

2 June 2013

Secured Wreck of Belgian Congo
Liner Charlesville Heads for New
World Wreck Museum in Antwerp

Flanders Water Heritage Cooperates With Polish Government

Following the sinking of the last Belgian Congo Liner Charlesville (currently Georg Büchner) on Thursday evening, 30 May, Flanders Water Heritage ('Watererfgoed Vlaanderen') immediately activated its wide international maritime network. We talked personally to the Polish Vice Minister of Transport, the Director of the Polish Maritime Administration, Managers of the Port Authority of Gdansk and a major private port operator and the Belgian Honorary Consul in Gdynia.

We offered our **full cooperation to investigate the causes of the foundering of this iconic ship**. As a matter of fact, we possess important information on the preparation of the departure from Rostock, which suggests that the vessel – which was still a listed monument under German law – left port in a **completely unseaworthy state**. The Polish authorities accepted our offer with thanks.

We also made a request to take all **appropriate measures to prevent further damage and the looting of the wreck** pending an investigation into the feasibility of salvaging the ship or components thereof. The Polish authorities promised to enact a prohibition to dive and to study a salvage project in cooperation with us.

Heritage Values Must Be Preserved Upon Removal Of Wreck

Meanwhile we also investigated the maritime law of Poland. In principle, the owner is obliged to remove the wreck himself. As the wreck constitutes an obstacle to navigation and hinders coastal traffic, **the Maritime Office of Poland may undertake its recovery**, notifying the rightful owner about the time of the delivery, provided that the latter shall refund the costs of the works. If the owner fails to collect the recovered property, or does not pay the costs of the works, the Maritime Office may decide to sell the property. The **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea** obliges all States to protect objects of an historical nature found at sea and to cooperate for this purpose (Art. 303). We informed the Polish Authorities that, upon departure, the ship was still a listed monument under German Heritage Laws and that Flemish Minister Bourgeois announced that, upon its repatriation, the ship will be protected under Flemish Heritage Law. As Belgium and Poland are States Parties to the UN Law of the Sea Convention, **the competent Governments are under a duty to cooperate in order to ensure the conservation of the wreck**.

Talks With International Salvage Companies

Flanders Water Heritage has entered into negotiations with the **most reputed salvage companies**. We submitted technical data in order to obtain a price

quotation. Experts confirmed that it should be possible to raise the wreck in its entirety. It goes without saying that such a project would require substantial financial means. The possibility to salvage parts or components will be investigated as well.

New World Wreck Museum Set To Become An International Hit

Never waste a good crisis ! Following the sinking of the Charlesville the ship is no more under the control of the untrustworthy German authorities and her story has become even more intriguing. We propose to integrate the ship or at least components into a **brand new World Wreck Museum** in Antwerp, together with the wrecks of the the Cog of Doel and the Belgica.

The Cog of Doel, built in 1325, is the most important wreck of a medieval European cargo ship. It is currently the subject of a scientific project financed by the Government of the Region of Flanders in Belgium.

The Belgica, built in 1884, is the wreck of the ship that made the first scientific expedition to the Antarctic and which became the first ship to winter there. The wreck lies in a Norwegian fjord and a salvage project is ready to be implemented.

The Charlesville, built in 1950, is the only wreck of a cargo and passenger ship which connected Europe and an African colony.

Antwerp has the largest sea port area on the planet and has a centuries-old tradition as a port city.

The World Wreck Museum would give Belgium a **world-class maritime attraction**, similar to the Vasa Museum in Stockholm and Titanic Belfast which opened in 2012. The Vasa Museum attracts 1.2 million visitors per year, makes a substantial profit and in addition generates 200 million EUR per year for the local economy of Stockholm. You can read the case for the World Wreck Museum on http://www.watererfgoed.be/wwm_Wereldwrakkenmuseum.aspx. We are currently preparing English, German and French versions of this web page.

We have informed all Polish, Belgian, Flemish and Antwerp authorities of the above and have requested a technical meeting before positions are made public.

We also invited the Underwater Archeology Department of the excellent Maritime Museum in Gdansk to assist us.

See also our press release of last Friday on <http://www.watererfgoed.be/Docs/Watererfgoed%20Charlesville%20perstekst%2031%205%2013.pdf> (in Dutch).

Watererfgoed Vlaanderen / Flanders Water Heritage unites and defends all the dry and wet water heritage of the Region of Flanders in Belgium (over 100 organisations active in the field of historic ships, shipping and harbour museums, water monuments, traditions, arts and culture, tourist and commercial service providers, experts, researchers and lovers of water heritage in all its forms). Our umbrella organisation promotes the conservation and valorization of all Flemish water heritage, the water-mindedness of the Flemings and the international appeal of Flanders as a beacon of shipping and port culture.

vzw Watererfgoed Vlaanderen, Emiel Banningstraat 25, 2000 Antwerp, www.watererfgoed.be, secr@watererfgoed.be, +32 3 216 92 26 – Chairman Eric Van Hooydonk: +32 475 870 780