

## **CORRIDORS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND THE HUNGARIAN EXIT TO THE SEA**

**Norbert PAP**

University of Pecs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Regional Development and Political Geography,  
6 Ifjúság, H 7635 Pécs, Hungary, e-mail: [pnorbert@gamma.ttk.pte.hu](mailto:pnorbert@gamma.ttk.pte.hu)

**Péter REMÉNYI**

University of Pecs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Regional Development and Political Geography,  
6 Ifjúság, H 7635 Pécs, Hungary, e-mail: [remko@gamma.ttk.pte.hu](mailto:remko@gamma.ttk.pte.hu)

**Andor VÉGH**

University of Pecs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Regional Development and Political Geography,  
6 Ifjúság, H 7635 Pécs, Hungary, e-mail: [veghandor@freemail.hu](mailto:veghandor@freemail.hu)

**Abstract:** The study considers the question of sea outlets from a continental, Central European (Hungarian) point of view. It gives a historical overview about the position and politics of the states in the area which are either land-locked or have limited outlets. The paper takes the corridors into account relying upon these findings. The study discusses the Hungarian geographical and political situation in details. Since the nearest sea is the Adriatic, the issues of the Western Balkan corridor will be discussed in more detail. Today the question of marine transport in Europe affects primarily the connection with Far-Eastern/Chinese areas; therefore, we interpreted the possibility of a partly unnecessary sea-lane induced by the Eurasian railway transportation.

**Key words:** corridor, Hungary, Adriatic, geopolitics, international relations, transport, Western Balkans

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After the collapse of the Soviet Empire the number of landlocked states increased. In the Eighties just Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary were without sea exit in the region. In the Nineties Slovakia separated from the Czech Republic, FYROM Macedonia seceded from Yugoslavia and former soviet republics of Belarus and Moldova also joined this group. Serbia in 2006, after the independence referendum of Montenegro, and Kosovo in 2008, as a landlocked country, became an independent state. Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Slovenia gained their independence only with a narrow coastline.

According to today's professional opinion private seaside and the lack of territorial ports do not represent special political disadvantage. Owing to the

flexibility of traffic systems and logistics “national” ports do not represent real benefits in transport competition. The European Union can assure free sea-lane access to anyone by means of the four “freedoms”. If this would be the case then writing this study would be unneeded.

However, the actual worldwide recession inclines us to re-think the situation from many aspects. The future of the European Union and mainly the impact of sovereignty debates have become questionable. The first gaps have exactly appeared in the Balkan area and in its proximity. Greece has sunk into economic and political crisis while the economic problems of Italy impend over the entire Union. Turkey has made an alteration in its foreign policy. It is dominantly Hungary that receives uncountable judgments on its economic and political issues, but Bulgaria and Romania also share this status. The Kosovo conflict has not been solved and Bosnia-Herzegovina has not become more stable. The European perspective of the Western Balkan states has become questionable. We may reckon upon that national view points, the question of sovereignty and territorial debates within that will become lively in that area. Global economic rearrangement will also have significant impact on transportation, although it is not clear what kind of effect it will be, at least for the time being. States are trying to get benefits by competing with each other for creating relations with those ambitious BRIC countries that have been not or merely affected by the recession. Territorial advantages are marked up, historical reflexes become critical and this is the reason why we regard considering the pre-integration corridor-issue reasonable.

Some of the new countries of Central Europe and the Western Balkans have smaller or bigger problems with their shape or territorial extension regarding the sea exit. Not a precise term, but the journalistic “corridor” indicates these land bridges, which are in the focus of our study.

### **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW ABOUT THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS OF THE DISTANCE FROM THE SEA SHORES**

One of the major factors of classical geopolitics is the evaluation of marine or inland nature of the regions. It is a particularly sensitive issue from a Hungarian or Central European point of view, which we also need to focus on in our study.

The fact that Southern Europe is strongly determined by the sea is immediately conspicuous for a superficial bystander. It does not require a detailed proof. However, the question arises: what role does the sea or the access to the sea play in the In-between European region including Hungary? Traditionally the most prominent of the geographical factors is when we would like to evaluate the kind of the area. The closest coast to “landlocked” Hungary is lying in the direction of the Southern European region along one of the marginal seas of the Mediterranean Sea. The following analysis studies whether the accessibility to the seas have appeared/appears as an aspect in the foreign political efforts of the South-Central European states involving Hungary.

Owing to Europe’s peninsular nature, the distance of Eurasia’s inland territories from the seas, especially from the so-called warm seas, grows from the west towards the east. Accordingly, a “maritime” and a “continental” Europe may be differentiated. Moreover, certain thinkers claiming that Europe is primarily maritime, draw its border along the line connecting the Finnish Gulf and the Azov Sea.

Several facts convincingly prove the maritime determination of Europe's major part, if not all of it. Such are special climatic features in the formation of which the ocean, the seas play a fundamental role, or the high value of coast length per 1000 km<sup>2</sup> (*4 km/1000 km<sup>2</sup>, as opposed to the Asian value of 1.7 km/1000 km<sup>2</sup>*), or the fact that the world was "discovered" and colonised by European seafaring nations.

However, 45 states in the world or 15 in Europe do not have coasts, for them, reaching the open sea is only possible through the territory of another state (or other states).

**Table 1.** Some basic data of the European landlocked states 2009  
(Ed.: Pap, N. Source: CIA World Factbook)

Country	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population (thousand persons)	GDP per capita (USD)
Andorra	468	84.825	46,700
Austria	83,870	8,217	40,400
Belarus	207,600	9,577	13,600
Czech Republic	78,866	10,190	25,600
FYROM Macedonia	25,333	2,077	9,700
Hungary	93,030	9,976	18,800
Liechtenstein	160	35.236	141,100
Luxembourg	2,586	503	82,600
1244-Kosovo	10,887	1,825	6,600
Moldova	33,843	4,314	2,500
San Marino	61	31.817	36,200
Serbia	77,747	7,310	10,900
Slovakia	48,845	5,477	22,000
Switzerland	41,290	7,639	42,600
Holy See (Vatican City)	0.4	0.832	no data

The distribution of states isolated from the sea, the so-called landlocked states follows a growing tendency from the west towards the east in Europe. Their territorial distribution regarding their distances from various seas reflects a characteristic picture. Out of the 15 states 12 (Andorra, San Marino, the Vatican, Switzerland, Austria, Liechtenstein, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo) are situated closest to the Mediterranean region, 1 (Luxembourg) to the Atlantic Ocean, while 2 (Belarus and the Czech Republic) to the Baltic Sea, Moldova to the Black Sea. The previously mentioned group of states without coasts share very few common features. It must be noted, however, that these states are relatively small ones with small population size. Even together they constitute a minute proportion of Europe. Their overall population is 9 % of Europe's, while their total territory is 6 %. They include extremely wealthy (Switzerland) as well as very poor (Kosovo) countries.

During the course of history, various ways of reaching the sea have evolved. In the Middle Ages the use of sailable rivers leading to the sea was regarded as something secured by a natural right. (*Duties and taxes were collected there, thus the maintenance of waterways was also considered as a responsibility of the state.*) In actual fact this possibility was very limited. In the Modern Ages the accessibility of sea for different states was regulated by contracts.

Europe's inland waterway system is primarily determined by two rivers: the Rhine and the Danube. The Rhine Navigation Central Committee, one of the oldest European multilateral organisations, was founded in the closing

agreement of the 1815 Vienna Congress. Its duty was to solve problems related with securing free shipping. Originally its members were certain coastal states, with Belgium and the United Kingdom joining in (as winners) after the World War I. Initially, shipping was not free at all, and it could only be secured through multiple stages, by various contracts. Such were, for example, the Mainz Act of 1831 which ensured free shipping for states along the river, or the Mannheim Convention of 1868 declaring that ships of states both along and away from the river Rhine could freely use it. Certain privileges, however, have not been made general ever since then (e.g. cabotage).

The case with free shipping on the Danube was similar. Austria and Russia made an agreement about the freedom of shipping in 1840, in the Danube Shipping Agreement. The same were the contents of the British-French and the Austrian-Turkish contracts in 1854. Then in 1856 the great powers negotiating in Paris declared the Danube as an international river. A variety of organisations were established. Transportation on the Danube, irrespective of the principles of free shipping, always proceeded depending on the power relations of the great powers. Losers of the wars were normally excluded from committees dealing with the river, or directions were made on their expenses.

States for which sea transportation occurred as a problem thought that the best solution was to occupy coastal territories together with opening a corridor (inland exit route). The greatest of such attempts in history was that of the Russians who aimed at providing themselves with a free exit to a warm sea. The Russian state used to be functionally *landlocked* until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was Peter the Great with whom the attempt to establish Russian ports on the coasts of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea started, but for them the result seemed not entirely satisfactory.

States other than Russia are also found in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, the sea exits of which open on a closed, controllable and controlled sea. In view of historic experiences, their possibilities to access the World Ocean must be considered limited. These states include for example Bulgaria and Finland too, the efforts of which to improve their situation can be best seen if their histories are analysed.

Debates and aspirations regarding corridors were most abundant in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, states of Europe which was, from many aspects, totally disintegrated, were characterised with hardly penetrable borders, high customs barriers, and aspirations for autarchy. Nations regarded each other suspiciously. Resentments from the recent past (wars) were still too lively.

The first wars of the new century in Europe were fought in the Balkans. During these wars, Bulgaria opened up an exit to the Aegean Sea (1913), but was able to possess it only until 1919 when it went to Greece. This area, namely Western Thrace, which had only a small number of Bulgarian inhabitants, was populated almost entirely by Turks, Pomaks and Greeks. It was chiefly motivated by opening an exit to the Aegean Sea and not by the ethnic issue. Typically of Bulgaria, during the World War II, in 1940 it conquered the territory again and kept it until the end of the war (Pándi, 1997).

The situation with the Finnish state was similar to the Bulgarian. When the independent Finnish state was established, it possessed a long Baltic coast and a very narrow exit (corridor) leading to the Barents Sea. The latter was the surroundings of the port city Petsamo (today: Pechenga), the so-called Petsamo-territory. It was not some sort of ethnic feature that secured its importance in

the sparsely populated north, but the fact that it faced a sea that was navigable throughout the year. As it can be observed even today, the North Atlantic stream keeps this coast segment ice-free all year round, as opposed to most Finnish coasts in the Baltic. The possession of such an “open-sea” port was favourable from the point of view of security politics too, since the Baltic Sea is “hermetically” sealable. Its practical significance was probably quite low, it wasn’t very economically important for its background area. It rather had a potential for significance. The territory securing the exit was kept even during the Finnish-Russian “winter war”, and it was only in the 1947 Paris Treaty marking the end of the World War II that Finland had to give it up for the benefit of Soviet Union (Páandi, 1997).

The World War I, the first great “resource (?) war” in history was lost by the central powers locked away from seas, and through that, from supplies. The determining role of the United States in winning the war was unquestionable. The victorious Americans pronounced their concepts about how to close down the war and set the situation straight. These ideas were reflected in President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points. Out of these points the 13<sup>th</sup> dealt with the issue of establishing a new Polish state. In order to ensure the viability of the new state, he proposed the creation of a corridor which was the so-called “Danzig corridor”. According to the words of French marshal Ferdinand Foch, the commander-in-chief of the winning Entente military forces, the seeds of a next war had been sown by the establishment of the corridor, and indeed, this was the point where the World War II started.

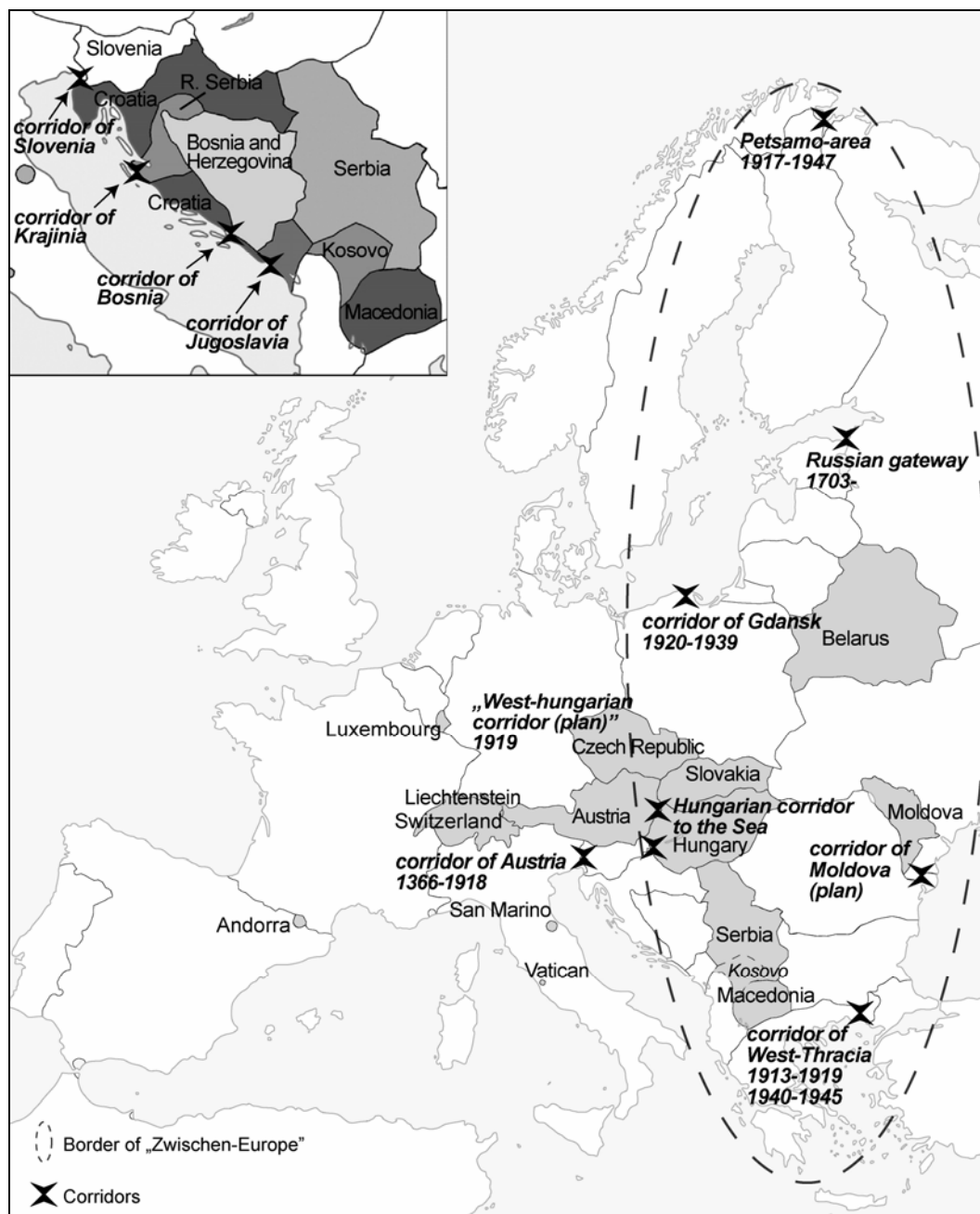
Czechoslovakia, another country that was created by the peace treaty, also pronounced its claim for sea exit (Gulyás, 2008). The route would have followed a course towards the south-west, through the western areas of what are today Hungary and Burgenland (Eastern-Austria), way down to the SCS Kingdom. (Gulyás, 2005). Peculiarly enough, it was not planned to lead directly to the sea, instead it would have ensured railway connection with ports in the Adriatic, and would have completed the ring of the Little Entente around Hungary. The peace conference in March 1919 rejected the proposal, because the corridor would have meant Austria’s complete isolation, and would have forced the country into a union with Germany, which was just what the Entente powers wanted to avoid (Romsics, 1992).

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Mahan wrote that great power existence was unimaginable without appearing on seas and without the possession of an effective trading and naval fleet (Mahan, 1890). The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was a great power until the end of the World War I when it fell and broke into pieces. Its successor states, Austria and Hungary, by the discontinuation of great power existence, lost their sea exits too, which went to the winner Entente powers.

The basis of the present status quo got created by the disintegration of multi-national empires after World War I. The settling of the situation following the World War II. basically preserved the former structure. The trend of “new state establishment” after 1989 has increased the number of states that need to perceive sea access as a problem. The sea accessibility problem of the landlocked states belonging to In-between Europe demanded a solution as early as after the World War I, so that it would be possible to moderate the disadvantages of these countries and decrease tensions probably occurring later.

In 1921 in Barcelona, a conference with 32 participant countries was held, and a convention about the freedom of transit traffic was signed. The issue of

free access to seas was settled in 1958 in the framework of the UN. The situation of the newly formed African states without coasts was set straight in an international agreement in 1964. The integration process starting to develop in Western Europe ensured for its members that this problem would not appear in a form of interstate conflict.



**Figure 1:** Landlocked states and corridor problems in Europe

(Ed.: Pap, N., 2009, updated by Pap, N., 1999: Korridorok Köztes-Európában (Corridors in In-between Europe). in Földrajzi Közlemények (Geographical Review) pp. 180-190)

As a wave of new state establishment came in the 1990s, securing corridors leading to the sea became important again in the regions of In-between Europe, especially of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Moldova, one of the new Eastern European states, is in a specific situation. Although the country is very near to the sea it can only get at an exit to the sea by the Danube (Giurgiulești Port). In the Balkans, where new states were formed by means of violent events of wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, the landlocked status was involved in the syllabus of interstate relations. The Greek blockade on Macedonia showed how great advantages a home exit to the sea could bring to a country.

The issue of connection to the sea seems to appear in various forms on the political agenda of the new states.

*The term “corridor” usually refers to the possibility of moving along between two points.* The realization of communication in broad sense has technical and international legal frameworks and limitations. In the areas under the sovereignty of *one* state these frameworks and limitations are not so strong. There are wider possibilities of development, simpler rules, smaller dependence on international relations and financial difficulties are easier to overcome. Thus we must make a difference between complex transportation corridors running through the area of two or more countries and those connecting a state with international waterways.

*Corridors can be defined as means of reaching world seas and international inland waterways and as geographic phenomena enlarging state scope for action restricted by international relations.* In the background of their creation generally stands the intention to make the state’s geographical framework optimal. Usually, corridors are not long-lasting elements of the political geographic system, although aspirations for their establishment can be quite permanent. The dispute about sea exits of In-between Europe in the south and towards the Mediterranean Sea is formed as a need. Most conspicuously these needs and problems increase on the eastern coasts of the Adriatic closest to Hungary. Historically Hungary also used to possess a sea exit for a longer time in the region.

### **CORRIDORS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

In the region of the Adriatic there are several states that are connected with their inner territories to the sea through a short coast section and a land bridge. The following main corridors were present on the northern and eastern coasts of the sea during the past hundred years:

- The Austrian corridor which ran out to the Trieste region until 1918 (Habsburg rulers opened a narrow exit to the sea for Austria in 1366, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century they built railway lines leading here, in competition with the Hungarian Fiume Railways; Austrian Southern Railway). Today, the Austrian sea outlet means the Danube that has busy water traffic either towards the North Sea through the Rhine or southward to the Black Sea. Beyond that trading takes place through numerous European seaports only because of economic and logistic aspects.
- The Slovenian corridor which includes the port of Koper and a coastline less than 50 (47 km) kilometres long. In the past few years debates over the usage of the Croatian Gulf of Piran, and over the designation of Croatian-Slovene boundaries show the sensitivity of new states about the

issue of sovereignty, frustrations and lack of common seaside-management cogitation. The issue also became an obstacle to Croatia in the EU integration process. The decision will be made by the International Court of Justice.

-The Bosnian exit: the surroundings of the port town Neum, and the geopolitical issue of Croatia regarding the planned Pelješac bridge... The story of Bosnian sea outlet dates back to 1699. This is the year when the Republic of Ragusa gave the territory to the Ottomans in order to gain defense from the Venetians. Anyway, the inner Bosnian area obtained a legitimate sea outlet that was also maintained after the country had gained independence. However, the Bosnian exit to the sea is practically attained through the port of Ploče, which is Croatian territory. Nevertheless, in the sense of constitutional law, Neum divided the Croatian sovereignty into two parts so as a way of elimination Croatia decided to build the Pelješac bridge. This small town shows the picture of a typical Adriatic seaside resort but ambitious plans appeared about developing it into a significant port. However, the reality of these plans is uncertain.

The development of the port of Ploče has already begun during the first Yugoslavia but because of World War II its traffic enhancement was postponed until Tito's regime. Improving the port was always in connection with the demands and possibilities (Bosnian export-import) of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the one-time Dinaric core of Yugoslavia), namely, it was Split and later Rijeka and Zadar that represented primary ports for Croatia but Serbia and its territories had the possibility of the Thessaloniki outlet besides the remaining Croatian ports as well. In spite of Croatian and Bosnian authors highlight the importance/possibility of its Central European relations the Ploče outlet had never served as a port for these areas and it is also questionable whether the final port of the still unstable Bosnia-Herzegovina's transport line, which strikes along the country, can compete with the ports of Trieste, Koper and Rijeka which started developing earlier and thereby have significant advantages. It is visible that the significance of the port of Ploče is primarily a traffic corridor issue for Bosnia and for the Bosnian-Croatian relations. The most suitable sea outlet for Bosnia-Herzegovina's industrial demands for raw materials and for products conveyed by water is Ploče. Since the development under the 1960s was a result of a joint Bosnian-Croatian project Bosnia-Herzegovina demanded to obtain automatic ownership in the Port Corporation of Ploče which was established by the Croatian Privatization Fund that has majority ownership in it. Currently the port is mostly maintained by Dalmacijacement and besides that the raw material supply and shipment of Bosnia-Herzegovina's industry (aluminum industry in Mostar, Arcelor Mittal Ironworks in Zenica, GIKIL Lukavac, etc.).

### **The complicated question of the Serbian sea exit:**

The problems of a Serbian outlet to the sea became key question for the newly shaping Serbia and Serbian geopolitics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Serbian politics partly reinforced this by ethnic and geopolitical reasons. The only sea exit on ethnic territory was realized in Dalmatia; which, according to the shaping Serbian political elite, was considered to be one of the future Serbian provinces just like Bosnia and Herzegovina so territorial continuity between Serbian core land and sea was guaranteed. The junction of the Adriatic Sea exit (mainly because of cultural and symbolic reasons) was Dubrovnik, though for example



under the dominance of V. S. Karadžić, Serbian territories led to Trieste (including Zara, Fiume and Trieste as major ports).

After the Balkan Wars and World War I, the Serbs aimed the Shkodra area sea exit in the first place. In October 1918 Serbian troops marched in, but mainly due to Italian military forces they shortly marched out of the city. After World War I and even in the summer of 1920, there were significant movements of Serbian troops and military actions in North-East Albania but this attempt also ended in failure. As an outlet to the sea, Montenegro is evident from an ethnic-national point of view but disadvantageous from a traffic-geographical one. Building the Belgrade-Bar railway also required huge sacrifices and it was implemented rather late. Although Montenegro, and its port in Bar, is already going on its own way for Serbia it is still one of the marine gates to be potentially developed.

The other Serbian marine communicational relation is currently realized through Croatia, though this route is longer than the above mentioned Montenegro route but it is more built up and more favourable from a traffic-geographical aspect. The Romanian Constanta is similarly longer, but despite of this it is one of the most utilized Serbian sea outlet. Presumably, every sea outlet that so far has been fallen into the background just because of ideological reasons can be revalued by the consolidation of the one-time Yugoslav territories and by a unified EU direction. This is shown by the circa 2-years-old Serbian-Croatian-Slovene railway agreements and other Serbian developments in the past year (Sremska Mitrovica-Rijeka coordinated port developments, two-sided coordination of Belgrade-Bar highway and railway developments).

Kosovo is the latest mini state that has been established in the Balkans. It has a traditional kind of economic relation system which rests upon a North-South direction. However, this land-locked state has a sensitive relationship with its northern and southern neighbours but Serbia refuses to recognise that. The majority of Macedonians in Macedonia reckon Kosovo as the hinterland of local Albanian separatist ambitions and Albanian armed troops. Since the economic prospects in Kosovo relate to the exploitation of its mineral resources the state has a share in organizing the opportunity of mass transportation. Thessaloniki is the traditional sea outlet across Macedonia. Kosovo's transport relation with Albania is handled on the Durrës-Kukës-Prizren-Priština route that has huge strategic importance but its permeability is little for the time being. Theoretically, an alternative outlet could be offered by Montenegro but the conditions of transportation are significantly worse there.

The Hungarian Kingdom for centuries had a sea exit to the Adriatic. Details of it can be read hereafter.

### **CHANGING POSITION OF HUNGARY: THE QUESTION OF THE SEA EXIT – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

Hungary's relationship with the sea is one of the very nearly unexplored fields in the country's political geographical way of thinking. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century numerous documents were written within the scope of Fiume and the Hungarian coastline, and the public was also interested in Hungarian marine politics. The most important documents are related to Rezső Havass (Havass, 1911) and Gyula Prinz (Prinz, 1905). Thereafter, the political geography was concerned with discussing the Trianon-issue, the possible solutions for Hungary and the theme

of bipolar world order. It had not become a relevant part of neither the revisionist policy between the two World Wars, nor the concerns of Hungarians beyond the frontier and the agenda of loose foreign relations. Hungarian-Yugoslav relations did not shape up as it was planned so the question could not emerge. The process of Euro-Atlantic integration, the role of Hungary in the Western Balkans, the needs of Hungary in transportation under the process of modernization, the increasing Hungarian presence in Yugoslav succession states, and the previously exceptional interest in Croatian coastline all contributed to have conversations about the issue as an agenda.

From among the three possible seas (Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Adriatic Sea) the major part of the historic Hungary laid closest to the Adriatic. This sea offered more considerable advantages for becoming interconnected into the world market, than did the Black Sea.

When the concept of capitalist market economy spread generally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hungarian state made serious efforts to connect the Hungarian coastline with the inner basin regions with modern means of communication. This is how railway lines leading through the Karsts were constructed, through which products of Hungarian agriculture (mainly grains) were forwarded to the ports, primarily to Fiume, than by means of inexpensive sea transportation, to the world market.

The Hungarian Crown had a 190 km long Adriatic coastline, and even this short coastal segment could be accessed through an inland stripe inside the state's body, being 48 km wide at its narrowest point. This area was one of the first territories (then being part of the Croatian Monarchy) to be annexed to the Hungarian Crown, and it was possessed permanently until 1918. The most important town of the Hungarian coast was Fiume, the Croatian name of which (Riekae) was given in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Habsburg rulers wanted to improve the Empire's trade by, among other means, developing seaports. Charles III reinforced the autonomy of Trieste and Fiume (1723), then built the first road through the Karsts, the Charles Route. Maria Theresa continued her father's policy. She organized the coastal territories into a separate province (Littorale Austriacum) in order to optimize the state's economic policy in the region. However, on the whole, she showed preference for Trieste in her foreign policy. As suggested by her son Joseph, she annexed Fiume to Hungary, and placed it under the Hungarian Governor's administration in the form of a *corpus separatum*<sup>1</sup> (1776). The aim was to open up channels for the transfer of Hungarian products, to provide market for them, and, through these, economically improve this region.

The interest of the Hungarian public in seacoasts livened up during the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century "reform period". It was believed that one key to economic and industrial development was the improvement of sea transportation and the strengthening of Fiume as an export port. Plans were made for the construction of railways leading to Fiume<sup>2</sup>. The actual work could not proceed because of the War of Independence and the absolutism which then followed. After several years of wrangling, the legal situation of the town was finally settled in 1881, following the Conciliation in 1867.

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<sup>1</sup> A separate corpus belonging to the Hungarian Crown.

<sup>2</sup> István Széchenyi appeared to be extremely influential (cf. the slogan "Out to sea, Hungarians!")

The construction of the railway lines belonged to the political debate of the “Fiume or Constanța” dilemma. The route following which Hungarian grains should be transported to its markets in Italy and Western Europe was debated. In fear of competition with the Austrian line leading to Trieste, Hungarian economic politicians proposed that the railway should be directed to the port of the Romanian Constanța. On the contrary, estate owners from the Great Plains, after considering the conditions of transportation (*longer and more expensive shipment on rail, much longer shipment on sea, the competition with Russian and Romanian grains*) voted for the Fiume port. The final section of the railway connecting Budapest and Fiume was completed in 1882, the Oradea-Fiume section in 1909. In the 1910s plans were made for the development of the port and the improvement of the railway line. The geographic and legal basis for establishing improvable *Hungarian* seaports in Dalmatia did exist, but the basic requirement for such development would have been, here, too, the construction of an appropriate railway line. The World War breaking out soon prevented the realization of these plans, and the peace treaties made the loss of coastal territories definitive. Hungary became *a landlocked* state, inside the ring of the hostile states of the so called “little entente”. The state looked for a sea exit with new geographic and geopolitical context in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What about the modern times, the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> centuries?

As the scientific-technological revolution commenced, and the characteristics of external economic relations went through transformation, the importance and the main features of sea shipping also became different. The circle of goods-, persons- and information carriers broadened, their inner hierarchy changed significantly. Power lines of the core vs. periphery relation also became re-arranged. All these lead to certain directions of communication to become devaluated while the value of others grew. The nature and importance of communication axes became changed.

What about present day Hungary?

There are seven communication axes or channels of present time Hungary, distinguished in the literature. These are as follows (Erdősi, 1996):

- a) western (Budapest-Vienna),
- b) south-western “Adriatic” corridor,
- c) north-eastern “Borsod-Galitian”,
- d) northern “Tatra-Kraków”,
- e) eastern “Subcarpathian-Podolian”,
- f) south-eastern “Pontus-Levante”,
- g) southern “Suez”.

Today, Hungary's foreign trade is done primarily with member states of the European Union, and, to a lesser extent, with neighboring countries. The network of necessary railway, road, inland water and pipeline connections are available. The goods originated from overseas countries (mainly from the Far East) arrive across the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg and Bremen (altogether 65 %), because the relatively low costs, good logistic services and significant transport capacity. The role of the ports of the Adriatic, Koper and Rijeka are less important despite the geographic proximity. The role of the “Adriatic” corridor itself, in accordance with one of its former functions, is basically the maintenance of communication with the highly developed northern-Italian regions.

In the communication development concept of Hungary the country's specific national interests are being harmonised with Pan-European plans. Elements of the Trans-European Network that cross our country have special

importance. The intention to develop the so-called No. 5 complex communication corridor, the most important element of which is the Trieste-Ljubljana-Budapest-(Bratislava branching)-Uzhgorod-Lvov-Kiev road and railway corridor, is included in the infrastructural system of the European Union. In its function and capacities, though, it is identical with the old route: provides Hungary with a south-west connection with the *West* and the *World Market*.

### **QUESTION MARKS OF THE NEW “SILK ROAD”**

A new concept and opportunity is the “Chinese-Hungarian” railway project. Recent world financial crisis has been re-arranging the spatial order of world economy, which may result in a more powerful and economically stronger China. Now the Chinese goods (or any others from the Far East) are delivered to Europe through the huge ports in Western Europe (Rotterdam, Hamburg etc.). The marine routes circumventing Eurasia and Africa are long, crowded and expensive. Piracy threatens the cargo ships in the Southeast-Asian archipelago and around the Horn of Africa. Shipping distance between Hong Kong and Rotterdam 20,600 km, which takes 46-48 days with a speed of 10 knots.

The direct transport connection between Shanghai and Budapest takes 11.000 km. The railway connection between China and Hungary exists (via Ukraine, Russia and/or Kazakhstan), but there are lots of question marks. Security threats, legal background, transport capacity, different gauges, the overall stability of the region, development issues are the major problems. As with the German-Chinese railway project profitability and demand are the major hindering forces of the operation of such a land corridor. However the potential of this eastern direction is undeniable, it is also present in the Hungarian development strategies it can be an alternative only in the long run.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the question of the Hungarian exit to the sea is still an open issue. The northwestern direction dominates the overseas trade but the southwestern corridor is gaining importance. The investments of the port of Koper, the stabilized situation of Croatia (the lack of which caused the drop of the shipments towards Rijeka), and significant infrastructural investments linking these ports to Hungary (railway links, highway and pipeline connections) are the major elements. The eastern corridor, while being a real alternative, needs significant efforts and a suitable economic environment to be elaborated.

### **CONCLUZION**

The marine vs. continental dichotomy has been the base of political geography for a long time. Major part of the world’s countries have no coastlines, they are so called landlocked states. Majority of such areas is concentrated in Europe but besides that there are numerous other states in Central and Southeast Europe that have sea outlets oppressed by difficulties and conflicts. The geographical location of European landlocked states and corridors trace out a temporary zone between maritime and continental Europe which coincide with the In-between European (Zwischen Europa) territorial category.

It seemed for a long time that the process of European integration may terminate the problem of corridors and landlocked states in Europe (so-called four freedoms). Today’s crisis in global economy, the most severe political crisis in integration association, and the subsistent multiplicity of international territorial conflicts jointly contribute to revising the question of national sovereignty and within that the marine and political importance of sea outlets.

The policy of sea outlets among the Western Balkan states is still very vivid nowadays. Events of near past, conflicts of present day still make the situation difficult. The European perspective gave and still offers a kind of solution to problems but the question is whether the present acute crisis, that turned severe exactly in the Balkan (Greece), leads to the loss of European perspective. In this case we may count on severe conflicts, territorial debates, individual solutions, and the revival of historical offences.

Hungary is affected in this issue on many layers. The country is motivated to handle the problem because of its historic heritage, present economic interests, and security demands. Currently, from the aspect of transport, the Adriatic Sea plays a second-rate role but touristically and politically it has a more important role.

Transport and delivery relations with China bear high significance for the whole of Europe. In most of the cases shipments arrive by sea mainly to Western European ports. The question of whether this remains the same or whether Hungary may function as a turntable in a future Eurasian land bridge is not subsidiary for Hungary.

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