

## ADELAIDE FRIGATES – DISAGREEMENT AT THE POLISH GOVERNMENT

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**Procurement plan pertaining to the Australian Adelaide-class frigates that are more than 25 years old created a disagreement at the Polish government. Polish Ministry of Marine Economy and Inland Navigation is an opponent of this intention. The said department of the Polish government is taking over the tasks related to restructuring of the shipbuilding industry that had been previously handled by the MoD. *We do not accept the course of action taken, to acquire the old Australian vessels and thus hamper the process of building, at the Polish shipbuilding facilities, of new defensive warships such as corvettes, within the framework of “Czapla” and “Miecznik” programmes* - stated the head of the Ministry, Marek Gróbarczyk. Head of the Polish Ministry of Defence, Mariusz Błaszczak, stated that Minister Gróbarczyk *“assumes a different point of view”*. The experts suggest that, without rapid initiation of major projects, no chance would exist to restore the potential of the shipyards.**

The emotions around the acquisition plan, concerning the Australian Adelaide frigates, are still alive. Concept of procuring these 25-years old vessels is supported by the Presidential National Security Bureau. Polish Ministry of Defence is scrutinizing the idea very seriously. Soon, President Andrzej Duda is going to make a trip to Australia, with an objective, among other goals, to sign a letter of intent concerning the purchase of those frigates.

However, the government is not unanimous when it comes to procurement of the frigates. During an interview for the “Portal Stoczniowy” outlet, head of the Ministry of Marine Economy and Inland Navigation, Marek Gróbarczyk, directly stated: *We do not accept the course of action taken, to acquire the old Australian vessels and thus hamper the process of building, at the Polish shipbuilding facilities, of new defensive warships such as corvettes, within the framework of “Czapla” and “Miecznik” programmes (...)* *We are taking an unchanged and unequivocal stance: warships shall be built in Poland. Nothing stands in the way for the Polish shipyards to build warships for the Polish Navy.*

Gróbarczyk added that in particular “Miecznik” and “Czapla” programmes will be blocked. He noted that building warships for the Polish fleet at the national shipyards is to be, according to the programme adopted, an element of restoring the shipyard industry.

Responding to the above, head of the MoD, Mariusz Błaszczak, stated during a TV Trwam programme that Gróbarczyk *“assumes a different point of view”* being focused on manufacturing the warships at the Polish shipyards. These shipyards however, as the head of the MoD claimed, need time, as production of a warship takes years to complete. Błaszczak also added the following: *When it comes to the frigates, the Polish Navy must be in possession of warships that can remain at its disposal now and here, and this is troublesome, as two years ago negligence took place and no orders were placed with regards to those warships.*

Even though the MoD assures that new warship programmes would be continued, spending at least PLN 2 billion on the Australian frigates, mentioned by the Vice-Head of the National Security Bureau Dariusz Gwizdała, would undoubtedly hamper the new warship programmes expected to be carried out by the Polish shipyards. At the same time, the experts suggest that the Polish facilities need orders now. This would help them to rebuild their potential and acquire the ability to compete, also on the civil market.

The original claims referred to a pricetag associated with acquisition of the Australian frigates that was much lower. So, is the reaction we have witnessed in case of Minister Gróbarczyk an effect of information pertaining to the probable contract value? It shall be remembered that the Ministry headed by Gróbarczyk is gradually taking over supervision over the PGZ's shipyards that were to be responsible for building new ships.

Polish Ministry of Defence has spent at least PLN 274 million on investment in the PGZ Stocznia Wojenna [PGZ War Shipyard] company. This is a manufacturing shipbuilding facility that is to deal with building new warships. Acquisition of Adelaide-class frigates would however delay the process of building the new "Miecznik" and "Czapla" class vessels at the Polish shipyards. These warships were to replace the Polish OHP Class units. These projects, implemented in collaboration with the foreign partners, were to provide an opportunity to make a qualitative leap and begin restoration of the shipyards' potential.

Maciej Styczyński, Director of the Ship Industry Division, at the Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation, recently stated the following: *"Good shape in which the Polish shipyards would be is not dependent solely on better performance of our economy, it is also an issue of strategic importance. We must be aware that here we are also dealing with our presence on the Baltic Sea, competition with states stealing production from us. Willingly or not, we must stick with implementation of contracts concerning building warships in partnership with the leading foreign partners, shipbuilding groups that are able to provide a transfer of technology and wide industrial cooperation with the Polish shipyards. This should make it possible to restore the manufacturing potential, and also to obtain key competencies in the domain of convoluted project management."*

The need to place actual orders at the shipyards, when they are consolidated, has also been brought up by the experts. *The Polish shipyards are too scattered and too small to act as the general contractor when it comes to large, modern vessels. They require consolidation, and this project is to undergo implementation. Not only do programmes and concepts count, as we should be looking forward to actual orders. They are needed now.* - Piotr Słupski, Manager and Expert working in the shipbuilding industry, stated in his interview for the Newseria Biznes agency.

We also know that being taken over by the Ministry of Marine Economy and Inland Navigation constitutes a chance to consolidate state shipyards. Restoration of the sector is one of the priorities of the Plan for Responsible Development. Gróbarczyk himself also stated that this strategy shall encompass building warships for the Polish Navy. Meanwhile, Director Styczyński was speaking about shipbuilding industry support programmes, during a debate organized by Defence24.pl, as a part of the Balt Military Expo. The support measures include shipbuilding act which is already in force, along with the Marine Development Fund that is being prepared. To make it possible to put this process into motion, orders are needed.

*The shape in which the Polish shipyards found themselves is not the best. They somewhat missed the boom that is being experienced by their European counterparts. Each of the long-term solutions requires a specific timeline, while the Polish shipyards need the contracts today* - Słupski assessed. He added that implementation of warship projects pursued by the Navy creates an opportunity to acquire technologies, know-how and management solutions.