

Wspólnota Interesów Górniczo-Hutniczych S.A. [Mining and Metallurgy Community of Interests Joint Stock Company] in the years 1934-1939

The objective of the work is to present the activities of the company Wspólnota Interesów Górniczo-Hutniczych S.A. [Mining and Metallurgy Community of Interests Joint Stock Company] in Katowice in the period from 1934 to 1939. In the historiography of Upper Silesia to date, issues relating to the functioning of concerns have been described briefly, focusing mainly on the history of individual enterprises. As a result, knowledge of the existence of many business entities in Upper Silesia is being forgotten. Meanwhile, the activities of larger ownership structures in the region have translated into the development of production potential, created a network of mutual cooperation and dependence between various facilities, and influenced the standard of living of local communities along with the development of individual towns. The Community of Interest [Wspólnowa Interesów] concern described in this work is an example of this. Despite the fact that it was one of the largest enterprises in interwar Poland, it is almost unknown in the cultural awareness and historical knowledge of most inhabitants of Upper Silesia and Poland.

The origins of the Community of Interest date back to 1929, when, on the initiative of Friedrich Flick and William Averell Harriman, majority shareholders of Górnośląskie Zjednoczone Huty Królewska i Laura [Upper Silesian United Royal and Laura Steelworks] and Katowicka Spółka Akcyjna dla Górnictwa i Hutnictwa [Katowice Joint Stock Company for Mining and Metallurgy], a so-called Community of Interest Agreement was concluded between the aforementioned companies. Since then, the two companies remained separate legal entities, combining their industrial and commercial activities. This merger coincided with a deteriorating global economic situation as a result of the economic crisis. The condition of the Upper Silesian companies was additionally worsened by the decisions of their main shareholders, who used them most often as collateral to take out speculative loans. In March 1934, when both companies were unable to cover their current liabilities, which put them in danger of bankruptcy, they were placed under court supervision. During the efforts undertaken until 1937, the profitability of production was achieved, some liabilities were paid and settlements were reached with foreign shareholders. Then, on 16 April 1937, a new concern was established in which the Treasury, the Silesian Voivodeship and the Bank

of National Economy [Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego] held the majority of shares. In subsequent years, the company carried out a number of investment activities aimed at expanding its production profile and modernising its facilities.

The main objective of the study was to present the company's activities from the perspective of a wide range of problems: production-related, organisational, political as well as initiatives addressed to employees. The chronological framework adopted in the text covers the period related to the time of operation of the Polish authorities heading the concern in the years 1934–1939. It was possible to write this work thanks to a rich source base comprising numerous archival resources related to the activities of the company and its affiliated entities, as well as state and voivodeship institutions involved, *inter alia*, in the process of restructuring the companies comprising the enterprise. An extensive search of local and trade journals also provided important supplements, including a lot of information about public opinion on the events described.

The work consists of four chapters. Chapter one presents Friedrich Flick's business activities in Upper Silesia in the years 1920–1928, which were the genesis of the concern described. Chapter two takes a closer look at the circumstances of the conclusion of the so-called community of interest, the functioning of judicial supervision and the course of negotiations between Poland and the existing shareholders. The circumstances of operation of the Community of Interest between 1937 and 1939 are described in chapter three. The last chapter deals with the development of the concern and the measures taken to improve its profitability and extend its product range.