

The Sejm Library, 1919–2009

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of the Sejm Library followed Poland's regaining of independence in 1918 and the ensuing parliamentary election of 1919. The library was set up at the end of 1919, and after many organizational changes it came to incorporate the Senate Library and the parliamentary archives. By 1939 the library's collection amounted to 78,000 volumes, including parliamentary and official publications as well as books and journals on law and the social, economic, and historical sciences. In September 1939, a fire destroyed part of the collection, while the remaining 62,000 volumes were transported by the Germans to Berlin where they disappeared in circumstances that were never clarified. Only a small part of the collection, deposited before the end of the war in Castle Houska in Czechoslovakia, returned to Poland. In a one-chamber parliament set up after World War II, the library, functioning under the name of the "Sejm Library," had to rebuild its collections almost from scratch. In 1991, the library took over the 145,000 volume library collection of the former Archives of the Polish Left, and in 1993 the Sejm Archives was incorporated into it. Currently, the entirely automated library has a collection of about 500,000 volumes and provides services for both chambers of the Polish Parliament.

The year 2009 marks the ninetieth anniversary of the establishment of the Sejm Library, the oldest institution providing services to the legislative chambers and, except for the German occupation period (1939–45), the only one that has retained its tradition and organizational form for so many years. For the purposes of this brief discussion, it seems reasonable to divide the recent history of the Sejm Library into four periods reflecting

the milestone dates in Poland's history. The first covers the two decades between 1919 and 1939, referred to as the Second Republic period, when the library was established and managed both to build extensive collections and a strong position among Polish libraries. The second period is that of World War II (1939–44), during which disastrous time the library had no institutional existence. The third period is that of communist rule (1944–89), when from 1952 the Sejm was formally the supreme body of state power; whereas in fact it was deprived of any decision-making power and was given merely a token role, for which neither a library nor expert resources were particularly necessary. Finally, the fourth period began after 1989, when democratic changes triggered a real growth of demand for information, fueling political debate and the lawmaking process, and where the decision center moved from the Communist Party to constitutional bodies, which included the Parliament as well.

THE SECOND REPUBLIC, 1919–39

At the time parliamentary libraries were being established in Europe, Poland did not exist as an independent state (1795–1918), and the stormy experience of nineteenth-century parliamentary bodies in the Polish territories was not conducive to the development of any sustainable facility supporting deputies' work. While the autonomous Galician National Sejm (Galicia was a crown land of the Habsburg Monarchy and enjoyed considerable autonomy) and the Polish Group in the Russian State Duma had their own reference book collections catering ad hoc to the needs of the deputies, no full-fledged library was set up in either of these.

It was not until Poland regained independence (November 1918) and the first Polish Sejm to be elected in democratic elections was assembled soon after February 1919, that plans for a parliamentary library became real. In March 1919 a group of deputies of the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL-Piast) submitted a petition to the Marshal of the Sejm requesting that "the Sejm library be established and provided first with the most necessary works, and then be gradually expanded" (Legislative Sejm of the 2nd Republic, 1919, p. 1). The petition expressed a conscious need and concern of the lawmakers for the establishment of a research and documentation base necessary to support the legislative work that was to give shape to the reviving state.

In organizational 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 was called the Legislative Sejm Library (1919–22). When the second chamber, the Senate, was finally set up at the end of 1922, it took over the role of the Sejm and Senate Library, although the library and its reading room (see fig. 1) were financed from the Sejm's budget. At the turn of the 1930s, twelve years after the establishment of the Sejm, it became necessary to organize the growing archival resource,

consisting of both the records of parliamentary work, mainly the legislative process, and the administrative files produced by the offices. The library's structures were used for this purpose, and in September 1931 it was transformed into the Sejm and Senate Library and Archives by the order of the Sejm Marshall (*Monitor Polski*, 1931). It was described as an auxiliary body supporting the Sejm and Senate, and as such, it stored a collection of various publications concerning the activity of the Sejm and Senate with special focus on publications in social, legal, historical, and economic sciences. The library's function was to provide relevant information and materials, operate a reading room of daily newspapers and periodicals, and collect and store all files and documents resulting from the proceedings of the Sejm and Senate. 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 Sejm and Senate's Marshals. The staff consisted of officials and lower-rank employees filling positions under different contracts within the limits set by the budget of the Sejm.

The nucleus of the collection consisted of about 3,000 volumes previously put together for the purposes of the Parliamentary Constitutional Committee of the Provisional Council of State. It was a body appointed in 1917, whose mission was to prepare the foundations of Polish statehood. The new library took over parts of collections from liquidated institutions previously operating in the annexationist states, for which the Polish state was a successor. Part of the library of the former Pozna Province (a Prussian regional administration body) was appropriated, as well as a collection of official journals from the library of the National Department (autonomous government of Galicia) in Lvov (Legislative Sejm of the 2nd Republic, 1923). In spring 1924, about 12,000 volumes were also brought from Lvov, previously held by the library of the Governorate (an office representing the Emperor of Austria in Galicia). A small number of books came 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 State Duma was recovered. A considerable number of items came from Warsaw library duplicates, primarily the Public Library for the Capital City of Warsaw and the library of the Warsaw School of Economics. The Sejm Library also benefited from donations from private individuals, often deputies and senators.

Intensive efforts made by the director of the library, Dr. Henryk Kołodziejcki, 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 Dr. Kołodziejcki resolved to provide the library, free of charge, with one copy of each publication dealing with subject matter corresponding to the collection profile. In 1921, Poland ratified the Brussels Convention of March

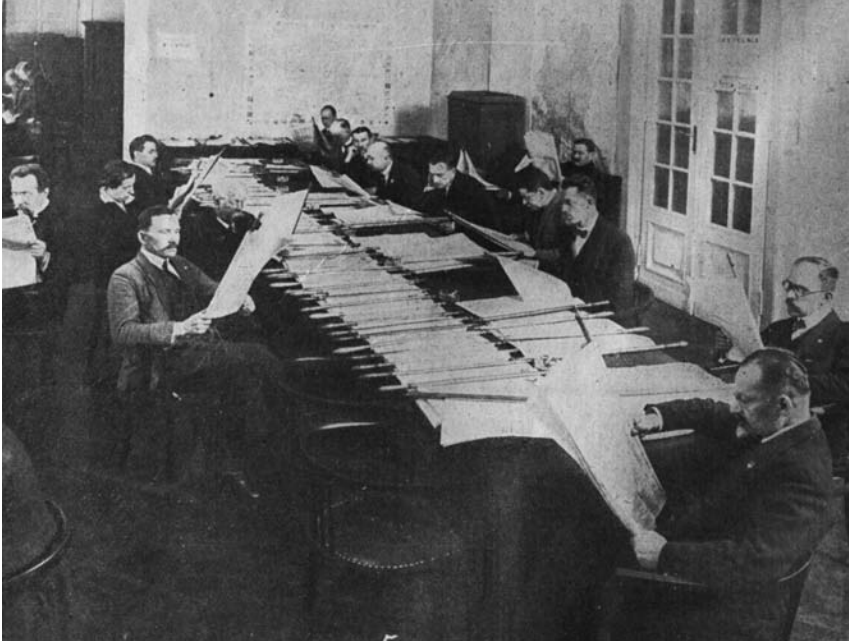


Figure 1. Reading room for members of Polish Sejm and Senate. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany (Illustrated Weekly Magazine, 1923.* © The Sejm Library.)

15, 1886 (*Monitor Polski, 1921*), which enabled it to develop the exchange of official publications with many parliaments. Further cooperation was also stimulated by the establishment of an editorial office within the library in 1925 for the publication of “*Exposé sommaire des travaux législatifs de la Diète et du Sénat Polonais,*” which contained complete texts or abstracts of Polish legislative acts translated into French. The publication helped to overcome the language barrier, and was highly appreciated by foreign partners. The editorial staff consisted of outstanding lawyers, and the director of the library was the secretary of the editorial office. By 1936, seven volumes appeared, covering legislation enacted between November 1918 and August 1937.

Apart from parliamentary documents, the library collected the publications of a number of states. With regard to the former annexationists (Austria, Prussia, and Russia) and several Western European states (Belgium, France, and Great Britain), historic collections dating back to the beginning of the nineteenth century were purchased. The library was the Polish depository of the publications of the League of Nations and the Carnegie Foundation. It also received the publications of the International Labor Office, the International Institute of Agriculture, the

International Institute of Trade, and many other organizations. The resource was expanded with 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*).

The library strictly adhered to its collection profile. It collected books in the field of law, with special focus on public law, as well as economics, politics, social sciences, and modern history. There was also a special emphasis on political doctrines and the history of parties and political movements. By the mid-1920s, the library possessed a 900-volume collection of books on Bolshevism. In 1927, the book collection consisted of about 35,000 volumes, and the regular acquisition of periodicals included 473 publications in Polish and 309 in foreign languages. By 1938 the library had about 48,000 volumes of books and 30,000 volumes of periodicals.

When the new parliamentary buildings were commissioned in 1928, the library's operating conditions also improved significantly. It had two reading rooms—the main one situated in the immediate vicinity of the plenary hall and a periodical reading room, popular with the deputies, housed in the new building. The resource storage facilities were arranged in the new building, with modern metal shelving and appropriate fire protection equipment. Staffing also increased to meet the library's growing needs. Initially, besides the director, a qualified librarian and a messenger were employed. In 1921, there were already six persons employed; in 1928, thirteen; and by 1939 there were twenty employees. The personnel were periodically supported by two or three trainee librarians, and assistance was also provided by voluntary workers.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, two teams (sections), the Legal Section and the Socioeconomic Section, were set up in the library for auxiliary work on parliamentary bills, justification of proposals, and preparation of substantive speeches. Duties of library employees included collecting statistical data, preparing comparative summaries, drawing up budget statements, and performing other work commissioned by deputies or senators. The parliamentarians were highly appreciative of the library's information work and viewed its achievements as the beginnings of a future "preparatory work office for the deputies and senators" (*Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, 1930/31, part 2a, p. 2), which was to evolve into parliamentary expert bureaus. However, the course of historic events prevented full implementation of this idea.

To process the collections, the Sejm Library used a catalog framework developed by director Kołodziejcki. The decimal classification system was rejected as being too formal and inadequate for a parliamentary library. The catalog comprised three main branches: law, socioeconomic sciences, and historical-political sciences. It encompassed 24 branches and more than 300 subbranches marked with digits and letters. The book catalog

was complemented by references to a special catalog of periodicals and documents in the form of descriptions of major events covered by the domestic and foreign press. The catalog framework was expanded as new subject matter appeared in various written materials (Kramm, 1955).

According to the library's rules of procedure, its resources were available in the reading rooms, and material could be borrowed by the deputies and senators as well as employees of the Sejm and Senate offices, journalists, members of the Parliamentary Reporters' Club, authorized officials of ministries and central offices, researchers, students authorized by university authorities, and, under certain conditions, ordinary people from the street. Attendance grew quickly, especially in the 1930s. In 1933, there were 750 people a month; in 1935, 900; and in 1937, 1,050 a month. Readership among the deputies also grew, but at a slower rate. In 1935, they borrowed 517 items from the storage facilities (disregarding reference book collections), and in 1936, 522 items (*Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, 1937/38). The custom of keeping the reading room open on plenary days until the end of proceedings solidified at the time, and is continued to this day.

Entering its twentieth year of existence, the library, together with the Sejm and Senate Archives, was already a strong and dynamic center of scientific information in the fields of law and politics, well suited to perform its statutory tasks and continuously improving the methods of work for the parliament's purposes. It was considered a serious 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: 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, catalogs, and inventories. However, the periodical reading room and majority of the storage facilities situated in the modern building with reinforced-concrete floors survived. The lowest stories accommodating the archives were flooded with water from firefighting on upper floors. The surviving archive records were moved to a central repository designated by the Nazis, which they burned in November 1944 when the city was systematically scorched to the ground. As part of efforts to save the collections, the most valuable archival files were evacuated to the East at the beginning of September. They were seized by the Soviets, but survived the war and were returned by the Russian authorities.

While hostilities were still in progress, the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA—*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) set up "The Operational Unit for the Protection of Scientific Values and Fine Arts," best known as "*Kommando Paulsen*," named after its commander, professor of history at the University of Berlin and SS Untersturmführer, Peter Paulsen. The Kommando was

instructed 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” (Meżyński, 2000, pp. 191–192). At the same time, RSHA Department II, described as the “Ideological Research and Evaluation” department, conceived the idea of organizing its own library to provide an information resource for the work carried on by the department. The library was to be built around “political” book collections brought from the conquered countries and confiscated by the Reich. The instructions of RSHA Department II were to take out of the country “church and political, Marxist, Jewish or Masonic libraries, in Polish, German, French and English” (Meżyński, 2000, p. 193). In fact, Paulsen only packed and took away from Warsaw several small but “political” book collections from the Hungarian, Danish, French, Jewish, and Ukrainian Institutes as well as the Institute of Foreign Relations. Collections of the Sejm Library were the largest and most valuable loot of *Kommando Paulsen*. By the beginning of December 1939, the surviving book collection of about 48,000 volumes had been taken away to Berlin. Newspapers and magazines were partly burned 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.

Some of the books looted in Warsaw were incorporated in the RSHA library, which was organized in 1941. Its collection fell into three groups: “German Reich and General,” “The Opponent,” and “Foreign Countries” (Meżyński, 2000). We do not know how many books from the Sejm Library were incorporated in that library, how many were retailed as duplicates, or how many were deemed useless. The copies that returned to Warsaw after the war bear the shelf marks “Ausl” (Foreign Countries) or “MI” (German Reich and General), assigned according to criteria that are unclear. Probably, in view of increasingly heavy bombing of Berlin, books from the RSHA library were evacuated and hidden at the Houska Castle in the Czech Sudeten. According to different sources, between 6,600 and 8,300 volumes, approximately 14 percent of the resources looted in 1939, were brought from there to the Sejm Library in 1946.

THE SEJM LIBRARY UNDER COMMUNIST RULE, 1944–89

In view of the fact that the Sejm Library was almost completely destroyed by the Germans, postwar reconstruction started from scratch. With the opening of the Legislative Sejm in February 1947, the library was also commissioned. Its customary name, the Sejm Library, became its official name, because in the 1946 referendum rigged by the communists, the Senate was abolished, and until 1989 the Parliament remained unicameral. In organizational terms, the library was considered a parliamentary administration office and reported to the head of the administration, rather than to the

Marshal of the Chamber as was the case in the interwar period. Regulations adopted in 1952 provided that the library would consist of autonomous sections: General, Acquisitions, Collection Processing, Reading Room, and Reference Library (*Resolution of the State Council of 5 August 1952*).

The acquisition policy sought to maintain the same one set before the war by director Kołodziejcki, and until the end of the 1940s, it was noted that the “present Sejm Library is drawing on the tradition of an excellently organized pre-war library” (Hryniewicz, 1949, p. 1). However, there were also differences arising from a different structure of state power, with the political leadership being exercised by the Communist Party. As the Communist dictatorship was gaining foothold, references to the prewar tradition disappeared, and the acquisition policy placed an increasingly greater focus on what was then called Marxism-Leninism, which included not only the classics, but also lesser eulogists of the regime, such as Vyshinsky, Molotov, or Zhdanov.

By the end of the 1940s, more than 100,000 library items had been gathered of which about 70,000 were incorporated into the collection. Such a great increase of resources over a short period of time seemed to be quite reasonable, because apart from purchases, donations, and exchanges, in the period immediately following the end of the war, libraries benefited from what was called “allocations.” These came from administrative handing over of complete book collections from former German libraries, collections abandoned by private owners or taken over from organizations liquidated by the Communists. In 1953, the Sejm Library held about 100,000 volumes of German books, 60 percent of which were intended to be incorporated in the resource (*Wytyczne pracy Biblioteki Sejmowej*, 1953). Selection, disinfection, and partial processing were planned, but the work progressed slowly. In 1959, unprocessed publications from that group still consisted of over 19,000 volumes. Nearly 8,000 of them were handed over to the State Library of the German Democratic Republic, and it was not until the 1990s that remaining items from that collection were put to order. One of the acquisition methods peculiar to the Communist period that gives a good idea of the atmosphere of those days was the acquisition of books and magazines from the Main Control Authority for the Press, Publications, and Performances, or, simply speaking, the censor’s office. In 1953, the office supplied 15 percent of new book acquisitions and a sizeable number of copies of newspapers and periodicals (*Sprawozdanie za rok*, 1953). The Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported foreign press acquisition in a similar way; however, it also made the process much more laborious for the librarians. Once or twice a year, the Press Department delivered three to four tons of newspapers and magazines, which the librarians needed to sort through carefully to select issues missing from the library’s resources or to form completely new series (Hryniewicz, 1957).

Major difficulties were also involved in the exchange of publications. While the 1886 Brussels Convention was formally in force, the Communist authorities tried to control and reduce the scope of its application to the minimum necessary for propaganda purposes. In 1960, an exchange committee was set up and chaired by the Chief of the Sejm Chancellery, who was to ensure appropriate, albeit incomplete, political supervision over its activities. For example, each dispatch of materials to the New York Public Library and each piece of correspondence accompanying the materials required a separate approval granted by the Chief of the Sejm Chancellery. He even released special instructions on the exchange of the Sejm's publications. In response to political pressure, the Committee also decided to stop sending Polish parliamentary publications to the Bundestag Library. For four years the German partners continued supplying their materials, but having received no response to their letters and no Polish parliamentary documents, the Germans ceased supplying the Bundestag documentation. An attempt at restoring contact was harshly opposed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which banned the renewal of exchange "under the present political situation" (*Sprawozdanie z działalności Biblioteki Sejmovej*, 1961–65). There are countless examples thereof.

The Sejm Library also fell victim to the withdrawal of books deemed 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 the absence of documents, it is hard today to determine the scale of what the library's director Zofia Hryniewicz later described as a "pogrom" (Hryniewicz, 1957). In the 1950s, certain libraries (including the Sejm Library) were permitted to hold banned publications. They were processed and stored under numerous restrictions, and access was limited to a small group of individuals trusted by the regime (*Monitor Polski*, 1954).

A period of rapid growth of the library was followed, in the mid-1950s, by a relatively stable acquisition rate of 3,200 volumes a year. In 1959, the overall collection inventory was 156,681 volumes, and in 1989 it reached 253,595. Despite difficulties and obstacles in the exchange of materials, the desirable acquisition model was successfully defended. Owing to its position linked to the Sejm, 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. It is worth noting that more than 50 percent of the books acquired were foreign-language items, an uncommon phenomenon in the communist bloc. The library also obtained a mandatory copy of Polish official publications. While the copies were sometimes hard to come by, almost a complete set was collected eventually.

Until the early 1970s, the library's weakness was insufficient staffing, which prevented sustainable processing of a large inflow of materials.

Librarians were often seconded to other work, engaging in communist production actions, such as cereal or potato harvesting (Hryniewicz, 1957). The situation became critical in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the collection processing backlog reached several years, and the number of completely unprocessed publications increased to about 30,000 volumes (almost 15 percent of the total collection). Taking advantage of the situation that arose after the ruling team was replaced at the beginning of 1971 by a more liberal one that was more open to the West, the library presented an expert's report, which stated in the summary that "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" (Jasińska, Piusińska, & Romańska, 1972, p. 15). Owing to support from the library community and the friendly attitude of senior officials of the Chancellery of the Sejm, the number of staff was increased from seventeen in 1970 to twenty-seven in 1974. A new parliamentary documentation department was established, and preliminary work was begun to develop library automation and IT systems for use by the Sejm. The ultimate goal was for the Sejm Library to become the Main Centre of Legislative Information. To implement this plan, the IT Section was established, which evolved ten years later into the IT Center, an independent unit that exists to this day.

As work progressed, costs were calculated and necessary expenditure was compared with potential benefits arising from the use of the computer technology available at the time. Elements of the monstrous system were abandoned one by one, and the plans eventually boiled down to an electronic address system of the current Polish legislation and that relevant in the past (back to 1918). In practice, the system was designed to determine which normative instruments contained legal provisions relating to a specific subject, and if and what instruments were available regarding the interpretation and application of those provisions. Apart from a register of normative instruments, the system was to comprise the Central Catalogue of Legal Literature containing information on books, serials, and official publications in the field of law held in the collection of the Sejm Library and seventeen other law libraries (including eight libraries of university law faculties). In order to facilitate the coordination of work, in 1979 the library was granted Central Legislative Library status. Theoretically this status bestowed a number of responsibilities related to the acquisition and processing of collections, but because there were no funds, there was little progress in this area. The crisis of the late 1970s brought further work to a halt, rendering the original assumptions completely obsolete in view of advancements in computer technology.

For any parliamentary library, the number of deputies using its collections was an important indicator of its usefulness. We know that from

1959–68 the library was visited, on average, by 140 deputies (out of 460 deputies) annually, and in the latter part of the 1980s, deputies accounted for 6 to 11 percent of users. From today's point of view, the level of deputies' attendance might seem quite satisfactory, but it was considered poor at the time. Although there was a reading room available for public use, the deputies had no separate room of their own, and this was considered one of the reasons for their low usage of the library. Nevertheless, the overall number of users showed increasing growth, and from 1956 to 1989, ranged between 7,500 and 13,500 people per year. Those using the library were mainly government officials, academics, journalists, and senior-year students.

Throughout the postwar period, the library struggled with a lack of suitable storage space and premises for employees. The storage space issue was dealt with through resource selection and by increasing the shelving height. While postwar reconstruction plans provided for a separate library building in the Sejm complex, when it was actually commissioned, it was put to other uses, for example, offices for senior officials and the central archives of the communist party. Today it houses the Senate.

FREE POLAND: THE SEJM LIBRARY AFTER 1989

The partly free elections of June 4, 1989, led to a change in the position of the parliament within the system of state power. Once a meaningless body formally putting into effect directives of 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. The existence of a parliament that was in session permanently, as opposed to the previous system of two sessions a year, meant that there was an unprecedented intensification of work. Due to those changes, demand for information and for expert support increased markedly. It became necessary for the parliament to set up its own Research Bureau and to strengthen and unify the information and documentation facilities of the Sejm.

Following the prewar tradition, the Sejm Library also provided services to the new Senate as well as its staff, primarily comprising members of structures separate from the Sejm. In organizational terms, it remained a part of the Sejm Chancellery and was financed from its budget. The first years of transformation saw the expansion of the library's structure through the annexation or establishment of new agencies.

In 1990, the idea of establishing the Museum of the Polish Sejm was abandoned; consequently, the team involved in its organization for several years was taken over by the library, where it formed the Museum Division. The division has been involved in the collection and processing of works of art, cultural heritage assets, and antique books related to the history of the parliamentary system. It has also been organizing temporary

exhibitions, usually to mark important anniversaries celebrated by the Sejm. Currently, the Museum Division's resource is close to 6,000 pieces, comprising works of art, documents, and numismatic items.

In spring 1991, by decision of the Chief of the Sejm Chancellery, the 145,000-volume library of the former Archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Polish United Workers' Party was taken over. This arrangement probably saved this interesting book collection from dispersion, but it involved a huge organizational effort. A large portion of the volumes was stored in piles in the basements of the building then being converted for the purposes of the Senate. After almost a year of organization work, the resources were again made available to readers. Furthermore, an additional focus for the collection was planned, emphasizing the transformations taking place in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 as well as the left political and social movements. This makes reference to the prewar tradition, when the Sejm Library kept a collection of works devoted to Bolshevism. The book collection forms a separate Social History Collection Division.

The Sejm Archives, incorporated into the library in 1992, forms a separate division. In this case as well, reference was intentionally made to the tradition of the Second Republic, although practical concerns were also taken into account (e.g., elimination of multiple acquisitions of certain documents, easy access for archivists to source materials kept at the library, etc.). The Archives hold, process, and provide access to materials produced by the Sejm, its bodies, deputies, and their offices, and by the Chancellery of the Sejm. In 2008, the Archives' resources contained more than 1,000 running meters of files, about 54,000 audio and video recordings, and more than 1,500 sets of photographs.

During the time Poland was intensively preparing for membership in the European Union, the library formed a new division, the European Information and Documentation Center, which was given the task of providing information support related to EU documents and legislative acts. A website was created offering an extensive set of constantly updated information, such as the activities of the Sejm related to European integration. Between January and July 2004, more than 87,500 users visited the website. The center also participates in the Inter-Parliamentary EU Information Exchange (IPEX) project.

In response to the deputies' demand for media information, the Media Resource Center was established in 1991. The center deals with recording, processing, and presentation of audiovisual recordings of the sessions of the Sejm as well as major news and feature programs broadcast by several television channels. A press information section was set up at the same time, which publishes daily and weekly press reviews about the Sejm in paper format, and since 2005, in an electronic format that provides direct access to press clippings with full-text searchability.

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 expanding information access via Web pages. In 1993, a medium-class integrated library system (ALEPH) was purchased, which 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 library processes and at the same time to gradually put additional modules into service. After the Polish language version was developed, the operation of the system started with cataloging new acquisitions in order to make its most visible fragment—the catalog of the latest collection—available to users (and decision makers) as soon as possible. By 1997, all modules of the system had been rolled out, and soon 96 percent of the items searched by users were available in the automated catalog, confirming that the original assumption behind the project had been correct. In 2008, the retrospective conversion of books in the main collections was completed, and simultaneously work has been in progress on a retroconversion 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 an analysis of several such languages, it was decided to develop a proprietary uniform information retrieval language, matching both the content of parliamentary documents and the requirements of the automated system. As a result, “Stebis,” a uniform thesaurus system, was created, based on Eurovoc, a multilanguage thesaurus of the European Parliament. The system has been updated and developed ever since (about 11,300 descriptors in 2008), and ongoing cooperation with the Eurovoc thesaurus team includes, among other things, proposing new descriptors and delivering in 2005 an official Polish language version of the thesaurus for the purposes of the European Parliament.

Currently, as many as fourteen databases, including ten accessible to the general public via a website, are maintained in the ALEPH system, which has been upgraded twice so far (versions “500” and “500-18”). In 2008, the number of records in all bases was 510,000, and the number of user visits exceeded 145,500.

In 2002, digitization of the Polish parliamentary documentation was undertaken, which is certainly a component of the Sejm Library’s mission, and at the same time a form of protection of the most frequently used materials. Parliamentary documents from the 1919–93 period have been digitized (since 1993 a full-text database has been in operation), and there are plans to digitize the 1807–1918 period. The implementation of the program should lead to the creation of a broad and, more importantly, public source database on the history of the Polish parliamentary system.

The rules organizing and disciplining the collection process were defined anew in 1992. The writings collected according to content criteria mainly concerned law, in particular constitutional and parliamentary law, philosophy, and sociology of law. In addition, publications concerning the state and political systems, international relations and organizations, political sciences, economics, and history were acquired in complete sets or in extensive selections. Correctness of the acquisition profile has been confirmed by a minimal number of borrowings from other libraries on request of the deputies and senators. Foreign-language publications form about 40 percent of the acquisitions. From 1991 to 2008, the Library's resource increased by 94,500 volumes. At the same time, due to the selection procedure, nearly 59,000 volumes were removed from the collection. 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.

After 1990, the number of deputies visiting the library increased, on average, to 284 a year for a total of about 2,150 visits. They account for approximately 18 percent of all users. In practice, the library is trying to pursue a "semi-open-door policy," serving individuals and institutions whose scientific, professional, or information needs can be satisfied by the library's unique collections. The average annual number of visits is 12,000. In recent years, the average daily reader attendance has dropped from sixty to fifty people, which is mainly due to an increasingly wider access to parliamentary databases over the Internet.

In the early years of transformation, the library received support from Western parliaments. What proved especially effective was assistance from the U.S. House of Representatives through a program initiated by U.S. Congressman Frost, the Frost Task Force, which was carried out by a special team of the Congressional Research Service under substantive management by William H. Robinson.

Continued until 1996, the assistance provided to the parliaments of twelve Central and Eastern European (CEE) states included the supply of publications, computer hardware, delivery of training, and seminars. Modernization processes were also supported by the Library of the House of Commons and by the European Parliament. In the period concerned, the library participated in many forms of international cooperation with organizations such as the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the European Centre for Parliamentary Research & Documentation (ECPRD), the International Consortium of ALEPH Users (ICAU), the European Legislative Virtual Library (ELVIL), and others, always based on the assumption that it is necessary for the verification of the library's own capabilities and that it provides a way to draw on the knowledge and experience of other parliamentary libraries. Since the mid-1990s, the Sejm Library has been providing training and internships for

employees of information centers 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 the library was given at the beginning of the past two decades.

THE SEJM LIBRARY TODAY

Reminiscent of its existence during the Second Polish Republic, in its present organizational shape the Sejm Library encompasses three functions, the library, the archives, and the museum, all of which form the information documentation facility of the Sejm. The ample and carefully profiled library resources, meticulous archival records, and collection of works of art and cultural heritage assets enable the parliamentarians and other users to find answers to most inquiries. The library's collection has provided a basis for many major dissertations in the fields of law, political science, and history.

Along with the use of advanced forms of information, 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. Memory of tradition combined with deployment of state-of-the-art IT technologies is characteristic of the Sejm Library of today. It is left to our readers to judge whether the synthesis presented herein is accurate.

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