THE EFFECTS OF THE EUROPA CANAL RHINE-MAIN-DANUBE ON HUNGARIAN INLAND NAVIGATION

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Introduction

The theme of this paper is goods-transport on the Danube, and associated Hungarian geographical problems. The opening of the Elbe(lateral) Canal has initiated these developments, and within ten years the Europa Canal may be open. Both canals will be of fundamental importance to West Germany, a country within which inland navigation is a well developed branch of transport, but will present possibilities and concomitant difficulties over a far-wider area.

The Danube waterway suitable for large barges has a length of 2379 kms, touching or crossing eight states. It is the most international of all rivers, used in 1974 by vessels of 24 nations. The Danube catchment has a population of 80 million. In terms of length, the Danube is the second river of Europe, but in terms of freight the third. Generally the Danube waterway is seen to consist of three stretches: Upper Danube, Regensburg to Gönyü 588 kms; Middle Danube, Gönyü to Turnu Severin 860 kms, Lower Danube, Turnu Severin to Sulina 931 kms.

1. The Significance of the Rhine-Main-Danube (RMD) Waterway for Inland Navigation in the Countries of the Danube-Basin

The building of the waterway presents geographers with a range of research themes. The RMD will be a transcontinental waterway 3505.2 kms long, 68.8 % of which will be Danube. With the increase in freight the Danube will have a more dynamic role, losing its present rather backward condition. Obviously there will be no through freight between the two end points, Rotterdam and Sulina. The locks will ensure that sea connection between the two will remain quicker and cheaper.

According to the United Nations Europe Committee, by the year 2000, inland navigation will be the most important branch of transport in terms of freight tonnage. The RMD will belong to category IV, providing a reliable route for transport of bulk goods between the Rhine Valley and the Danube, in particular between North Rhine-Westphalia and the Danube. The Danubian lands, characterised by a rapid industrialization, will thus have closer ties with the Rhinelands.

The ties will involve peoples of differing social and economic circumstances. Countries of Central Europe, like Hungary in lacking direct access to the oceans, will be able to reach the greatest port, serving the busiest part of the world ocean. The technology of the Rhine fleets is bound to affect Danubian shipping,(Heinrich, 1974/75).

It is exceedingly difficult to analyse the various effects of this great waterway. There are many authors who argue that since the whole of the new linkage is in West Germany, the use is likely to be national rather than international. The conditions for usage can be determined by West Germany, as is natural. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the waterway can be given an international character. The Rhenish fleet has in general higher tariffs than apply in the peoples democracies of the Danubian region. The effect of this difference must be considered.

It is to be emphasized that the lack of judicial and economic knowledge should not lead to an avoidance of the question. An international conference should consider all the problems in order that the eastern wing of the RMD can develop without disturbance, and the two parts united as a functioning whole.

In view of the geographical distance, it appears logical that the Europa Canal will be of most value (apart from West Germany) to the nearer countries, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Russia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania are more peripheral, and have direct access to the sea. For the more peripheral countries Regensburg and the transhipment point at Kelheim will remain the furthest point reached. This will be particularly true for Yugoslavia which can dispatch bulk goods to Western Europe from the Adriatic.

The rapid completion of the canal construction between Nuremberg and Regensburg is of the utmost importance to Austria, and the Austrians have themselves undertaken engineering works to improve the RMD waterway, ready for the expected stimulus to traffic. For the VOEST works at Linz large quantities of coke, coal and ore are moved along the Danube. When the canal is finished this material can be received without transhipment at Regensburg, affecting a savings of 20–30 % of the freight costs. Austria will probably contribute about 5 million tons of freight to the waterway, and the canal will therefore play a decisive role in the transport situation of Austria,(Fekete, 1972).
Czechoslovakia is also preparing for the eventuality that its river vessels will be able to reach the busiest waterway on earth, that is the Rhine. The harbour installations at Bratislava and Komarno will be increased, particularly the first named. In 1975 its capacity was already 2 million tons. A further installation was begun at Palenisko in 1975, which when completed in 1985 will lift the tonnage to 8 million. The capacity at Komarno is being increased to 4 million tons of cargo.

The European economic committees, and those of Czechoslovakia, are exploring a possible link between Danube, Oder and Elbe, and the large-scale extensions of Bratislava are planned for this. Preparation for the advantages deriving from a Danube-Elbe link is necessary. The country is already using the Elbe with systematic freight transport between Deén and Hamburg.

2. The Geographical Situation of Hungary, Central to the RMD Waterway

A new geographical stimulus will derive from this central position. The midway point on the RMD will be at Dunakalmás only 105 km from Budapest, Fig 1. The diagram shows that Hungary will have equal access to the sea in both directions, to Rotterdam and to Sulina. This possibility will open a new route for Hungarian external trade, direct freight without transhipment to the Rhineland and Rotterdam. Hungary exported in 1974 three million tons by sea, 96% by foreign vessels, (Kovács, 1974b). In 1985 Hungary will be able to reach two busy ports by barge. With an increase in Hungarian shipping an increasing quantity of goods can be dispatched further, to the traditional market of the Levant, and to the Atlantic. The goods for external trade can go to and from the ports by motorized barge, thus relieving the burden on the Hungarian road and rail net.

A further stimulus derives from the east-west orientation of the Danube waterway. This is exceptional for Europe in that the rivers suitable for barge traffic such as the Rhine, Weser, Elbe and Oder are directed northward. This advantage in orientation gives an opportunity to and places a duty upon the nations of the Danube Valley. In Hungary and along the whole Danube, the provision for freight transport is constantly increasing. We try to remove all hindrances to such movement, indeed to promote it by all means possible.

From the geographical situation of Hungary, two further important points arise.

a) The Danube and the Tisza only cross Hungary. They rise elsewhere and do not reach their base of erosion within Hungary. The various problems that result include: water pollution, water supply, high water danger, and securement of agreement with neighbouring states for prospective water works.

b) The basin character of the country. The fall of the rivers, having their sources in the Carpathians, is gentle within the Pannonian Basin, and there is a possibility that flood crests will overtake each other. Means can be taken to expedite the movement of flood crests, but the crests can be long lasting for the reason noted above, as for example, when flood crests on the Tisza and the Maros coincide. The crest of high water shows similar dangers and because of woodland clearance plus stream regulation, this has an increasing tendency. At Szeged the high water level of the Tisza has grown from 1867 to 1970 by 239 cm, (Degen,