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Establishment and the evolution of the first river transport companies in Romania

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Abstract. This article analyzes the formation and evolution of the first *Romanian River Transport* companies, following the following topics:

- the premises that led to the setting up of the first river transport companies in Romania;
- the equipping and structure of the Romanian River Navigation (N.F.R.) ship park before the outbreak of the first World War;
- Company's heritage values.

Keywords: *Romanian River Navigation, Naval Transport, Heritage.*

1. Introduction

After the formation of the modern national state (1859), and the acquisition of Romania's state independence (1877), we get the Danube mouth and direct access to the Black Sea and the premises for the formation of a national transport fleet are being made.

The creation of the river transport fleet is rooted in 1890, when the *Company of State Monopolies (RMS)*, requiring ships to export salt to Serbia, intervened with the government to establish a transport service on the Danube [1].

2. The formation and development of the first river transport companies in Romania

On May 30, 1890, General Manager of State Monopolies Company - Grigore Manu proposed the setting up of a river transport fleet and on June 18 has approved the law under which an extraordinary credit of one million lei was opened for the Austrian Shipping Company on the Danube (DDSG), to buy the tug "PACS" of 750 HP with 243.300 lei and 4 barges of 1400 tons capacity with 0,040 million lei. The tug was renamed "Despina Lady" and on November 1st 1890 the Company's water transport service was inaugurated in Turnu-Severin [2].

Two years later, exactly in 1892, another 20 barges worth 1,400 million lei are purchased, and in 1895 the tug "Basarab" and 4 barges are bought for the amount of 1,265 million lei [3].

In 1893, the State bought from the Austrian Danube Navigation Company (DDSG), to provide logistical support for the vessels acquired, Turnu-Severin shipyard for 0,240 million lei and in the same year, it buys the largest passenger ship on the Danube "East," renamed later " Stefan cel Mare " to be used for the transport of passengers between Braila and Galati [4].

In 1898, Company of State Monopolies (RMS) enters restructuring, and in 1901, the water transport service of the company will change its name to the Romanian River Navigation Service (N.F.R.), which will move its headquarters from Turnu-Severin to Galati, with the company to be set up by the national Authority for Development (NRF). Organized as a separate service in the Ministry of public works.

At this time, the Romanian river fleet was actually the following ships in the service of the Romanian river navigation system:

Tab.1. The park of the Romanian River Navigation according to the type of ship that are equipped and the purchase price - in 1901

Item No	Name of the vessel	Tonnage (GT)	Power (HP)	Year of construction	cost price (mil. lei)
0	1	3	4	5	6
I Ships propelled, of which:					
Passenger, total:		1.464	3.380		2,197
1	Ștefan cel Mare	520	670	1870	0,350
2	Dorobanțul	18	30	1877	0,020
3	Călugărenni	20	40	1880	0,020
4	Independența	20	40	1894	0,020
5	Principele Carol	450	1.000	1895	0,724
6	Calafat	19	40	1898	0,029
7	Kilia	19	40	1898	0,025
8	Cerna-Vodă	32	190	1899	0,104
9	Turnu Măgurele	32	190	1899	0,104
10	Domnul Tudor	135	380	1900	0,267
11	Vasile Lupu	135	380	1900	0,267
12	Giurgiu	32	190	1901	0,139
13	Călărași	32	190	1901	0,128
Tugs, total:		1.911	5.266		2,068
1	Despina Doamna	260	600	1869	0,243
2	Miron Costin	200	356	1883	0,094
3	Petru Rareș	261	650	1891	0,260
4	Severin	261	650	1891	0,260
5	Brâncoveanu	148	400	1891	0,156
6	Dragoș	108	650	1892	0,125
7	Basarab	261	650	1893	0,265
8	Gherdap	145	250	1893	0,150
9	Radu Negru	83	300	1899	0,159
10	Alexandru cel	92	380	1900	0,178

Item No	Name of the vessel	Tonnage (GT)	Power (HP)	Year of construction	cost price (mil. lei)
0	1	3	4	5	6
	Bun				
11	Mihai Viteazul	92	380	1900	0,178
II. Ships not propelled, of which:					
1	57 barges with a total capacity of 35.534 tons				4,50
2	12 tanks - with a total capacity of 6.000 tons				
3	11 pontoons				
Total value					8,76

Source: Calculated by:

1. *Romanian Maritime Calendar* - 1910, p. 198
2. *Carmen Atanasiu, in Dobrogea - Historical landmarks, Europolis Publishing, Constanta, 2000, p. 50.*
3. *Central historical national archives, MLP Fund, File 19/1905.*

Therefore, we can conclude that from the setting up of the Romanian River Navigation Service, which established the organization of modern Romanian shipping, until the beginning of the 20th century, the investments made by the State to develop inland transport capacity resulted in the purchase of 104 transport units of which:

- 24 ships propelled with an installed capacity of 8,7 thousand HP and a tonnage of 3,375 GT;
- 80 unpropelled ships with a transport capacity of 41,53 thousand tons, whose value is of 8,76 million lei gold [6].

On 6 of the 13 passengers, the hull was built in Turnu Severin's shipyard, and were equipped with propulsion machinery purchased from the external market, and only 2 of the tugboats were built in the country, the other ships being built and armed at the shipyards in Lintz, Zurich, Budapest, etc [7].

In 1903, the state granted a credit of 700.000 lei to the Romanian navigation, out of budget surpluses for the fiscal year 1901/1902, to make the following investments: The purchase on the external market of 5 tanks, the construction of 3 barges of 650 tons capacity, the modernization of the "Prince Carol" and the "East" vessels.

In a report dated May 13, 1905, N.P. Stefanescu informed Anghel Saligny, who was appointed general manager of the hydraulic service in 1901, that at that time the Romanian River Navigation had the following fleet of ships:

- 12 passenger ships with a total power of 3.340 cp.
- 11 tugs with a total power of 5.346 C.P.
- 58 barges with a total capacity of 35.610 tons;
- 14 tanks with a total capacity of 6.640 tons,
- 11 pontoons,

the value of which according to the purchase prices was lei 8,345 million lei [8].

On May 31, 1905, the Senate voted the "Law on the creation of a special fund for ship insurance", meant to buy new ships or to conduct repairs to ships that would suffer damage exceeding 6.000 lei, the fund, which was to be made by the Ministry of public works paying 3% of the cost of the vessels for the service annually to the Fund for deposits and maintenance. In 1906, under this accumulation fund, Romanian River Navigation (NFR) receives the loan of 0,900 million lei for 12 surees, and in 1910 of the total surpluses of 3,00 million lei gold, NFR deposited in this fund the amount of lei 1,309 million, the remaining amount of 1,691 million lei being paid to the state as annual budget surpluses [9].

Between 1910 and 1913, eleven transport units entered the Romanian river navigation system, the NFR reaching 144 ships with a total capacity of 73,30 thousand tons and a power of 10,12 thousand HP, structured as follows [11]:

- 11 passenger ships with a total power of 3.200 HP.
- 12 tugs with a total power of 6.800 HP;
- a fuel tank with an installed capacity of HP;
- 107 barges with a total capacity of 67.600 tons;
- 120 tanks with a total capacity of 5,700 tons.

The value of the NFR for this date is estimated at 15 million gold lei [12].

In 1914, in the field of river transport, the private initiative started by setting up a private company, namely "Romanian Danube Company", created by the co-participation of a financial group made up of 8 banks that started with a capital of 15.000.000 lei gold, out of which about 7,200 million lei gold were invested for the acquisition of the following river transport means

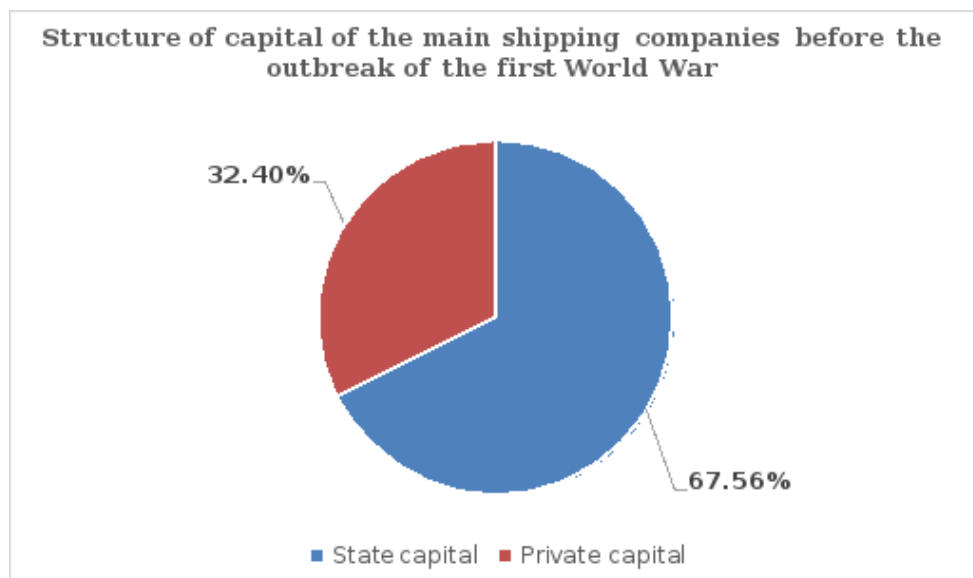
- 62 barges with a total capacity of 76.600 tons,
- a tug vessel with a power of 350 hp;
- 4 floating lifts with a total discharge capacity of approx. 440 tons/hour [13].

Due to the outbreak of the first World War, the company's activity was relatively low and, since 1916, suspended until its return to activity in 1919.

3. Conclusions

As shown by the previous exposure, the setting up of the first inland navigation companies in Romania was based on economic conditions. The investments made to develop the transport capacity of the Romanian river fleet, from the establishment of the NFR to the outbreak of the first World War, led in the period 1900-1914 to almost doubling the number of ships, increasing by 1,99 times and the triple number of transport capacity increasing by 3,6 times, propulsion power, however, remains low, increasing only 1,2 times.

The capital accumulation that occurred at this stage amounts to lei 22,20 million, out of which the state sector had a share of 67,56% and the private sector about 32,4 %.



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- [3] Ibid.
- [4] Sergiu Filipescu, in *Our Sea*, no. 7, Constanta, 2001, p. 31.
- [5] The Encyclopedia of Romania, p. 90.
- [6] Note: In some of the above sources, the value of the NFR vessel fleet is given in French francs, ca. 8,69 million francs, which convert into national currency at the rate at that date, of 100 French francs = 100,85 lei gives us the value of 8,76 million lei gold.
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