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## **COMMUNICATION CONNECTIONS BETWEEN POLAND, LITHUANIA, KALININGRAD REGION AND BELORUSSIA**

After 1989, far reaching changes in geopolitical situation took place in Central and Eastern Europe. A new geopolitical situation, as embodied in changes of borders of countries, formations of new countries and restitution of previously existing countries have broken existing economic connections, especially some trade routes and communication connections. The range of the hinterland of the Baltic Sea ports have also changed. New economic needs and geopolitical circumstances have necessitated the making of alternative and even new manifestations in carriage and transit.

The achieved independence by the Belorussian Republic and the Republic of Lithuania has ceased direct land connection between Russia and its Kaliningrad region. A quite important role in the carriage system is reserved for Poland, with its transit connections, precisely because of the respective geopolitical and geographical situation. For ages, Poland has been a kind of 'bridge' for West Europe and Russia, maybe even Far East as well. Therefore, there is a main carriage and transit corridor across Poland which links Russia, Europe and Far East (LIJEWSKI, 1994).

"The experience teaches us that the geopolitical aspect has the all-important role when we are talking about transport infrastructure. We cannot ignore this role and think it was only in the past and not in the present. And we should understand how important it is for the future" (PISKOZUB, 1994).

The geopolitical situation of Belorussia - in spite of its official freedom - is highly unfortunate. The lack of having access to sea forces Belorussia to send all its loads to the Baltic Sea ports or instead sending them by land via Poland, Lithuania or to the South, via Ukraine. At the same time, a main parallel transit corridor of Europe goes across Belorussia and links Paris-Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk and Moscow. Therefore, having influence on Belorussia is a top geopolitical issue for Russia (ROŚCISZEWSKI, 1994), something which can clearly be noticed in the relations between the two countries, especially under the Presidency of Mr. A. Lukaszenko. The deep economic crisis in Belorussia and its dependence on Russian gas and petrol, together with the pro-Moscow politics of the Belorussian President, are taking this country to the total economic subjection of Russia. In addition, Belorussia has an important meaning for Russia because the shortest transit connections with Lithuania, Poland and Kaliningrad is just through there, in Belorussian territory. And the Kaliningrad region is one of the most important and also the biggest military base of the Russian Federation. Consequently, it not only makes economic but also military sense.

The North-East of Poland's territory is also of importance for carriage from Lithuania. The carriage corridor not only links up with Lithuania, but also provides a transit way, connecting Finland, via Tallin-Riga-Kowno to the direction of Warsaw. In the trade and transit system of the Kaliningrad region, the importance of waterways has also increased in the Vistula Bay, more specifically the part from Elbląg to Kaliningrad. Thus, the North-East Region of Poland which borders with Russia via Kaliningrad, Lithuania and Belorussia, apart from some local economic connections, plays a great role in the carriage and the transit system of connections because of the geopolitical circumstances in the above-mentioned countries.

At the present time, there are twelve border/road passages and nine railway passages on the Polish border with Belorussia, Lithuania and the Kaliningrad region

Table 1. Trans-border infrastructure of carriage on the Polish border in 1994

Polish border with:	The length of the border (in km)	Number of roads passages (left) generally accessible (right)		Number of railway lines crossing the border (left) generally accessible (right)	
Belorussia	407.47	8	2	5	3
Lithuania	102.41	2	1	1	1
Russia	209.73	2	2	3	1

Source: Komornicki, 1995, p. 47.

The following belong to the most important railway passages communications: Braniewo, which is on the Polish-Russian border; Trakiszki on the Polish-Lithuanian border; and Kuźnica Białostocka, Czeremcha and Terespol on the Belorussian border. To the main generally approachable and operational road border passages on the Russian border belong: Bezledy, on the Lithuania border; Ogrodniki and Kuźnica Białostocka and Terespol on the Belorussian border. The carriage corridor via Kuźnica leads into the direction of St. Petersburg, via Terespol and towards Moscow. The carriage infrastructure of Lithuania, Belorussia and the Kaliningrad region, which includes the railway and road connections, is weaker developed in comparison to the Polish side. Its development depends on the economic and geopolitical situation.

The lack of access to sea forces Belorussia to transit all cargoes to the Baltic ports or to the Ukrainian Black Sea ports. Some border problems with Lithuania, irregularly observed mutual obligations with Russia and Ukraine, and little possibilities for Latvian carriage, indicates that Poland and its ports are the main transit partner of Belorussia. The deep economic crisis, which can make Belorussia dependent on Russia, can be noticed in the decrease of railway transport in the order of 13,8% in 1992 in comparison with the previous year and decline in motorized transports of about 25,3% and river transport of 29,4% in the same time period. From 1992 onwards, there is a permanent decreasing tendency connected with the general economic crisis in the region and with the rise of the material prices and energy (GRYNIEWICZ, 1993). Also, from 1992 onwards, the indicators which are characteristic for motorised transport are getting worse every year. The political situation and problems inside Russia (civil war in Chechnia) make the economic situation uncertain. And what is very important, Belorussia is politically, economically and militarily connected to Russia since 1995.

The railway system represents the main carrier on Lithuania. Its carriage system stretches 2080 km and is connected with the Baltic countries: namely, Latvia, Belorussia, Russia and Poland. A part of the transit carriages of those countries goes through Lithuanian territory. But none of this territory follows the shortest connection between the Kaliningrad Region and Russia. To the main junction belong: Kłajpeda, Kowno, Wilno, Szawle-Radziwiliszki (PAULAUSKAS, 1993). Kłajpeda, which is on the north carriage corridor West- to East-Europe is becoming the main transport junction of Lithuania (figure 1). In 1992, 18 million tons of cargoes were reloaded in the port of Kłajpeda and the transit sales amounted to about 15 million tons.

The development of the carriage which uses international transport ways should have an effect on the railway and road infrastructure of Kowno station, which can be a hindrance for a crossing of the main transit ways of Latvia, Estonia, Russia and the Kaliningrad region. Lithuania has great hopes because of a project of an international motorway with equal parameters going from Tallin via Riga and Kowno to the direction of Warsaw ('Via Baltica'). Other branches are meant to go, in parallel fashion, to the south coast of the Baltic Sea ('Via Hanseatica').

The Kaliningrad region, because of its specific situation of being Russian enclave has a bigger geopolitical and transit meaning than other regions. A highway from Kaliningrad to Braniewo was being built in co-operation with Germany as a part of so called Via Hanseatica. At the present time, only two road border passages exist between Poland and Russia. Firstly on the way from Braniewo - Kaliningrad in Gronowo and secondly in Bezledy on the way from Olsztyn to Kaliningrad. The Polish border with the Kaliningrad region has the lowest level of exploiting existing trans-border roads - it stands at only 11,8%. For Lithuania it is 33,3%, for Belorussia 14,3% and for Germany 68,4% (KOMORNICKI, 1995).

The shortest connections between Kaliningrad and Russia goes via Lithuania and through Belorussian territory. At the beginning of 1996, after the presidents of Russia and Belorussia had signed the pact of integration, Boris Jelzin announced a plan of building a new carriage corridor between Kaliningrad and Belorussia via Poland. That corridor could eventually go from Grodno (Belorussia), Augustów, Olecko, Gołdap (Poland) to Gusiew (the Kaliningrad region). By this way, Russia could avoid making transit carriages via Lithuanian territory. Eventually becoming an extraterritorial corridor, it would link the Kaliningrad region with Russia and Belorussia, situating Lithuanian stronger inside the sphere of Russian influence. The idea was, of course, not formally announced to Poland. However, the problem was an issue during the Polish-Russian meeting about co-operation between those two countries. Plans of that kind of a transit corridor were published by the Russian side in a paper at the conference at the University of Kaliningrad in 1994 (ZWIERIEW, 1994). In addition, in 1995, before Mr. Jelzin had announced his idea of building the new connection going via Poland, the Polish Directorate of Public Roads conducted a distinctive study of transit connections between the Kaliningrad region and Belorussia via Poland. This road would start in the village of Chworościany and proceed to the car border passage which has just been build near the towns of Gołdap (Poland) and Gusiew (Russia). Of course, the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs has denied the news about having any negotiations on this subject with Russia. Also, Mr. Rosati, the Polish Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that Poland would never permit the building of any corridor on its territory. However, in the pact about building a gas pipeline from Jamal Peninsula to Germany via Poland (article no. 3), the govern-



ments of Poland and Russia foresee building a gas pipeline to the Kaliningrad region from Belorussia via Poland. What means establishing a Russian transit way without the involvement of Lithuania (figure 2).

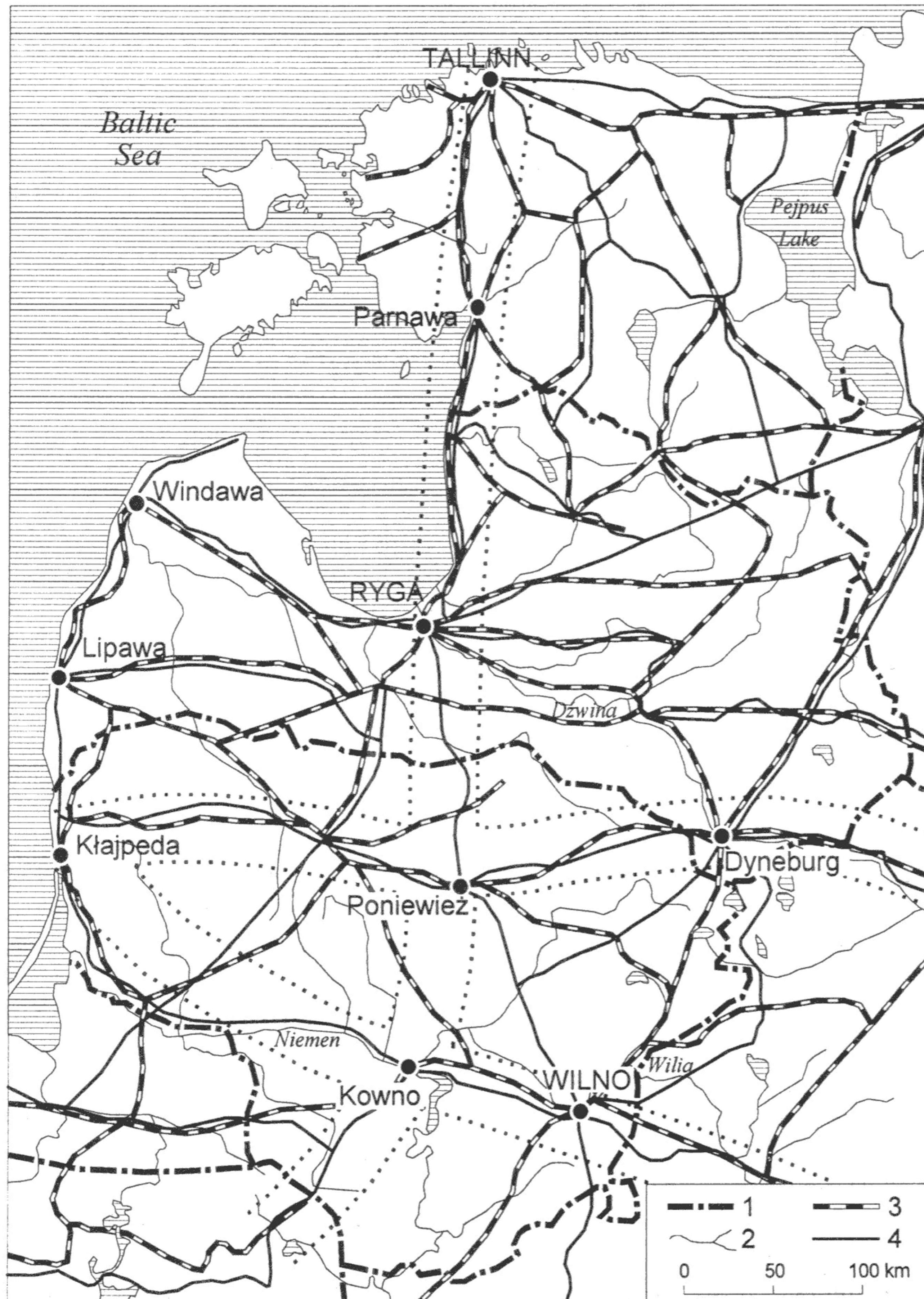


Fig. 1. Transport infrastructure in the Baltic states 1. state borders, 2. rivers, 3. railways, 4. roads

Building the road transit track appears to be unprofitable because of low traffic intensity on the Gołdap border. In 1995, this passage was passed by 1500 lorries and about



20,000 cars. Just two years earlier, in 1993, about 20,000 lorries and 191,000 cars passed the two left road passages on the Gronowo and Bezledy border. Consequently, among the most important investment prospects in North-East Poland is building a highway from Tallin-Riga-Kaliningrad-Gdańsk-Szczecin-Hamburg (the 'Via Hanseatica') and from Helsinki by ferry to Tallin and next to Riga, Kowno, Warsaw ('Via Baltica').

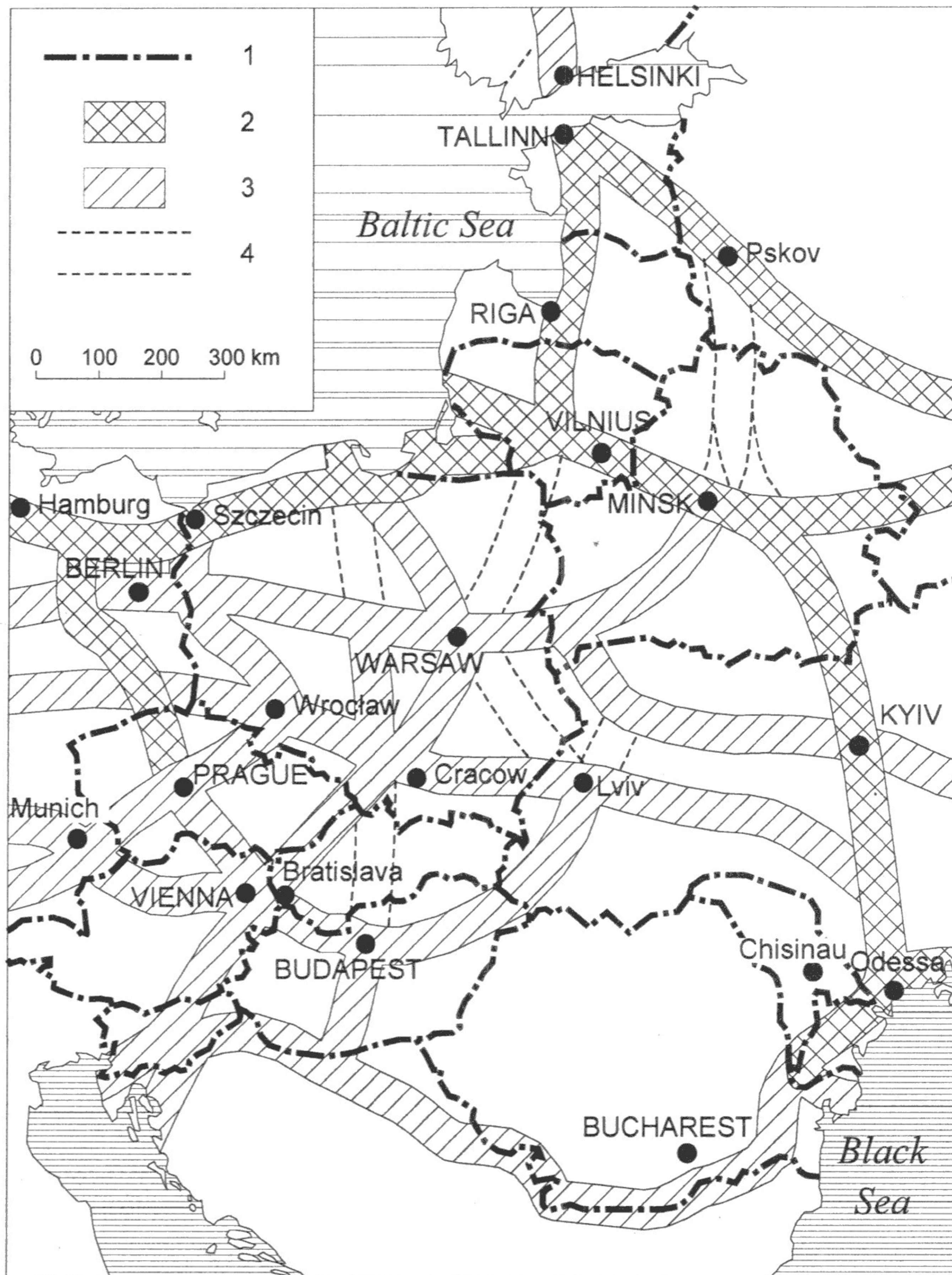


Fig. 2. New transit corridors in Central Europe after 1990

1. state borders, 2. transit tracks before 1990, 3. transit tracks after 1990, 4. potential transit tracks

Equally interesting seems to be an idea of an inland water carriage development. To the potential connections belong: a shipping connection Germany-Belorussia from Duisburg via Hannover, Berlin, the rivers Odra, Warta, Noteć and the Bydgoszcz Channel to Bydgoszcz from where there are two directions. The first one is to Warsaw via the Żerań Channel to Zegrze, via the Bug river to Muchawiec and Brześć which has a good connection with the Black Sea. The second option, from Bydgoszcz via the rivers Vistula and Nogat to Malbork and Elbląg via the Vistula Bay to Kaliningrad. In 1995, the sea carriage on the way Elbląg-Kaliningrad was in the order of about 1 million tons of cargo, mainly coal from Kaliningrad. There are also two possibilities of reactivation, of course after making necessary investments: a water track which will connect Poland and Belorussia via the Narew river, the Biebrza river and the Augustów Channel in Poland and then via Grodno and the Niemen river in Belorussia and next via Niemem to Kowno in Lithuania and to the port of Kłajpeda. In 1993, it was considered to build a wild-track line from Belorussia via Białystok to the Gdańsk ports. Gdańsk had to be a main sea port for that country (WENDT, 1995).

The state of the transit-carriage situation on the Belorussian, Russian, Lithuanian and Polish borders reviewed above will represent, if only parts of the planned communication connections are realised, a complete change in carriage connections, with Poland losing the most in these scenarios. Even more so as a new passenger port at Baltijsk-East and a terminal for ro-ro ships were built in Kaliningrad in 1994. This terminal will be used to start direct ferry connections with Denmark and Sweden. It is also planned to use the sea port to serve transit cargoes sending to and from Belorussia. Belorussia would also like to start its own fleet and the prospective place is to be Kaliningrad.

The above changes in the development and extension of the communications system may raise many potential threats for Poland. A worsening of the political situation between Poland and Lithuania can also occur and Poland should care for a good relation with Lithuania because of the Polish national minority in Lithuania. To the main threats belong: ecological damages connected with an increase of the carriage in one of the least polluted region of Poland, and a possible increase of crime. As we know from experience, the tracks with the high intensity of passing Russian cargoes, which are controlled in some parts by the Russian Mafia, have higher crime indicator. Of course, building the new connections and exploiting them will bring measurable economic profits to the local communities. But we have to ask a question about the balance of losses and profits which new transport connections will bring.

The realisation of the plans described above could cause the transit cargoes to shift to Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian ports which rival Polish ports, and especially to the port of Tallin-Muuga and to the German Baltic Sea ports (*Transport Side*, 1994, 1995). And what is very important too, it will create a new geopolitical situation for communication relations between the North Poland and the Kaliningrad region. Transport infrastructure in the North-East region of Poland will be very important, for military, economic and transport reasons, to Russian and in Russian and Polish policy. And Polish and Russian political business should also try to keep good economic relations; political and economic relations, which, of course, are not always going in the same directions as we can notice with the example of pretending Poland to join NATO and Russian vetoing in that case.



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