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## Interview: Grigori L. Bondarevsky

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# The strategic and economic importance of Eurasian integration

*Professor Bondarevsky of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Social-Political Studies has advised Soviet and Russian governments for many years on oriental affairs, with specific expertise on Central Asia. He is the author of 27 books and pamphlets, including a seminal work on the Baghdad-to-Berlin railway. He is a recipient of the International Nehru Award and was just elected to the Russian Academy of Social Sciences. On the occasion of his 75th birthday, he participated in a seminar in Wiesbaden, Germany, with EIR, on Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. He was interviewed on Feb. 16 by Mark and Mary Burdman.*

*Since this interview was conducted, there has been a serious political crisis in Kazakhstan over the March 9-11 period. President Nursultan Nazarbayev dissolved the parliament and announced presidential rule.*

*There has also been an important development for the Central Asian railroad. On March 19, Iran opened a new railroad line to Bandar Abbas, the port on the Straits of Hormuz (see **Map**). This new railroad connects the main trans-Iranian line with this strategic port. Now, when the new Mashad-Ashkabad rail line linking Iran to Turkmenistan opens, the whole Central Asian railroad will have a direct link to the Indian Ocean. The railroad was built in secret, and very rapidly. Previously, the only port outlet for the Iranian railroad was at Bandar Khomeini, at the head of the Persian Gulf. To celebrate the opening of this new railroad, the prime minister of Iran invited the Presidents of Turkmenistan, Armenia, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and the prime minister of Pakistan. At the meeting, President Saparmurad Niyazov of Turkmenistan announced that the Mashad-Ashkabad line will be finished in six months' time.*

**EIR:** The situation in Russia and throughout Eurasia is becoming more critical by the day, with economic collapse, military conflicts, and so on. We know you are a proponent of the idea of infrastructure development, particularly railroads in the countries of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States], being a means of positively contributing to possibly changing the situation in a more positive direction. Can you comment on this?

**Bondarevsky:** First of all, I would like to start by saying

that not everybody in Russia supports the idea of Eurasian union. [Kazakhstan President] Nazarbayev masterminded this idea a year ago, in a speech he gave in April 1994 at Moscow University. But he was disappointed by the response he received last October, during the summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States, where he did not receive support. There was a possibility to return to this problem, at the last summit at Alma-Ata [capital of Kazakhstan], only a week ago, but still, there was no real discussion. Why?

There are two groups of opponents. Some groups in the former republics of the U.S.S.R. are afraid that this Eurasian union, with one super-government, and one economic body, and with a unified high command, could be a new form of Russian or Soviet imperialism. This is one group of opponents known to the West. The second group, which you do not know precisely, because it is purely Russian, says: "We do not need these Asian republics. We do not want to feed them, we do not want to allocate a lot of money to them, we are tired of supporting them, let us invest in Mother Russia, with her 70 million square kilometers of territory; enough is enough!" Between these two groups of opponents, from different angles, it is not easy to find a way out, especially if you take into account mighty nationalist, sometimes Islamic-nationalist, groups in Central Asia, and some influential nationalistic groups in west Ukraine, who are opposing the idea, from nationalistic, religious, and some other standpoints.

However, the situation changed approximately one year ago in one most important aspect, the economic dimension. You have to understand that the economic development of the U.S.S.R. was of a unique style. You cannot compare it to Germany, or France, or Italy, because it started from nearly zero in the Asian parts of the U.S.S.R. While in Germany or France, industrialization started 200 years ago, in the U.S.S.R. overall, it started according to one plan, Stalin's plan, which was implemented by the Politburo, economic ministries, and if necessary, the KGB and gulags. It was an economic plan for development, based on more modern technology than Europe had possessed in the 19th century.

Sometimes, some people say, especially in countries

# Central Asian rail link to Persian Gulf port nears completion



- Existing main rail lines
- == Newly completed rail line
- - - Rail line under construction

which were not heavily bombarded during the war, such as Great Britain: "We do not want to change machinery that still works. So we do not want to invest. *You* build a new economy." But we in Russia earlier had no technology in the Asian or Far Eastern parts at all, so we had to build from new technology at the end of the 1920s, and early 1930s, and again after the war in the 1950s.

What was done in Russia, was never done in Germany or other countries. It was done by one master. Was it a good plan or bad? It depends on the master, who was Stalin and some of his assistants. The economic system was created, so that a factory was built in Khabarovsk, and a second factory which supplied spare parts, was in Yerevan, because Stalin never thought that the U.S.S.R. could break up in the next 10,000 years. They built it for coming centuries. Therefore, when different parts were suddenly cut out under the nationalistic slogan, "We want a Uzbekian national economy, a Kyrgyz economy," and so on—for one year, it worked. But after that, there was no oil, no gas, no spare parts, and—what is of great importance in these Asian republics, with all my highest respect for their civilization, which I have studied for 50 years—they had no skilled labor force.

The labor force in machinery, especially heavy machinery, with new technology, in the eastern republics, in north Caucasian republics, was Russian. When the nationalist upheaval started, long before the Chechen war, the bulk of Russian experts and white-collar workers from Chechnya, ran away from Grozny. One or two years ago, 35,000 experts left, and this, and the lack of spare parts, ruined the Grozny oil fields. Our bombardment of Grozny was a tragedy, but the oil industry was already at a standstill because of the Russians leaving. The same in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan: They had to close factories, close some heating centers, not only atomic but also hydroelectric, because the white-collar Russian population ran away. It is important to understand, that they ran away not because President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan or President Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan demanded it. We cannot say that Nazarbayev or Karimov or President Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan supported the nationalistic drive. But in these republics, the nationalistic drive started from the bottom without any help from the government.

I will give you one important example: language. For 70 years, the Russian language was the only official language in Central Asia. Now, they introduced the law for a state language of their own. It was a dangerous decision. How can you, in the Kyrgyz language, introduce everything connected with computers, with Cosmos, and so on? There are no such words. Their engineers and experts received their training in Moscow and Petersburg, not in Frunze. Suddenly, there was a law that in five years everyone should speak only Kyrgyz, and the teachers should give lectures in Kyrgyz, and the state government should be based on the Kyrgyz language. The government did not demand it, but the nationalist pressure groups and the nationalist youth demanded it. It was going

on de facto.

So these honest Russian people, whose grandfathers grew up in Tashkent—which I know very well, because I spent many years there—their grandfathers came, they created factories, they built up the first university in the history of Central Asia. [This was] the Central Asian University—where I was the dean of the Oriental Faculty—which was created by Lenin's decree in 1920. A huge train from Russia, packed with professors, and doctors, and laboratories, came from Moscow and Leningrad and started the Central Asian University. It gave birth to branches in all republics. But now they demand to speak only Uzbeki. So the old Russian professors, the technicians, the experts, they run away, not because they are pushed away, but in this nationalistic situation.

It gave a terrible blow to the working of the economy. Even the richest republic, Turkmenistan, [has problems]. It began very well: It has approximately 90 trillion cubic meters of gas, enough oil, and so on. They introduced their own currency, the manat, in 1993, and proclaimed that their currency was worth 350-400 rubles. Now you can buy manat on the black market in Ashkabad, for 20 rubles. Why? One reason is that the economic system is ruined. The spare parts are not arriving.

Ukraine does not have oil; they have to get it from Russia. Ukraine has magnificent refineries, but the oil is from Russia. Nobody knows who will pay whom. Belarus has magnificent factories. It produces very good trucks, of 25-40 tons, from the MAZ (the Minsk Auto Factory); they were famous, they were developed especially to work in Siberia, on the frozen hills. But Belarus does not have snow, or hills. Who buys their trucks or cars? It is a terrible imbroglio.

**EIR:** What you are saying, then, with your historical overview about how Stalin structured the Soviet economy, is that in the post-Soviet era, the process of political disintegration has been accompanied by, and worsened by, a process of economic disintegration and crisis, and that this may set the climate for considering new forms of political-economic relationships to try to set the situation straight again? Could you specify the role of rail infrastructure in this?

**Bondarevsky:** Yes. Let me explain. After one or two years, the people in the republics understood that it is time, after disintegration, to start this integration process. Nazarbayev's idea was based on the necessity of this economic—not political—integration. Therefore, his idea of Eurasian union is based on economic necessity, and on the geopolitical position of Russia, plus Kazakhstan. Russia, plus Kazakhstan, as you know from maps, starts from near the Polish border, and extends up to the Chinese Great Wall. It is one geopolitical unit.

In this situation, the idea of Eurasian union, opposed by nationalistic and some other forces, one of the best possibilities to start with, is railways.

Even the railways are nationalized now. Only five years

ago, we had one state company for the Central Asia railway system, which was built by Russia in the old days, and the center was in Tashkent. Then the Kazakhs said, "No, we are an independent republic," and they cut out the Kazakh system. Turkmenistan's Niyazov said no, we want to have a Turkmen railway. Then they converted the Central Asia into Uzbek and Tajik railways, then Karimov cut in two the administration of the railway from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan.

But the railway still exists. It functions, but badly. If you are an Uzbek, and I a Tajik, if we go together in Tashkent to buy tickets to Tajikistan and back, you produce your passport, and you will get a much cheaper ticket, for the same railway car, because you are a proud Uzbeki citizen, and it is your Uzbek railway.

But the economic issue is stronger. Therefore, after prolonged discussions, for five years, the Central Asia-Chinese railway system started. The railway link between Kazakhstan, a little northeast of Alma-Ata, and Xinjiang, in Chinese territory, was nearly ready, needing only 20 kilometers to be built on the Russian side and another section on the Chinese side, in 1959. Everyone thought that it would begin operating in 1960. Our railway station on the border was named "Friendship." But instead of friendship, you know what happened then between Russia and China. Building the railroad was stopped.

Only after prolonged discussions and delays, in the late 1980s, the line was ready. Therefore, it became, first technically, and then economically and politically, possible to buy a ticket in Beijing, China, to proceed on the same railway through all China, through Xinjiang, through Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan, through Uzbekistan, Tashkent, through Ashkabad in Turkmenistan, and then come to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea, which is renamed Turkmen Bashir now. A ferry, which has existed for 20 years, brings the train to Baku, and from Baku through Tbilisi, which has a straight railway connection with Turkey. The railway connection Russia-Turkey has existed for 30 years. You could buy a ticket in Moscow, proceed through Baku, Tbilisi, Yerevan, straight to Turkish territory, to Istanbul and Europe. It was not often used, but it existed.

In 1992, the international Central Asian Railroad Association was created. The Chinese government, the Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen governments were in this group. This was joined immediately by the Turks, who have the extension to Europe, and by the Iranians. The Iranians were especially active. In 1989, when the U.S.S.R. still existed, there was an official treaty between the U.S.S.R. and Iran, to build a short railway, Ashkabad-Mashad. It is 300 kilometers long, 150 on Turkmen territory and 150 on Iranian territory. Mashad is the capital of the greatest Iranian province, Khorasan, and Mashad is connected through railway to Teheran, and from Teheran a line goes to the Persian Gulf and a second line to Tabriz and Turkey. It was built by the Germans, from 1927-29. This year, ahead of schedule in April-May, the line

will be ready.

The railway line does not run straight, because there are mountains; it makes a curve from Ashkabad to Serachs a little southeast, and then from Serachs—there are two Serachs, Iranian and Turkmen—to Mashad.

**EIR:** What is the strategic and economic significance of this line?

**Bondarevsky:** Extremely great! I am afraid that the people in Europe still do not understand how important it is.

If, today, the Japanese or South Koreans want to send their goods to Azerbaijan, how can they do it? Through the Trans-Siberian line, through Moscow, and then again a long way south; but, if Grozny is at war, there is no connection at all. From September 1994, there has been no railway connection between Russia and the Transcaucasus. There are two railways, one from Rostov in the north, through Grozny, through Dagestan, Baku, Tbilisi, and Yerevan. The second railway, built only in 1929-30, runs from Tuapse, Novorossiisk, through Sukhumi, a shortcut to Zugdidi, to Tbilisi, but this second railway was cut after the Abkhazian-Georgian war. From September, we had to stop sending trains through Chechnya, because during the six months of 1994, there were 1,400 rail cars looted by brigands from Chechnya. What is notable, is that when the brigands attacked trains, they knew exactly in which wagon the most important goods were. Therefore, not only the Chechen mafia, but also the Moscow mafia gave them information.

After both lines were cut, it was a tragedy for Azerbaijan, and especially for Georgia and Armenia. They do not receive food. Azerbaijan can produce food, Georgia less, and Armenia cannot at all. The land is stones. If this Central Asia railway works, you do not need the North Caucasus lines. You have a short cut from Japan and Korea to Transcaucasia, and from Turkey to Europe.

On the second line, Ashkabad-Mashad, the goods go to the Gulf, to the very important port called Bandar Shahpour, now called Bandar Khomeini, the Port of Khomeini. It is a good, deep-water port, and from this port, there is a shortcut to Bombay by steamer, or to the Red Sea, or to East Africa. In the 19th century, there was a British-Indian steamship company, for Bombay and the Persian Gulf. From 1901, Russia also had such a steamship company, which ran from Odessa on the Black Sea, through the Black Sea, to the Aegean, Mediterranean, Suez, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Now, with this new railway system, which is working, the state decisions of whole governments are signed, it is not a plan for the future. It is working! From late this year, the line to the Gulf will be open.

This is of greatest importance. If you look at a map of Europe and Asia, you see the old Trans-Siberian railway. Now, there is the new Central Asia railway.

Note that in Russia, there are two terms. In English there is only one term, Central Asia, but in Russian, there is

*Srednaya Asia*, “Middle Asia,” and *Tsentrálnaya Asia*, “Central Asia.” For Russian geographers, politicians, and experts, there is a great difference. In Russia, Middle Asia is this Central Asia about which we are speaking, plus Kazakhstan; Central Asia is Tibet, Mongolia, the Pamirs. Two years ago, the Presidents of the Central Asia republics had a meeting in Tashkent and announced they do not want to be Middle Asia, but Central Asia. Even our great political experts in Moscow did not grasp what it meant. I tried to explain to them at that moment, that the Central Asian leaders did not want to be a part of the old U.S.S.R., this Middle Asia; they want to be part of a larger unity, Central Asia.

The rail route starts in Beijing, then you have Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, then Alma-Ata, then Tashkent. The railway goes from Samarkand to Turkmenistan, and has a continuation to the Caspian Sea. Now, it will go to Ashkabad, to Mashad, Teheran, Tabriz, and to Turkey.

In the vicinity of Turkmenistan is a very important railway station, Chardzhou. Chardzhou is on the mighty river Amudar'ya [the Oxus]. Chardzhou was built by Russians at the end of the 19th century. There are two lines: One runs from Chardzhou to Ashkabad, and then to Krasnovosk. The second runs from Chardzhou straight to Russia, to Guryev and Saratov. This exists, and has for 40 years. Therefore, Russian goods using this way through Chardzhou and Mashad, can reach the Gulf. This is a two-way line. It is extremely important to understand all these possibilities.

When this Mashad-Ashkabad line is open for operation, say in a year's time, it will be extremely important economically. You know that economic development starts around railways. It will help to create new factories, to fight unemployment, to bring goods and tools, and so on. This would be a very important vehicle—an *extremely* important vehicle—for economic union.

The railway is stronger than nationalist feelings, and when the railway runs, economic development will be quicker. Then the people in Central Asia, who now know nothing about [Lyndon LaRouche's proposal for a European] Productive Triangle, and nothing about Germany, will have not only the deutschemark, which they buy on the black market, but also the straight connection to Europe! Your businessmen and investors, who are still hesitating about whether they should invest or not: Here is this link with new perspectives for the 21st century, which is not far away. It will open the way for great investment. Thus, the Eurasian idea will be implemented. In a letter which we sent to Nazarbayev, prepared and signed by myself, and two other experts, we just explained the linkage between the Central Asia railway and the Gulf, and his beloved idea of Eurasian union.

This Eurasian union, with railways, will also include the Transcaucasus in this system.

**EIR:** You are familiar with the LaRouche Paris-Berlin-Vienna “Productive Triangle” proposal for rail and rail-infra-

structure development for Eurasia. How do you see this idea corresponding to what you have been outlining?

**Bondarevsky:** On the Productive Triangle: According to my understanding, in the contemporary deep economic and financial crisis in western Europe, and the contradiction between Britain and western Europe, and some western European groups, although there are decisions about investing in this Triangle area, I have a suspicion that if there will be no new push, the investment will not be found. But, at the moment when you proclaim that this is not a simple Triangle, it is the Triangle *plus* Central Asia, the Far East, and the Gulf—and it does not need new investment on this side, the railways are ready!—the Productive Triangle will receive many more incentives. Today, some person in France will say, why should we invest in the Triangle, and make Germany, which is now too big, bigger? The British do not want to have anything to do with this. But the moment that the Triangle will become the vehicle to open everything to Asia, to open this magnificent area to investment, then it will be a very important impetus.

**EIR:** As you know, the “Triangle” idea was expanded, in our thinking, to the idea of the “Eurasian Land Bridge,” once the situation in China began to evolve in a direction where such a policy would become more possible. . . .

**Bondarevsky:** Yes, but I want to mention, that I began to talk about this two years before you started, in 1990, during my first meeting with Mrs. LaRouche, when she explained to me that the only important topic is the Triangle. I dared to explain—you were there—that the Triangle can only be if you have the continuation to Warsaw, Minsk, and Moscow.

But I am in the Triangle, I consider the Triangle extremely important, but in the contemporary situation, the political situation in Europe has changed. The Triangle idea was magnificent, five to seven years ago. Now it can have additional life, if it is combined with the Asian railways!

**EIR:** Is the proposal for a high-speed rail link connecting Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Moscow consistent with this overall approach?

**Bondarevsky:** We started asking ourselves, why do we need, in the midst of a terrible economic crisis, to build a new high-speed link between Moscow and St. Petersburg? For Europe, it is extremely important for business reasons to be quicker by three to four hours. But for us, our main trains start from Moscow, usually in the night at 11-12, and at 7-8 in the morning you will be in Petersburg. If it only takes four hours, then you will arrive at 3 in the morning. Who needs it? We have one daytime speed train, which takes four hours, but it is not so popular. Why do we need a train that will connect two cities in 2.5 hours, in this terrible economic situation? Also, between Moscow-St. Petersburg, it is impossible to use the existing railway. It will be necessary to build the whole railway, of 650 kilometers. The old line,

built 140 years ago, cannot be used for a speed train. But somebody from abroad is there, so this plan is implemented.

What I consider important is not speedy links, but railway links in general. If you go very speedily from Paris and Berlin, to Warsaw and Moscow, this is fine. From Moscow you will go, not so quickly, because the distance from Moscow to Vladivostok is 9,000 kilometers, so you cannot get there, even at extreme speed, in five hours. It is not so important.

It is important to have this speedy link between Moscow and the West and the Productive Triangle, and then to use this extremely important line, in two directions: from Moscow to the Trans-Siberian line, from Moscow through Chardzhou and Central Asia, and from Moscow—we think and pray we will finish with the fight in Chechnya—and then from Moscow, through North Caucasus, through Transcaucasia, and south. So it will be a link from East and West Europe, a link from Turkey, and a link from the Persian Gulf, and all *this* will concentrate in Central Asia. I consider it one of the most important events of the end of the 20th century, I would call it a 21st-century event, because the real result will come in the 21st century.

**EIR:** Many of these very good railway-development ideas were thought of by Russia's Count Sergei Witte, in the late 19th century, in cooperation with France's Hanotaux, but this produced a violent reaction from the geopoliticians in London, determined to oppose development in what they called the "Eurasian heartland." How do you see the British, today, reacting to these proposals for rail-vectored economic-infrastructure development?

**Bondarevsky:** Why should you remind them of this? I will tell you an important example: In 1989, Rafsanjani, the President of Iran, visited Moscow and had confidential discussions with Gorbachov. They signed this agreement about the Ashkabad-Mashad line. The next day, I was consulted on the matter, and that the agreement for the Ashkabad-Mashad line was only the beginning. I said, "I know, you discussed the continuation from Mashad up to Chaknehar, here in the Arabian Sea." I was asked, "How can you know, we discussed it only yesterday with Gorbachov?" I said, "Yes, but I discovered the blueprint of this railway, made by Russian experts in 1901, in the archives."

So many current ideas also existed at this time, you are right. I will send you a book of my daughter's doctoral thesis, on the Iranian railway. The British tried to stop the building of railways through Iran, because of this trans-Asian railway. As a result, up to 1928, Iran did not have railways, because of this Russian-British controversy, and all the activity of the British geopolitical school! You are right. Afghanistan, up to today, has no railways. It is correct, but the epoch is totally different. If the French and Germans invest in Central Asia using the railway, you may be sure that the British will run behind.

## Algerian opposition meets in London

by Dean Andromidas

On March 22, representatives of the Algerian opposition, as well as political figures from Morocco and Tunisia, held a seminar in London. Not a negotiating session, the event was organized around a presentation by Maître Al Yahia Abdenour, president of the Algerian League for Human Rights. The Algerian participants had attended a conference of opposition leaders in Rome in January, and their aim was to present the case, developed at the Rome conference, for a political dialogue to find a solution to the Algerian civil war, to the extensive Arab media based in London. The seminar also aimed at presenting the Algerian opposition case before British public opinion and policymakers.

Although sponsored by the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), the home of the British Crown's foreign policy establishment, it was in fact the initiative of the Center for Maghreb Studies, whose director is former Algerian Prime Minister Dr. Abdehamid Brahimia (see *EIR*, Dec. 9, 1994, for an interview with him).

Among those in attendance were Cheikh Abdallah Djaballah, president of the Nahdha Islamic Movement; Louisa Hannoun, secretary general of the Algerian Workers Party; and Ahmed Ben Bella, former President of Algeria. Although London-based members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) attended, Anwar Haddam, the official FIS representative to the Rome conference and currently based in Washington, was denied a visa by the British Foreign Office. The Algerian government refused to allow Abdelhamid Mehri, general secretary of the National Liberation Front (FLN), to leave Algeria. Political leaders from Morocco attending included Dr. Mohamed Boucetta, former minister of foreign affairs and leader of the Al-Istiqlal Party; Mohamed Al-Yazighi, acting general secretary of the Popular Union of Socialist Forces; Dr. Abdelkrim Al-Khatib, a former minister said to be close to King Hassan II and to the Islamist movement in Morocco. From Tunisia, participants included former Prime Minister Mohamed M'zali; former minister Ahmed Ben Salah; and Dr. Cheikh Ghanouchi, leader of the An-Nahdha, the Islamic party of Tunisia.

### Indictment of the Algerian regime

In his presentation, Abdennour called for implementing the National Contract that was drawn up at the Rome confer-