THE LITTLE BELT BRIDGE AND
INTERNATIONAL LAW

By

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I.

1. Topography of the Belt. — The Little Belt — the most westerly of the three natural passages which connect the Baltic with the adjacent sea — is the channel between Jutland — Als on the one side and Funen — Ærø on the other, delimited from the Categat by a line Æbelø—Bjørnsknude and from the Baltic by a line Pøls—Huk in Als to Vejsnæs Nakke in Ærø').

The width of the Belt varies from about 700 m at its narrowest point to about 30 km at the southern outfall. The width of the approaches is, however, in certain places — thus especially in the passage between Aarø and the coast of Jutland (Aarøsund) — as little as 300 m. To the difficulties which the narrow width of the approaches in connection with the highly winding riverlike course of the Belt creates for larger ships must be added, in the case of smaller craft, the strong and erratic current, just as the conditions of the wind inter alia on account of the coasts being covered with wood, are often capricious. As to the depth, this varies from 16 m to considerably greater depths. Thus as far as the depth is concerned, even the largest ships can pass the Belt, but at the same time the comparatively great depth renders it difficult for smaller ships to anchor in it.

2. The importance of the Belt in respect of traffic. — On account of its narrow width the Belt has from ancient times been considered far more as connecting Jutland and Funen than as separating them. Even nowadays its importance to the traffic between the two territories it separates — "the thwartwise traffic" — is far greater than its importance to the traffic between the seas it connects — "the lengthwise traffic". Thus calculations made

1) "Den danske Lods" 1925 with supplements.
prior to the building of the Little Belt Bridge showed for example that during the financial year 1921—22 about 750,000 passengers and about 700,000 tons of goods were transported across the Belt — figures which presumably now are considerably higher. The exceedingly great importance of the Belt to this thwartwise traffic is inter alia due to the fact that it is a link in the principal means of communication by land between Jutland — the most important province as regards extent and population — and the capital, a connection which in all circumstances is by far the most important of all the communications of the country, and which in time of war, if e. g. communication by sea is cut off, would be the only one between Jutland and the islands apart from that by air which as yet is of no practical importance as regards e. g. conveyance of troops or supplies of food.

While Denmark thus takes a great interest in the thwartswise traffic which fully justifies her in trying to develop it in the best possible way technically — since 1883 the question of building a bridge across the Little Belt has been under consideration — the interest attached to the lengthwise traffic of the Belt is comparatively small. This is due less to the above-mentioned difficulties of navigation than to the out-of-way situation of the Belt in relation to the eastern part of the Baltic which is of most importance to shipping. The natural route to the big ports here — Stockholm, Helsingfors, Leningrad, Reval, Riga, Libau, Memel, Dantzig, Gdynia, Stettin (beside the many Swedish and Finnish timber ports) — through which exports and imports in the Baltic are mainly carried, is the Sound or the Great Belt. Among the ports in the western part of the Baltic Kiel is of no great importance as a trading port, and both Kiel and Lubeck are reached far more easily through the Kiel Canal than through the Belt, and this to a certain degree also holds good of Flensburg. The shipping of the Baltic which uses the Little Belt to pass through is therefore — especially since Sønderborg, Haderslev and Aabenraa in Nothern Sleswick have again become Danish — in all essentials of a local or at any rate national character. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that the Belt under certain conditions as e. g. in a war, may be of considerable political interest.

3. The political importance of the Belt. — The reason for the somewhat great interest which from the point of view of foreign

1) “Rigsdagssidende” 1923—24, Folketingets Forhandlinger col. 2402.