

BREST ROAD - THE ORIGIN AND IMPORTANCE

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The vast plans for the economic development of the Kingdom of Poland launched in the first 15 years of its existence called for the establishment of an adequate transport infrastructure. The development of industry and especially the anticipated growth of trade made it urgent to build roads and bridges.¹ The legacy of the Polish republic of noblemen and the subsequent period of Napoleonic wars was the disastrous condition of the roads, especially during the spring melting of snow. The maintenance of roads carried out by the landowners with the use of mandatory work of their tenants did not help much. The fast growing transport of people and goods required better roads so as to increase speed and reduce costs. At the time, the available technology consisted in paving the roads with broken stone. Initial attempts to keep the existing roads in better condition and build new ones while relying on obligatory labor did not produce the desired results. Also the replacement of that labor with road tax hardly turned the situation round. In these circumstances, the matter had to be tackled by the government of the Kingdom and by local authorities. A problem of nationwide importance such as this had to be addressed at the central level. In the 1820s, the Government Commission for Internal Affairs and the Police of the Kingdom of Poland launched a huge road-building program, involving the construction of a network of paved roads radiating out of Warsaw toward Kalisz, Cracow, Lublin and Kaunas. The Brest road was one element of the system, leading east to the Russian Empire, connecting Poland to Lithuania, Russia and more distant routes of the Empire, running all the way to the Far East.

The decision to go ahead with this new transport project was taken by the Kingdom authorities in 1818, when the Industry and Crafts Board of the Government Internal Affairs and Police Commission was headed by Stanisław Staszic, an advocate of the industrialization of the country. Road-building works began during the same year. The new route was to link Warsaw with Brest-Litovsk along the shortest line, via Siedlce, a town that until then was bypassed by major transit routes. In the early years of the 19th century a trip from Warsaw to Siedlce took the traveler through Grochów, Okuniew, Stanisławów, Grębków, Niwiski and Chodów.² The new road was to shorten the distance and journey time considerably, tying Podlasie's provincial towns via Siedlce to the main route leading east. From Siedlce, post roads radiated out to Łuków, Sokołów, Węgrów, Żelechów and Łosice. An important consideration in mapping out the route that way was the fact that at the beginning of the 19th century Siedlce became an important administrative center: since 1810 it was the seat of the Siedlce department and from 1815 of Podlasie voivodship.

Little can be said about the course of the work itself as only fragmentary records have been preserved. The project was executed under the supervision of Franciszek Ksawery Christiani (1771-1842), Director General for Roads and Bridges of the

Kingdom of Poland. The work started in 1818. In 1820, the first section reached Siedlce and this started a change in the town planning appearance of the city. The freshly paved Rozniecka street, leading in the direction of Warsaw, became the central avenue of the town. Also Floriańska street gained in importance.³ From Siedlce the new road ran via Biała to Terespol, a government town situated on the left bank of the Bug. From here it was to continue across the river to Brest. The whole project, a road paved with stone, 178 staje (about 200 kilometers) long and 7 fathoms (12.5 meters) wide, was completed in 1823.

The completion of the work was commemorated with the striking of two commemorative medals and the erection of a monument funded by Stanisław Staszic. The ceremony of unveiling the cast-iron obelisk in Grochów, at what now is the convergence of Grochowska and Podskarbinska streets, took place on May 25, 1825. This peculiar monument to labor conveyed an apotheosis of labor unseen in Polish art until that time, along with views of the main cities situated along the route: Warsaw, Siedlce, and Brest, depicted in bas reliefs by Paweł Maliński (1790-1853). On November 10 of the same year, a replica of the Warsaw monument was unveiled at the far end of the road, in Terespol.⁴

The execution of such huge road-building projects required huge expenditures. As a result, on July 23, 1829, for example, the Government Internal Affairs and Police Commission took a loan for the construction of completion of five more surfaced roads leading out of Warsaw from Bank Polski:⁵

- the Cracow road, via Radom and Kielce;
- the Lublin road, via Puławy, and extending beyond Lublin to Zamość and Tomaszów Lubelski,
- the Volhynia-Silesia road, via Puławy, Radom and Piotrków;
- the so-called "factory" road, from Warsaw to Kalisz via Łowicz, Zgierz, Łódź and Sieradz;
- the Gdansk road, via Modlin and Toruń.

The plans envisaged the completion of construction of these roads in a space of five years. The total amount of loans was 14 million złoty, and unit cost was about 100,000 złoty per mile.⁶ By the end of 1830, Bank Polski spent a little over 2.5 million złoty on these projects. Some 1,000 kilometers of surfaced roads were built by that time.⁷ The work also involved the felling of forests and building of bridges. The work was contracted out to private enterprises. They hired huge numbers of workers and the labor of villeins was also used. "These works were a great benefit for the people deprived of income by disasters of various kinds, especially the laborers of cloth factories from small towns, who had to look for means of subsistence by building the roads."⁸ Also the army sapper units took part in the work on a big scale. The work continued also after 1831.

Investment in industry and transport was conducive to the growth of trade. Thanks to the reciprocally privileged tariffs between the Kingdom and the Empire, the value of trade between them rose by 74 percent, from 19 million złoty in 1821 to 33 million in 1829. As in the past, the Kingdom imported mainly farm produce and cotton and

exported cloth to the Russian and the Chinese market. As much as two-thirds of the total cloth production was exported to Russia. Nonetheless, the value of imports was 9 million złoty higher than that of exports.⁹ Goods carried on the Brest road accounted for a significant part of that trade. However, the development of both domestic and foreign trade was hampered by the lack of proper organization and of capital. In addition, the condition of the roads, still quite poor on the whole, increased transportation costs. The combination of the dependence on distant markets and low domestic demand was responsible for frequent recessions, which adversely affected the position of the poorest laborers in particular.

The November 1830 uprising and the Russian reprisals that followed demonstrated the huge military importance of that route. The Russian army led by Field Marshal Ivan Dybich advanced along the Brest and Kaunas routes into the Kingdom and Siedlce, situated along the strategic communication line, became an operations center. On April 10, 1831, the nearby Iganie was the scene of a victorious battle of Polish units commanded by Ignacy Prądzyński.¹⁰ On many more historical occasions would this road serve as the route of aggression against Poland, especially Polish independence movements, coming from the east. The same route, but in the opposite direction, was traveled by thousands of Poles deported from the Kingdom to Siberian exile. Between 1841 and 1844, a large prison was built in Siedlce, the seat of the guberniya authorities.

The reprisals following the collapse of the November 1830 uprising involved the construction of fortresses and numerous fortifications in the Kingdom. The construction of the fort in Brest made it necessary to move the buildings of the town of Terespol to a more distant place on both sides of the surfaced road and, in the early 1850s, the movement of the customs post on the approach road from Koenigsberg.¹¹

As he pursued the plan for a gradual integration of the Kingdom with Russia, at the beginning of 1851 Tsar Nicholas I abolished the customs border, incorporating the Congress Kingdom into the Russians customs zone.¹² For the Polish industry this meant easier access to large markets and huge development prospects, provided there were efficient transport and communications.

The economic development of the Kingdom of Poland and especially the military considerations that were so important for the occupying power made it urgent to consider the construction of railways in the region already in the early 1860s. This was to be the Warsaw-Terespol line, running more or less parallel to the Brest road, via Minsk Mazowiecki (Nowomińsk), Siedlce, Łuków and Biła. In 1861, railway investor Jan Gotlib Bloch (1836-1902) began campaigning for a slice of the project. However, it was only after the January 1863, in 1864, that the Administrative Council consented to the establishment of the Warsaw-Terespol Railway Stock Society. The Society was set up in the same year by the famous banker Leopold Kronenberg (1812-1878) and a group of partners.¹³ The Society was to build the railway and reap the profits from its operation for the next 75 years. Field work began in the spring of 1865 and station buildings were built during 1866 in Warsaw's Praga district. Miłosna, Mińsk, Mrozy, Kotuń, Siedlce, Łuków, Międzyrzec, Chotyłów and Terespol, along with train stops in Dębe Wielkie and

Szaniawy and with other facilities. The work was managed and supervised by the English contractors Vignoles and Brassey. They were also supposed to supply the rails and rolling stock. In the end, however, Lt. Col. Tadeusz Chrzanowski, from the corps of engineers, became the head designer and technical director of the project and its actual execution was entrusted to Warsaw businessmen Henryk Reichman and Emanuel Wolf. With the exception of the Praga station, all other station buildings were designed by Ing. Alfred Kropiwnicki.¹⁴

The formal opening of the Warsaw-Terespol Railway took place on September 5/18, 1867.¹⁵ The first stretch, from Praga to Terespol, had a total length of 199 verst and 227 fathoms (212.7 kilometers). The second section, from Terespol to Brest, which crossed the Bug and bypassed the fort, was opened on January 2, 1871 and was 5 verst 375 fathoms long. There it joined the Moscow-Brest line. The line ran on an embankment, accommodating two wide-gauge tracks, and 41 bridges. In this way the line, starting in Praga, on the right bank of the Vistula, crossed the Warsaw and Siedlce guberniyas and ended in Grodno guberniya, connecting Polish lands with the chief European rail routes of the Russian Empire.

Brest thus became a huge rail and road junction, a place where the Kiev-Brest line converged with the Moscow-Brest line and the Brest-Grajewo line, which ran to the Prussian border via Grajewo. In Białystok, the Brest-Grajewo line crossed the Warsaw-Petersburg line. In addition, the town was also a major junction of the Vistula, Bug and Dnieper waterways, linked by the Royal Canal stretching between Brest and Pinsk.¹⁶

The Warsaw-Terespol railway quickly became an important link that furthered the integration of the Kingdom and the Empire and indeed a transit route of European significance. Feliks Filipek, an authority on the history of that railway, established that the main kinds of cargo carried eastward to Brest were industrial products of the Kingdom, such as sugar, paints, agricultural machines, yarn, cotton, metal products, rails, paper, books, canvas, cloth and woolen goods as well as some goods of mineral origin, e.g., zinc, tin, salt and coal. The products shipped from Brest to Praga were chiefly grain, steppe cattle, pigs, peas, tallow, flour, ropes, linseed, timber, groats, flax and hemp, hair, bristle, hides and wool.¹⁷

Right from the start, this line was also immensely important from the military point of view, connecting as it did the centers of Tsarist rule with the system of strongholds and fortifications built in the Kingdom on the right bank of the Vistula. The statistics concerning military transports are quite characteristic: already in 1877, a total of 164,500 soldiers and recruits were carried along the line, followed by 156,700 a year later and 102,000 in 1879.¹⁸ Each year, the railway carried nearly 5,000 army vehicles. Passenger and freight traffic was rising steadily all the time, until the outbreak of World War I. The line's importance, especially military importance, was the reason why fairly recently, already in 1881, the Warsaw-Terespol Railway was bought out by the government.

Nevertheless, in the transport system of East-Central Europe of those times, Warsaw did not become a great focal point of transit connections between the Russian Empire, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Under an agreement on transport, signed by the

Russian and German governments in 1875, over the heads of Polish rail companies, Warsaw was the last station for lines of various gauge, ending at various terminals. The complicated marshalling and reloading of trains took up so much time that exporters and huge transport enterprises shunned transit shipments via Warsaw. Also passengers had to change trains and stations in Warsaw, using a narrow-gauge circle line or horse-drawn carriages and carts.

Despite these inconveniences, the Warsaw-Terespol railway was a profitable undertaking, confirming the possibility of making big profits. During the first fifteen years of operation, the combined revenue was 19.9 million roubles while expenditures totaled 13.7 million, leaving a profit of 6,180,760 roubles.¹⁹ An especially big growth of revenue occurred in the years 1876-77, when shipments increased significantly, reflecting the faster economic growth of the country. The construction and operation of the line gave rise to many fortunes. The railway offered jobs and financial stability to numerous employees and their families. The animated trade was the source of prosperity for towns and villages situated near the route.

Notwithstanding the formal obstacles, the transit importance of the route was unquestionable.²⁰ With varying degree of success, it served as a link between the industrialized western Europe and the huge market of the Empire as well as the Far Eastern markets, contributing to economic (especially commercial) enlivening of adjacent areas and the development of big and small towns, capitalizing on the buoyant trade. This was followed by the classic capitalist transformations in the society, the emergence of bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.²¹

The fundamental commercial and military significance of the Brest road and the parallel railway continued in the 20th century, despite the stormy political changes: the fall of the Russian Empire, the establishment of the USSR and its subsequent disintegration, the regaining of independence by Poland and subsequently by Belarus. The fronts of two world wars rolled through the region. During the second, a great "battle of the rails" was fought here by the resistance movement, which staged numerous subversive acts.²² The railway frequently required extensive repairs and after the war it was modernised.²³ The old Brest road is now part of the state road of the first category, the E8, running from Frankfurt on the Oder and Słubice via Poznań and Warsaw while the railway line, also running from Frankfurt/Oder and Kunowice is electrified along the whole route. As in the 19th century, it is a segment of a huge transcontinental route crossing Europe from west to east, toward eastern and central Asia.²⁴ It serves the development of international cooperation and civilisational progress. For several generations, this route has witnessed a rivalry between peaceful and military goals. It should be hoped that in integrating Europe, the considerations of international cooperation would play a decisive role in the operation and modernisation of this historic route.

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НЕОБХОДИМОСТЬ ТРАНСГРАНИЧНОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА В УСЛОВИЯХ ПЕРЕХОДНОЙ ЭКОНОМИКИ

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Изучение макроэкономических процессов, происходящих в последние годы в европейских странах показало, что в большинстве случаев упор делается на развитие приграничного сотрудничества. Такой вид сотрудничества особенно важен для Республики Беларусь. Наша республика имеет очень выгодное геополитическое положение. Ориентация Польши на Европейский союз, а Беларуси на Россию и другие страны СНГ может сыграть очень важную роль в отошении между ними и третьими странами.

В настоящее время экономические процессы, происходящие в Республике Беларусь стимулируют к развитию трансграничного сотрудничества. Это вызвано тем, что в приграничных районах как в Республике Польша, так и у нас проживают сообщества людей, у которых тесно переплетаются исторические, национальные и этнические корни. Достаточно крепки и родственные связи. Поэтому, независимо от развития политических систем, эти регионы нуждаются во взаимном развитии и углублении связей.

По итогам прошлого года доля польского направления во внешнеторговом обороте нашей республики занимала четвертое место. Ведущую роль в этом сыграли западные регионы. В то же время при небольшом росте общего товарооборота следует отметить снижение белорусского экспорта (около 20%).

Некоторые экономисты с отрицательной стороны отмечают восточную направленность белорусской экономики, в том числе внешнеторговую деятельность. В то же время это обстоятельство может сыграть исключительную роль. Наши западные регионы могли бы сыграть посредническую роль между Польшей и странами СНГ. При решении этой задачи большое значение должны сыграть еврорегионы и свободные экономические зоны. Если в еврорегион «Неман» входит Гродненская область, а так же Сувалкское воеводство и западные воеводства Литвы, то Брестская область в прошлом году заявила о своем согласии в присоединении к сврорегиону «Буг», в который входят четыре района восточных польских воеводств, а также Волынская область от Украины. В соответствии с заключительными договорами активными субъектами сотрудничества являются органы местного самоуправления и местной государственной администрации, что дает возможность оперативно решать многие вопросы сотрудничества. Хороший тому пример создания Польшей палаты по торговому и экономическому