

ARTICLES

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POLISH CODE OF OBLIGATIONS OF 1933 FOR EUROPEAN HISTORY OF LAW

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Abstract: The article deals with the codification of the law of obligations after World War I. It presents the activity of the Polish Codification Commission, paying a special attention to the participation of its members in the drafting of the Polish Code of Obligations of 1933, and to the fact that its authors based their rules on legal decisions concerning the law of obligations in France, Austria and Germany. They also used the French-Italian draft of the law of obligations of 1927 and the Russian draft of 1913. The Code of Obligations of the time was an important development in European scholarship. It was therefore widely commented, especially in French scholarship. The legal solutions found in the code were a compromise between individualist and socialist concepts of the law of obligations. The code was divided into two parts: general and detailed. In addition, the following principles appeared in the code: legal correctness, good faith and good customs, the equitable interest of the employer, and the *rebus sic stantibus* clause. The Code of Obligations was in principle no longer in force with the entry into force of the Polish Civil Code of 1964. However, it should be emphasised that Book III of the Code was directly based on the legal constructions employed in the Code of Obligations.

Keywords: Polish Code of Obligations, 1933, Law of Obligations, codification of European law, European systems of obligation law.

1. Codification is based on a unified and consciously adopted program for action. It involves a creative and conceptual contribution to the creation of a new

legal regulation. In this respect, it is not only a collection and approximation of existing legislations. Codification systematises a given branch of law, or at least parts of the system it creates. In practice, codification means creation of a systematic single whole of legal provisions in a certain branch of law. A systematic single whole, which entails innovations, simplification, supplementation, and abolition of provisions in force earlier. Codification of law requires from its creators not only knowledge of the sources of local law, but also the actual needs of economic, political, social life, including comparative studies¹.

The Polish interwar state, which emerged after World War I, faced the serious problem of unifying the law that was in force on its territory. This concerned, in particular, civil law, which encompassed five systems of private law, which included the following systems:

- 1) Polish-French (central Poland);
- 2) Russian (lands in the eastern part of the country);
- 3) German (the western part of Poland);
- 4) Austrian (southern territories);
- 5) Hungarian (territory of Spisz and Orava)².

First of all, the essential factors in the codification of Polish law included the following reasons:

- 1) political, concerning the unity, independence and sovereignty of the Polish state;
- 2) economic, the purpose of which was the economic unification of the Polish lands;
- 3) sound policy and modern law-making, as far as the norms of the invader countries were based on different political and legal principles;
- 4) psychological, connected with the legal unity of the state territory³.

In this connection, the Polish state, according to Zbigniew Radwański, could potentially choose one of three ways:

- 1) to leave legal particularism and be content with unifying only a part of the system necessary for the functioning of the state;

¹ Jastrzębski R. Wpływ polskiej tradycji prawnej na kodyfikację prawa prywatnego (1918–1939), (w:) Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Prawo polskie w 100-lecie odzyskania niepodległości, red. naukowa Ł. Pisarczyk. Warszawa, 2019. P. 248–251.

² Kodeks Napoleona. Kodeks cywilny Królestwa Polskiego. Kodeks zobowiązań i inne przepisy obowiązujące w województwach centralnych, Warszawa 2008. P. 7–12; Radwański Z. Prawo cywilne i proces cywilny, (w:) Historia Państwa i Prawa Polski 1918–1939, część II, pod red. F. Ryszki, pod ogólną red. J. Bardacha, Warszawa 1968. p. 148; Bardah J., Lesnodorsky B., Pietrchak M. Istoria hosudarstva y prava Polshy [History of the State and Law of Poland]. Moscow, 1980. P. 489–490.

³ Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939. Wrocław, 2000. P. 70–71.

- 2) to unify the legal system by adopting the law of others;
- 3) to create original sets of legal norms, gradually replacing regional norms¹.

In the end, the latter concept won, due to which the Polish Codification Commission (Komisja Kodyfikacyjna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) was set up by Act of June 3, 1919 (*Dziennik Praw Państwa Polskiego* No. 44, item 315). It is worth noting that the codification was in practice almost exclusively concerned the law of commerce, in terms of the civil law field². The inauguration of the Codification Commission took place on November 10, 1919. It was created for an indefinite period, as a central state body. It was of an advisory nature and engaged in the preparation of opinions and proposals. The act of June 3, 1919 based the commission's activity on internal autonomy and its organization was specified in its rules of procedure, which had been published four times between 1919 and 1939. The aim of the organizational changes in the Commission was to simplify its structure and speed up the codification work³.

2. At first, it was assumed that the Civil Law Section and the Commercial Law Section of the Codification Commission would draft the law of obligations jointly. However, this idea was quickly abandoned. The Civil Law Section first commissioned Ernest Till to prepare an abstract entitled "On damages other than an existing binding relationship". The abstract had already been submitted to the Section in 1921 on "Reparation for Damages Caused by Unjust Acts". Ignacy Koschembahr-Łyskowski then presented his own draft of the law of obligations. E. Thiel, who circulated a handwritten draft entitled 'On Obligations' to members of the Section in March 1922, outdid him, however. Part one. General provisions. Then E. Till, in coopera-

¹ Radwański Z. Kształtowanie się polskiego systemu prawnego w pierwszych latach II Rzeczypospolitej, *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* 1969, t. XXI, z. 1; Górnicki L. Pogranicza systemów prawnych, w szczególności pozaborowych, w pracach nad kodyfikacjami prawa cywilnego i handlowego w II RP, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, No 3799, Prawo CCCXIV, Wrocław 2017.

² Grodziski S. Prace nad kodyfikacją i unifikacją polskiego prawa prywatnego (1919–1947), „Kwartalnik Prawa Prywatnego” 1992, z. 1–4; Jastrzębski R. The Impact of the Economic Legislation on the Restoration of the Polish State after the First World War, „Optimum. Economic Studies” nr 1 (91) 2018.

³ Górnicki L. Organizacyjne zagadnienia kodyfikacji prawa handlowego w Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej RP (1919–1939), (w:) *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, No 2501, Prawo CCLXXXV, Studia Historycznoprawne, tom dedykowany profesorowi doktorowi Kazimierzowi Orzechowskiemu, pod red. A. Koniecznego, Wrocław 2003; Górnicki L. Pogranicza systemów prawnych, w szczególności pozaborowych, w pracach nad kodyfikacjami prawa cywilnego i handlowego w II RP, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, No 3799, Prawo CCCXIV, Wrocław 2017; Górnicki L. Wpływ obcych ustawodawstw i doktryny prawa na polską kodyfikację prawa prywatnego w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, „Zeszyty Prawnicze Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Towarzystwo Biblioteki Słuchaczy Prawa” 2005, z. 13; Górnicki L. Zagadnienie systematyki kodyfikacji prawa cywilnego i handlowego w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej (1919–1939), „Kwartalnik Prawa Prywatnego” 2004, z. 3; Rodziski S. Komisja Kodyfikacyjna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, „Czasopismo Prawo-Historyczne” 1981, t. XXXIII, z. 1.

tion with Maurycy Allerhand, Aleksander Doliński, Romana Longchamps de Berier, and Kamil Stefka, drafted the general part and its justification. The Codification Commission published it in 1923. The Civil Law Section then decided to draw up a separate Code of Obligations, following the Swiss model. The assumption was that it could come into being earlier, before the work on the complete Civil Code was completed. This made the draft by E. Till the basis for work on the Polish Code of Obligations. In 1924 a Law of Obligations Subcommittee was set up within the Section. Since March 1927, the code had been discussed by the Sub-Section of the General Part of the Civil Code and Code of Obligations, and the Sub-Commission of the General Part of the Civil Code and the Code of Obligations. Work on the code also involved contacts with academics from abroad, for example France and Italy. These included the French-Italian draft of the Code of Obligations. The first reading of the draft was held from August 1929 until March 1931. The second reading took place in August-November 1931¹. During the readings, the Sub-Commission was chaired by Henryk Konic, with R. Longchamps de Berier as a referent, and Ludwik Domański as a co-referent, and I. Koschembahr-Łyskowski as a member. The draft of the law, passed in the second reading, was published and sent to courts, associations and legal institutions for their comments before July 1, 1932. The last reading in the Sub-Commission took place from November 1932 to April 1933. The draft was adopted by the Approval Board of the Codification Commission in June 1933². It is worth noting that the Sub-commission separately sat on a draft of provisions introducing the Code of Obligations, which was adopted by the Board in September 1933. Both drafts were submitted to the Minister of Justice and then some amends were made. They were finally adopted by the President of Poland on October 27, 1933, and became binding on July 1, 1934³.

¹ Projekt części szczególnej prawa o zobowiązaniach w opracowaniu referentów głównych projektu Ernesta Tilla i Romana Longchamps de Berier, Komisja Kodyfikacyjna, Podsekcja III Prawa cywilnego, Lwów 1928; Projekt Kodeksu Zobowiązań, Komisja Kodyfikacyjna, Podkomisja prawa o zobowiązaniach, zeszyt 1. Warszawa, 1933.

² Balken-Neuman J. Zobowiązania. Kodeks zobowiązań oraz 35 ustaw dodatkowych. Zarys systemu polskiego prawa obowiązkowego do nauki i praktyki, Lwów 1934. P. 17–23; Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939. Wrocław 2000. P. 397–404.

³ Balken-Neuman J. Zobowiązania. Kodeks zobowiązań oraz 35 ustaw dodatkowych. Zarys systemu polskiego prawa obowiązkowego do nauki i praktyki. Lwów, 1934; Domański L. Instytucje kodeksu zobowiązań. Komentarz teoretyczno-praktyczny. Część ogólna. Warszawa, 1936; Domański L. Instytucje kodeksu zobowiązań. Komentarz teoretyczno-praktyczny. Część szczególna. Warszawa, 1938; Korzonek I., Rosenblüth I. Kodeks zobowiązań. Komentarz, t. I. Kraków, 1936; Korzonek I. Rosenblüth I. Kodeks zobowiązań. Komentarz, t. II. Kraków, 1937; Longchamps de Berier R. Polskie prawo cywilne. Zobowiązania. Poznań, 1999; Longchamps de Berier R. Zobowiązania. Lwów, 1939; Namitkiewicz J. Kodeks zobowiązań. Komentarz dla praktyki, t. I. Część ogólna. Łódź, 1949; Namitkiewicz J. Kodeks zobowiązań. Komentarz dla praktyki, t. II. Część szczególna. Łódź, 1949;

The Codification Commission had been working on the Code of Obligations of 1933 (*Dziennik Ustaw [Legislative Gazette]* of Poland No. 82, item 598) for over 10 years. He worked with laws from other countries, especially the German Civil Code of 1896, the Austrian Civil Code of 1811, the Napoleonic Code of 1804, the Russian Code of 1832, the Swiss Law of Obligations of 1911; the French-Italian draft of 1927, and the Russian Civil Code of 1913¹.

The Codification Commission reflected the controversy concerning individualistic and public law of obligation. The former was represented by 19th century civil codifications, including the German Civil Code and the Swiss Law of Obligations as amended in 1911. In principle, the individualist theory assumed that the will of the parties was realized in the law of obligation. In this context, the right was what the parties had agreed to and this could not be in conflict with applicable law or rules of conduct. This meant that the will of the parties was limited by the law and the judicature.

Public law of obligation, as a trend that aimed to generalize civil law, emerged at the end of the 19th century. The main thrust was that the unanimous will of the parties was a fiction, as an economically weaker party had to go along with the offer of the economically stronger party. Therefore, limiting the will of the parties to legislation and good custom is not enough. In this regard, the law must essentially seek to implement justice, irrespective of the will of the parties. Jus is the law, not the will of the parties, it was to be decisive in concluding a contract. Thus the state had to equalise the position of the economically weaker party by means of appropriate legislation².

Another important issue was the domestic system of draft of law of obligation. Three systems were competing with each other at that time:

- 1) personal (Roman) applied in the Napoleonic Code, based on the autonomy of will of the parties to civil legal relations;
- 2) subject-matter (Germanic) applied in the German Civil Code, where the only source of law was the will of the legislator, the State, which gave effect to the agreements of the parties;
- 3) bi-juridical applied in the Swiss law, combining mainly Romanic and Germanic elements, i.e. in principle of the first two systems³.

Peiper L. Kodeks zobowiązań. Kraków, 1934; Rymowicz Z., Święcicki W. Suplement do prawa cywilnego Ziemi Wschodnich (t. X cz. I Zwodu Praw). Warszawa, 1934.

¹ Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939. Wrocław, 2000. P. 404–437.

² Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939. Wrocław, 2000. P. 410–412.

³ Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939. Wrocław, 2000. P. 412–415.

The Polish Code of Obligations of 1933 was based on the subject-matter system, with certain concessions in favour of the personal system. The influence of the French-Italian draft of the Law of Obligations of 1927 and the Russian draft, submitted to the State Duma in 1913, was also noticeable. This implied that the Polish Law of Obligations would be a compromise between the Germanic and Romanic world views. In practice, however, the subject-matter system prevailed.

Characteristic features of the Code of Obligations were, among others:

1) the generalization of the law of obligations, especially in connection with the employment contract, and the introduction of the collective labour contract as a source of law, which was associated with the opposition to the use of economic overweening or exploitation by one of the contracting parties;

2) the introduction of the principles of lawfulness, good faith and good custom, and the equitable interest of the employer into the code;

3) introduction of the clause *rebus sic stantibus*, which indicated a departure from the dominant principle of *pacta sunt servanda*¹;

4) the code was divided into a general part which contained, *inter alia*, sources, essence and types of obligations, creation of obligations, transfer of rights and duties ensuing from obligations, expiry of obligations and a detailed part concerning individual contracts, such as sale, replacement, donation, hiring, lease, loan, labour contract, contract of work, trust, rent, life maintenance, gaming and betting, transfer of agreement and surety;

5) the rules relating to contractual relations in the Code of Obligations were based on Swiss bond law as revised in 1911 and adapted to commercial relations;

6) all contracts, apart from the custody agreement, had the character of consensual contracts in the Code².

3. The opinions on the Code of Obligations were predominantly positive, especially the French scholar Henri Capitant, who stressed the good technique and the solid system, especially in comparison to the German Civil Code. The most serious criticism was directed first at the *rebus sic stantibus* clause and the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* associated with it³. Another French jurist, Henri Mazeaud, called the code “a serious development in the world of jurisprudence” and also

¹ Jastrzębski R. Wpływ siły nabywczej pieniądza na wykonanie zobowiązań prywatno prawnych w II Rzeczypospolitej. Warszawa, 2009. P. 394–421.

² Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939. Wrocław, 2000. P. 438–453; Sójka-Zielńska K. Historia prawa. Warszawa, 1997. P. 253–254; Bardah J., Lesnodorsky B., Pietrucha M. Istoria hospodarstwa y prava Polshy [History of the State and Law of Poland]. Moscow, 1980. P. 494–495; Waśkowski E. Nowe idee w kodeksie zobowiązań. Lwów, 1934.

³ Capitant H. Préface (w:) Code des obligations de la République de Pologne. Traduit par Stefan Sieczkowski et Jan Wasilkowski, avec la collaboration de Henri Mazeaud. Paris, 1935. P. V–XX.

“a modern and scholarly code”. Its founders, he argued, were guided by a “spirit of moderation” and a “spirit of justice”. Edward Swoboda, a professor at the German University in Prague, pointed out that the Polish law of obligations was influenced especially by three systems: the French, German and Austrian systems¹.

The Code of Obligations was an important law-making achievement of the Polish state. It is also worth noting that other sections of civil law, i.e. the general part, property law, family and guardianship law, as well as inheritance law, were not codified during the interwar Poland. The consequence of this was that foreign regulations introduced during the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth continued to apply. Importantly, the codification of the Polish Law of Obligations was connected with the codification of commercial law, which followed from the Polish legislator’s conception of the economic unification of Polish lands from a legal perspective. Therefore, almost simultaneously with the Code of Obligations, the Commercial Code, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Act, and contract law were enacted. The point is that the new system of commercial law was to be an introduction to political unification, and the Code of Obligations was to be one of its elements. It should be noted that it was an original regulation, based on the existing legal order and new trends in jurisprudence. The code was, among other things, a kind of synthesis of the systems of mandatory law of the time. It was modern thanks to the use of legal techniques and it contained up-to-date legal constructions, as expressed by the clause *rebus sic stantibus*. It has been translated into foreign languages, including French and German².

After the World War II, the Code of Obligations was modified a great deal owing to the unification of civil law in 1945–1946, as well as political and social changes in Poland³ [30, 33]. The Code of Obligations was abolished by the Regulations Introducing the Civil Code Act of April 23, 1964 (Dziennik Statute of the Republic of Poland No. 16, item 94), i.e. the entry into force of the Civil Code Act of April 23, 1964. (Dziennik Statute of the Republic of Poland No. 16, item 93). It is worth noting, however, that the current Civil Code of 1964 retained many legal solutions from the Code of Obligations of 1933, which made it an important law-making achievement of the reborn Polish state.

¹ Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939. Wrocław, 2000. P. 457–462.

² Code des obligations de la République de Pologne. Traduit par Stefan Sieczkowski et Jan Wasilkowski, avec la collaboration de Henri Mazeaud. Paris, 1935; Górnicki L. Prawo cywilne w pracach Komisji Kodyfikacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1919–1939, Wrocław, 2000. P. 403–404.

³ Stawarska-Rippel A. Kodeks zobowiązań w pierwszych latach Polski Ludowej, „Kwartalnik Prawa Prywatnego” 2004, z. 3; Zoll F. Zobowiązania w zarysie według polskiego kodeksu zobowiązań. Warszawa, 1948.

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