

## 4. TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Despite the radical changes in the transport sector during the 1990s, the transport infrastructure in Bulgaria, including the infrastructure in the border areas, started to slowly improve as late as the end of the decade. During 2004, this infrastructure was still inadequate to the traffic load, and impeded the efficient control over the passing vehicles and the trans-border trade. The planned concession of airports and sea ports to private companies will further complicate control in the transport sector.

From a geographical point of view, the popular metaphors of Bulgaria as “the heart of the Balkans,” and the “crossroads between Europe and Asia” are well-justified. From a transport point of view, it means that five of the ten main European corridors pass through Bulgaria.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the favorable geo-political characteristics, there is no well-developed transport network on the territory of Bulgaria, nor is there one in the Balkan region as a whole. This follows from a number of geographical, historical, political, economic, and specifically transport-related circumstances. Most of all, the general backwardness of the Balkan Peninsula as compared to Western Europe has a negative impact on the condition of transport services in the region.

The economic potential of Bulgarian neighbors (Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Romania, Turkey, and Greece) comprises only 1.1% of the world’s gross domestic product. These countries participate in only about 10–12% of the overall foreign trade of Bulgaria.<sup>41</sup>

One of the circumstances that may have contributed to the underdevelopment of the transport system in Bulgaria is probably the peculiar geographic location of the country. The majority of the territory is occupied by mountains, which especially dominate the borders with Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey. Another factor is the geo-strategic position of Bulgaria during the Cold War period. It was the Bulgarian state, which was used by the Warsaw Pact countries to counter the southeastern flank of NATO—i.e. Greece and Turkey. During that period, the borders with these two neighbors, as well as sectors of the border with some parts of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, were blocked by barbed wire and further separated by a border ditch, while the respective border zones on the territory of Bulgaria were placed under a special security regime.

<sup>40</sup> Corridor **No. 4**: Warsaw–Bucharest or Budapest–Sofia–the Mediterranean. The end points of that corridor could be presented in several variants: Constantza, Istanbul, or Thessaloniki; **No. 7**: the Danube Water Route; **No. 8**: Bourgas (Varna)–Skopje–Tirana–Duras; **No. 9**: Moscow (Kiev)–Bucharest–Veliko Turnovo (Gorna Oryahovitsa)–Dimitrovgrad (Haskovo)–Kardzhali–Alexandropolis; **No. 10**: Berlin (Munich)–Vienna–Budapest–Belgrade–Nish–Sofia (Athens, Thessaloniki)–Istanbul. (See, *Railway Transport Magazine*, 2003, No. 2, p. 8).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Although there do not exist any particular political reasons, the trans-border transport to the north is restricted in a natural way by the river Danube, which serves as a boundary between Romania and Bulgaria. An exemplary illustration of the underdevelopment of trans-border transport in that area of the river where Romania, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine are situated is the fact that only four of all 104 bridges over the Danube are located in that sector of the river, and of those four only one connects Bulgaria and Romania (the bridge Rousse–Gyurgevo).

## 4.1. ROAD AND RAILWAY BORDER CROSSING POINTS

### *Trans-border Connections*

The modernization of the transport infrastructure is an important element of the strategy for Bulgaria's accession to the European Union. The main goal of the general European transport policy is the establishment of sustainable and efficient transport systems, which would be able to satisfy the social, economic and environmental needs of the population, while also contributing to the increase of the competitiveness of European business on the world markets.<sup>42</sup>

In compliance with the main EU directives regarding the integration of the road infrastructure. The Bulgarian government approved a *National Program for Construction and Development of the Road Network in Bulgaria*. The section of the document titled "Trans-border Transitions" envisages rehabilitation of the currently existing trans-border roads and construction of new road connections, in full accord with the policies for accession of Bulgaria and opening of its borders to the neighboring countries.

Three more road connections with Greece are planned for construction: Gotse Delchev–Drama, Rudozem–Ksanti, and Kardzhali–Makaza, in addition to the envisaged rehabilitation of the existing roads Kulata–Promahonas and Novo Selo–Ormenion. The new roads and the reconstruction of the old connections are expected to have a positive economic impact for the border region.

Three new roads with Macedonia are also planned for construction: Simitli–Pehchevo, Tsaparevo–Klepalo, and Nevestino–Delchevo. These roads, similarly to some existing border crossings, are mainly local, servicing the territories adjacent to the border, and are less associated with the process of intensification of European commercial relations. Some of the current roads are almost unusable during the winter. There is also a project in place for expanding of the current border crossings.

A new road connection with Serbia and Montenegro is also expected to be opened between Salash (Belogradchik region) and Novo Korito. A rehabilitation of the existing three road connections by land with Romania is also planned, as well as construction of new roads near Kraishte–Dumbroven. The new transit zone with Turkey at Lessovo–Hamzabeili is soon to be officially opened for traffic. Reconstruction of the existing roads with Turkey is also planned.

<sup>42</sup> The European policy in this sphere comprises the progressive liberalization of transport markets, the reduction of the inconsistencies in the EU regulations and ordinances concerning transport and the facilitation of transit through border crossing points (See *Railway Transport Magazine* No. 7-8, 1999, p. 4).

### **The Border Crossings and the Increasing Risks**

The increase of trade flows through the Bulgarian borders calls not only for modernization of the transport infrastructure, but also for opening of a number of new border crossings. Some of the major projects for improving of the infrastructure are: completion of the national highway ring with parallel construction of detours to Vidin, Rousse, Svilengrad, and Kulata; building of bridges and ferryboat complexes along the Danube river; construction of a tunnel at the Shipchenski mountain passage; equipment of the new border crossings alongside the borders with Romania, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey.<sup>43</sup> The opening of the border crossing with Greece (at Makaza), with Turkey (at Lessovo), and with Romania (at the future bridge over the Danube at the town of Vidin) will substantially facilitate the movement of commodity flows.

Apart from the **budget restrictions**, the modernization of the transport infrastructure of Bulgaria is related with the solving of **foreign policy issues**. Bulgaria's neighboring countries have tended to implement transport policies that consistently attempt to divert trade and cargo flows towards the routes that pass through their own territories.<sup>44</sup> As a result of the bad condition of the Bulgaria roads, the long lines of vehicles, and the corruption at the border crossings, a significant number of the international carriers prefer to use more indirect and roundabout routes, while also opting for less wear and tear and more secure shipments.<sup>45</sup>

The slow crossing of Bulgarian borders is partially a consequence of the multi-staged border control. The procedure requires trucks to go through five separate control points. In the cases when the cargo does not contain any animal or vegetable products, there are only three border control points, but even then the procedure is too lengthy and slows down the passing of the border crossing. This problem is not only about the efficiency of the work. The delays and the cumbersome processing procedure create conditions for corruption. As a result, major transport flows are redirected towards neighboring states.

The Appendix *Risk Profiles of Border Crossing Points* presents conclusions from research carried out at two land border crossings—Kulata and Kapitan Andreevo. The main identified **infrastructure risks** were the following:

- The high number of commercial sites (gas stations, duty-free shops, banks, customs consultancies, etc.) allows easy access to the border zone of many people and goods;

<sup>43</sup> Marin Russev. "The Transport Blockade of Bulgaria", *Railway Transport Magazine*, No. 2, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Romania attempts to redirect corridor No. 4, so that it passes by the city of Constantza; Serbia upholds the Moravian–Vardar alternative of corridor No. 10 going towards Thessaloniki and Athens (the justifications provided by Belgrade about the natural obstacles that hinder the construction of a highway connection between Nish and Sofia are very symptomatic in this respect); utilizing funds provided by the European Union, Greece "reconstructs" the so-called "Via Egnatia" (the ancient Roman road, which serves as baseline of corridor No. 8), but, strangely enough, is doing that much more to the south and completely on Greek territory; Russia, together with Ukraine and the former Caucasus and Central Asian Soviet republics, supports the traditional Black Sea route utilized for their contacts with the Mediterranean countries. (Ibid.)

<sup>45</sup> A recording of the meeting with representatives of AEBTRI held on 1 December, 2003.

- The distribution of the various border control booths requires the drivers to stop and leave their vehicles several times;
- Traffic jams and long lines create a stressful atmosphere used by corrupt border officials to let through illicit shipments. Traffic jams enhance corruption pressure on border officers since drivers offer bribes for faster processing of their trucks;
- The narrow lanes and the lack of parking lots cause bottlenecks, place the drivers under pressure as they are late for their deliveries, and create conditions for them to try to pay a bribe;
- Inadequate equipment, especially lack of security video cameras and x-ray screening devices makes efficient border control difficult;
- The inadequate lighting and fencing of the border crossing points also makes the work of the border police more difficult.

## 4.2. SEA PORTS AND AIRPORTS

The most worrying finding is that **not all ports and airports possess fully operational border crossing points**. For example, the airport at the town of Gorna Oryahovitsa only has a border control, while the customs control service is “on call,” i.e. the customs officials are generally stationed in the district customs office and not within the limits of the airport complex. Under certain circumstances, this situation may facilitate the transportation of smuggled goods and the concealment of re-exported commodities.

There is yet another problem: **at many airports and seaports, apart from the official border crossing points, there are also other entry points**. A good illustration is the situation at Sofia Airport, which is the most important center for air transport in Bulgaria. There are several entry points operating at Sofia Airport. There is, however, no customs or border control at all of these entry points and the security police act as the only supervision there. The security police officers, though, do not possess the necessary professional control or technical equipment to carry out proper control over transported goods, neither do they have the responsibility to implement such functions because this would be contradictory to the existing legislative regulations. There is a necessity for introduction of a well-defined control mechanism that would impose certain duties on the manager of the storage area and would enforce a strict set of regulations and precise formulation of the procedure “entering the customs area.”

**There is a substantial number of people who possess permits giving them privileged access to the zones of border and customs control**. This is still another condition for committing violations. According to some estimates, the number of people who have permits to access border and customs control zones is between 18,000 and 20,000.

Smuggling activities may also involve the participation or assistance of people who have access to or work at the zones for aircraft maintenance, those with access to the airport gates and airport service facilities, as well as the aircraft crew, the

administrative staff of the airport, the air traffic controllers, the officials from the MoI and the customs services, the aviation and other operators of airport activities, security services officers, and the border police guards and national police officers. Indiscriminate access of persons and vehicles in the airport area may result in illicit transfer of goods through the guarded security zones, their entrances/exits and the airport fence.

**The security problems of seaports are much more serious than those of airports** because seaports have much more complicated infrastructures. The complex transport network at seaports includes railway, automobile, and sea transport. Apart from that, seaports are within or near the limits of towns and cities, a fact that creates additional obstacles for the implementation of relevant security services.

The Appendix to the report presents a detailed picture of the risks of smuggling at the seaports of Varna East and Varna West and partially at the seaport Lesport. The main infrastructure risks identified there include:

- Lack of adequate fencing and electronic surveillance systems;
- Lack of a strict regime for entering and, especially, exiting the border crossing zone;
- Lack of complete radar coverage or electronic surveillance in parts of the Varna Lake zone;
- Absence of x-ray devices for inspection of containers;
- Cumbersome coast-guarding system and insufficient number of patrol boats for exerting strict border or customs control.

Some of the reasons for the lack of the above-mentioned procedures and equipment are related to the fact that seaports—as opposed to the land border crossings—are legal entities. Most seaport security is provided by the Ministry of Transport and Communications and subcontracted to private security firms. The upcoming concessions of sea ports will further complicate the situation because relations will be between a private entity and the state.