

EIR Feature

Finally, Europe talks about a joint transportation grid

by Angelika Beyreuther-Raimondi

The first-ever Pan-European Transportation Conference convened in Prague on Oct. 29-31, gathering practically all the transportation ministers of a reunited Europe—16 in total—who came with high-ranking delegations, to discuss the concept that in the “new Europe,” well-being and peace can only be assured, if a common European infrastructure network is created.

The conference occurred a full two years since Lyndon LaRouche first put forward his proposal for a high-speed transportation network to connect the Paris-Berlin-Vienna triangle, creating a productive “locomotive” in this area with the world’s most skilled workers and productive capacities, in order to rescue and develop the eastern European economies and pull the entire world out of economic depression. LaRouche sketched the idea at the moment when the Berlin Wall was coming down and revolutions—mostly peaceful—were sweeping away the communist dictatorships all over the former Soviet satellite states in central and eastern Europe.

Prague, of course, lies in the middle of LaRouche’s “Productive Triangle,” which has become well known in the last two years through a series of detailed descriptions published in multiple languages, and seminars featuring speakers from the Schiller Institute, which is backing the plan, throughout the major cities of Europe.

Two years to catch up

At the invitation of the European Parliament and the European Commission, and in cooperation with organizations such as the European Conference of Transportation Ministers, the various political, industrial, and other representatives took up the question of how to define an integrated transportation system in Europe; how to formulate the needed planning, utilization, and financing of European-wide transportation infrastructure; and how the demands for technology, protection of the environment, and security might be satisfied in the framework of a new



The Pan-European Transportation Conference opens, in the Spanish Hall of Prague Castle. Left to right: Jiri Nezval, minister of transport of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic; Georgios Anastassopoulos, vice president of the European Parliament; European Commissioner Karel van Miert; C.S.F.R. Prime Minister Marian Calfa.

approach to transportation policy.

During the opening ceremonies, which took place in the splendid rooms of the presidential palace, the vice president of the European Parliament, Georgios Anastassopoulos of Greece, declared that it was urgent that an efficient transportation policy for the twenty-first century be devised. It is high time to catch up the two lost years that have passed since the revolutions in central and eastern Europe, he warned. In the West, people have not thought grandly enough about the historic revolutionary developments. Action is long overdue, and it is clear that the fundamental role of transportation, conceived as European-wide, must become a political priority: "What counts is the political will"; in the face of an expected 50% overall growth in transportation in Europe and an expected 1,000% growth along the East-West axis, no one could doubt that transportation policy must be an unambiguous political priority.

The host transportation minister of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Jiri Nezval, greeted the participants from all the European nations with justified pride. He emphasized infrastructure's role in making possible for the cultural development of Europe, pointing out, "Without roads, there would have been no Christianization." He proposed "to create a kind of master plan for the unification of Europe in the area of transportation"; in the "reform states" of central and eastern Europe, that means concentrating on building a railway network.

Domenec Romera I. Alcazar, a transportation expert in

the European Parliament, called for a "bold and courageous attack" for "European-wide and global solutions and planning foreseen for the twenty-first century." The proposed transnational rail grid in Europe is "probably the most significant infrastructural proposal in the world in the twentieth century," he said.

The general secretary of the International Railway Association, Michel Walrave, put the problem this way: Why, he asked, should a "Marshall Plan for central and eastern Europe" not "have as its center of gravity, the area of railway transport?"

Overland links to Asia

The U.S.S.R. deputy minister of railways, V.N. Butko, spoke of the great opportunity presented to Europe, now that it has become possible to consider new ways of using the land routes to Asia. The trans-Siberian mainline connects Europe by land to the Pacific Ocean; the historic Silk Route, which in the Middle Ages connected China to Europe, is still today very significant from the standpoint of transportation policy. The construction of new international rail links would contribute to the development of traffic along the east-west axis. Moscow could be connected to the high-speed Hanover-Berlin-Warsaw route, especially since a high-speed section from St. Petersburg to Moscow is now in the planning stages.

Again and again during the conference the eastern participants, with a marked undertone of impatience, observed that the western Europeans might easily profit from the reunited

Europe, and should not raise the specter of a "sinkhole" in the east. In an interview with *EIR*, the transportation minister of the Russian Republic, Vitali B. Yefimov (see below), made a point of the geographical position of Russia, which "connects Europe, the Near East, the Far East, and China." He underlined the need to integrate the European with the Asiatic transportation system.

The ministers from the Baltic states cited the great new possibilities which are opened up by their "return" to Europe. Latvian Transportation Minister Janis Janovskis brought up the opportunities provided to northern Europe by linking the "ice-free harbors of Latvia . . . with the railway through Ukraine, to reach Odessa on the Black Sea," and from thence to the Mediterranean and the Mideast. Through this and other newly created possibilities, the "efficiency of European transportation should be substantially increased."

Traian Basescu, Romania's transportation minister, spoke of his country's potential: "All these matters imply that the economic reconstruction of eastern and central Europe shall begin with transportation." His Bulgarian colleague Veselin Pavlov, pointed to the two important ports of Varna and Burgas, whose development will create "favorable conditions for traffic transit from Europe to the Near East and Asia."

Cheapskates cost money

The failure to develop modern infrastructure is extremely costly in the long run, several speakers pointed out. The European Parliament recently confirmed that "the present lack of a European infrastructure network that would be attuned to the needs of the current users, imposes high costs upon the European economy." A study carried out for the

European Parliament, as reported by Domenec Romera I. Alcazar, asserts that "the annual costs to the European Community resulting from bad transportation infrastructure are estimated to be ECU 3.75 billion, an amount that by the year 2010 could reach ECU 13.6 billion per year, if the European high-speed railway grid were not built."

Heinz Ruhnau, the former chairman of the board of Lufthansa airlines, made a different calculation. He warned that inadequate infrastructure causes "a decrease in the productivity of the economy." On the other hand, "if there are no bottlenecks, the economic investment of the aircraft industry in the European Community will rise from the current DM 600 billion [\$357 billion] to DM 1,000 billion [\$595 billion] in the year 2010. The number of jobs should rise from 3.6 million to 5.6 million." Ruhnau gave a detailed accounting of how, because of inadequate European air traffic infrastructure, between 1986 and 1990 "about \$20 billion was wasted, annoying passengers, frustrating members of the airline and insurance associations, and putting an unnecessary strain on the environment."

Nothing that addressed these problems came from the president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Jacques Attali, although many had expected much from his speech. He did speak of a European "master plan" for the future, but he opined that because of restricted financial resources, not everything could be done at once, but only one project at a time. Other speakers in Prague agonized about raising taxes, establishing a European Transportation Fund, and the need to increase highway tolls—bypassing the necessary political decision: to put into effect the joint European infrastructure system, with all due speed and with the help of national measures of credit creation.

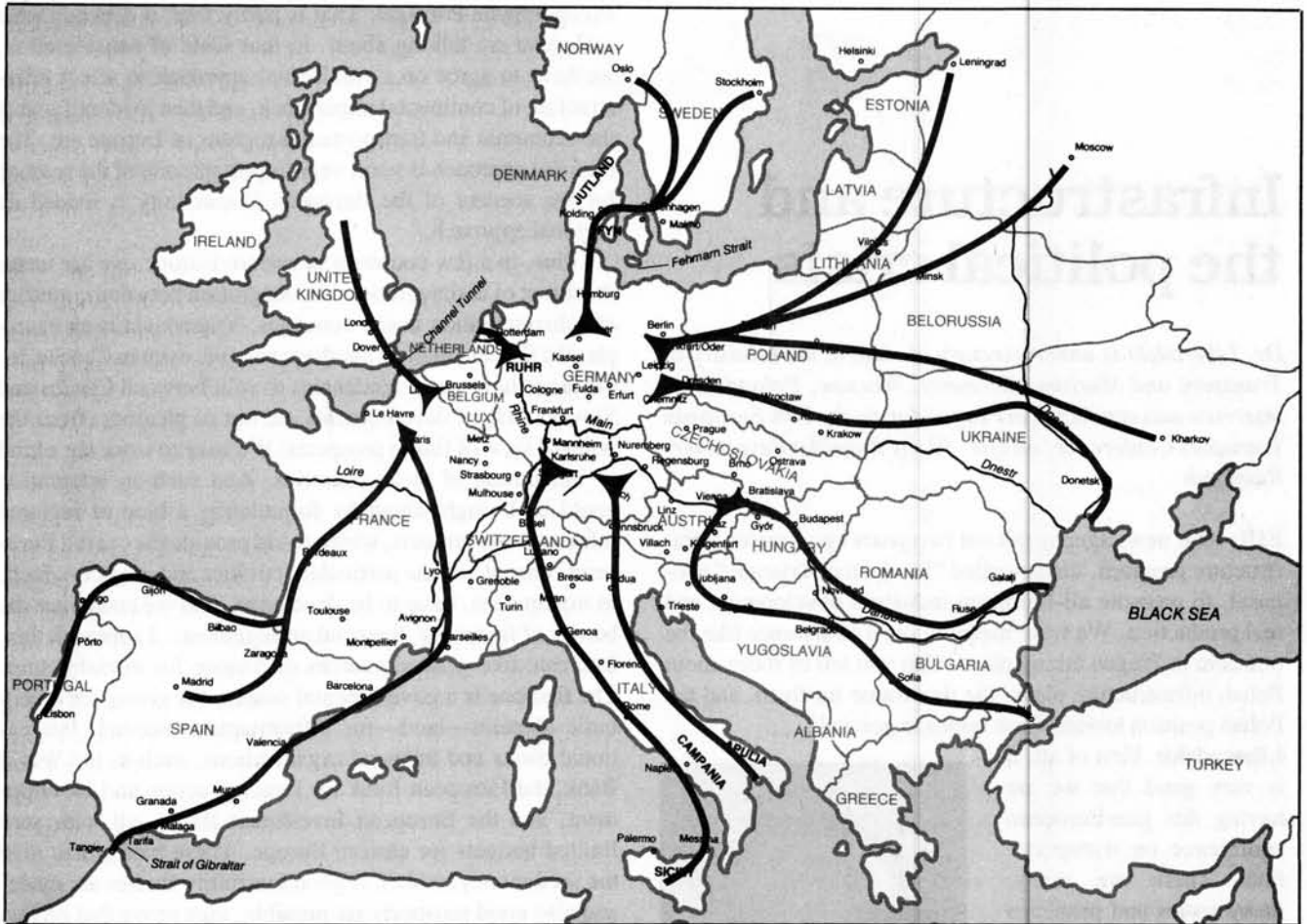


European transport ministers discuss the prospects for a continent-wide infrastructure program. If they act with sufficient vision and political decisiveness, the program can provide the key to saving the world's economy from a new Dark Age.

Jan Zavrel

FIGURE 1

Spiral arms extend from LaRouche's Productive Triangle



The LaRouche 'Productive Triangle'

Lyndon LaRouche's proposal for a European "Productive Triangle" has been circulating among policy makers for two years now, and elements of it cropped up again and again during speeches and discussions at the conference. In remarks intended as a contribution to deliberations (published in full in *EIR*, Nov. 8, p. 6), LaRouche emphasized the "American System of Political Economy," in opposition to the "free trade" dictates of the International Monetary Fund.

"Where is the recovery going to come from?" LaRouche asked. "It will come from the prudent use of the credit, the power of governments to establish monopolies on the issue of currency and the issue of that currency as loans, as loan capital to a national banking system for basic economic infrastructure, projects of water management, power generation and distribution, transportation, education, medical care, infrastructure, in promotion of scientific and technological

progress, that is, investment in scientific and technological progress in a capital-, energy-intensive mode. This will mean using the resources of credit to take the idle capacity of agriculture, mining, industry, and labor force, to mobilize them for national efforts of building. What must also be done is to bring together such efforts on the part of sovereign national states in a coordinated form, so that the various governments of states may cooperate, so that their various efforts will mutually support one another.

"That all can be done. It will be hard work, but a recovery is possible; whereas, if we do not take that course of recovery, then we are going to go into one of the worst periods in the history of mankind, a period for all of Europe and most of the world comparable to the Dark Ages in the fourteenth century."

LaRouche's proposal was, to be sure, not an openly discussed theme of the conference; yet if that proposal is not implemented soon, then the joint European infrastructure project will become an unrealized dream.