigation interest seemed the best solution. This problem was significant enough for the state powers to arrive at once and undertake all further steps at their own responsibility. Thus on April 13, 1940 a concept of establishing a navigation organization appeared which took the final shape two weeks later. In this way the British lost the possibility to swiftly take over the Norwegian maritime freight whereas for the Norwegian a chance cropped up to secure for themselves decent chartering conditions.

In the days to follow April 9, 1940 the vital role which Great Britain began to perform in the Norwegian navigation endorsed itself again. One needs to mention the attitude of the Norwegian government, E. A. Colban, I. Hysing Olsen and activists of the Norwegian Sailors' Association in London all of whom supported but the cooperation with England. This imperative tremendously facilitated the creation of new administrative structures, the establishment of the head office in

¹³² J. Rustung Hegland: op. cit., p. 15.

London and, first and foremost, direct subordination of the Norwegian maritime freight to the government of Johan Nygaardsvold. Certain doubts might have existed regarding a few ship captains, yet, the insurance propositions confirmed by I. Hysing Olsen took them away.

Despite the fact that the existing hustle and bustle produced the imprecision of the April document, yet, the aim, that is, taking over by the Norwegian state of the domestic shipping fleet which was supposed to cover the costs of the Norwegian government in exile was reached. With this one stone, two birds were thus killed, namely, the Norwegian shipping fleet had eventually the usage of its national colours guaranteed and the so-called “external front” comprising the king, Norwegian armed forces and the Norwegian shipping fleet was created.

Although amended later, The Stuguflåten Temporary Resolution deserves a closer attention. This is because this resolution constituted one of the first documents – harbingers of a new époque to come in Norway’s foreign policy. Consequently, the Resolution broke with the state of neutrality which so disappointed Norway on the day the German aggression of this country commenced. Also, the document demonstrated that in the then dominating in the Norwegian policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the big, if not the biggest, role was played by the Norwegian shipping fleet.

The events presented above constitute a momentous although commonly unappreciated and only slightly known fact owing to which the Norwegian shipping fleet was marked with a white stone in the history of WWII. Speaking of the contribution of the Norwegian maritime freight one can quote the words of the chief of the United States Admiralty, Admiral Emory S. Land who as early as December 1941 stated: “It seems to me that some English publication has already mentioned the fact of the Norwegian shipping fleet to be for the allied forces what a million soldiers would be for a war. I wish to say that this is hardly an exaggeration to say that. You are worth more than a million soldiers!”¹³³

¹³³ P. Hansson: *Co dziesiąty musiał umrzeć. O konwojach morskich podczas drugiej wojny światowej* [Every Tenth Soldier Had to Die. Sea Convoys in WWII], Gdańsk 1979, p. 8.

WALKA O NORWESKĄ FLOTĘ HANDLOWĄ I ZAŁOŻENIE NORTRASHIP (NORWESKIEJ MISJI MORSKIEJ)

Streszczenie

Okres drugiej wojny światowej jest niewątpliwie jednym z najważniejszych w dziejach norweskiej floty handlowej. Norweski fracht morski dzięki swemu zaangażowaniu w morskie transporty i płynącym stąd dochodom umożliwił działalność norweskiego rządu na emigracji, a także, wobec niewielkich sił zbrojnych Norwegii, stanowił rzeczywisty wkład w działania wojenne Norwegów. Jednakże zanim tonaż ten dostał się pod zarząd norweskich władz państwowych, należało wpieryw ochronić norweską flotę handlową przed zakusami nie tylko III Rzeszy, ale i aliantów.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie działań norweskich dyplomatów, a także rządu norweskiego, zmierzających do wprowadzenia norweskiej floty handlowej w służbę państwa norweskiego, a następnie aliantów. Omówiono więc założenie Nortraship, największej organizacji żeglugi morskiej podczas drugiej wojny światowej, wraz z towarzyszącymi temu przesłankami, oraz wydanie, jak i okoliczności przygotowania Tymczasowego rozporządzenia ze Stuguflåten, na mocy którego rząd norweski zarekwirował rodzimy fracht morski.

Zasięg chronologiczny prezentowanej pracy obejmuje okres od 9 kwietnia 1940 r., a więc od niemieckiej agresji na Danię i Norwęgę, do 26 kwietnia, czyli założenia norweskiej organizacji żeglugowej Nortraship.