



Why is Hungary Building a Port in Italy?!

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Summary:

The paper will analyze the strategic decision of the Hungarian government to build its own seaport in Italy. The position of the Croatian port of Rijeka in a broader traffic, economic and strategic sense is also analyzed using the SWOT method. The article analyzes Croatian-Hungarian relations and the new strategic Hungarian repositioning towards Serbia and Italy.

Keywords: Croatia, Hungary, traffic, economy, strategy.

Original Research

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1. INTRODUCTION

The negative Austro-Hungarian influence on Croatian transport policy had a long-term impact on the Croatian transport system. The interests of Vienna and Budapest were extremely ruthless in conducting transport policy in Croatian territory. All railway routes that were built in the territory of Croatian lands were mostly in serious conflict with Croatian national and transport interests or these interests were only partially fulfilled (Rijeka). Not a single eastern Adriatic port in the Croatian lands (Senj, Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Dubrovnik, Boka Kotorska) received standard gauge railways, although they had a superb maritime past, and Šibenik and Split had the natural protection of their geographical position, while Zadar had the natural wealth of its hinterland. The consequences of such an Austro-Hungarian policy were catastrophic, because the above-mentioned ports, during the period of intensive development of capitalism in the 19th century,

were isolated and excluded from the mass transport of goods and people with their natural hinterland. Narrow-gauge railways were also built in Bosnia, which had an exit to the north only in S.Brod. The Istrian railways were connected to Trieste and Vienna, never to Zagreb and Rijeka (Šarić, M. (2023). A special case is the port of Rijeka, which received a railway line (Riječka krpica, <https://proleksis.lzmk.hr/43980/>. 3.4.2025.), but was excluded by Hungarian fraud from the Croatian state territory and illegally annexed to the then imperial and hostile Hungary, without the knowledge of the Croatian side. The Croatian parliament's efforts to connect the eastern Croatian macro-region of Slavonia with Zagreb and Rijeka via the railway route: Zemun-Požega-Sisak-Rijeka, did not yield any results due to political blockades by Vienna and Budapest (Padjen, J. 2000). It should be noted in particular that Croatian transport policy for Croatian Istria and Croatian Dalmatia was conducted in Vienna, and for

central Croatia and Croatian Slavonia in Budapest. Bosnia and Herzegovina was completely separated from Zagreb in terms of transport and politics, even more so than Istria and Dalmatia. Although Croatia had formal autonomy within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Banic Croatia experienced a severe political humiliation with the election of the Croatian Ban, octroi by the official, Greater Hungarian and then chauvinistic Budapest, the Hungarian Khuen-Héderváry. He was appointed to the position of Croatian Ban in order to restrained Croatian statehood, internal transport connections and resistance to Magyarization. In the fight against the Croatian opposition, he relied on the Serbian citizenry, which generously supported him; he gave the Serbs in central Croatia and Slavonia broad national-ecclesiastical autonomy, with the clear goal of breaking up Croatian lands and turning Croatia into a marginal Hungarian province (Artuković M. (2001).

2. CROATIAN-HUNGARY RELATIONS AFTER THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hungary soon realized that Croatia could be a decisive partner in achieving its geopolitical interests, as evidenced by the fact that it was among the first to recognize Croatian state independence. It became extremely important for the Croatian and Hungarian states to create a counterbalance to the growing Greater Serbian aspirations of the late 1980s, which were ideologically and strategically announced and designed by the SANU memorandum, with the goal of subordinating the SFRY to Greater Serbian interests and territorial conquests at the expense of others ex yu republic, primarily Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (<https://knjiga.hr/memorandum-sanu-iz-1995-godine-jakov-sirotkovic-1/>. 7.4.2025.), and eliminate the Serbian military superiority that emerged from the forces of the so-called Yugoslav People's Army, and was exceptionally large and strong at the time of the Greater Serbian and Yugoslav (JNA) aggression on Croatia, thus creating a new

Croatian-Hungarian alliance. In September 1990, the Croatian government asked Hungary to purchase 30,000 machine guns for the Croatian state police. Minister of Defense Lajos Für and Minister of Foreign Affairs Géza Jeszenszky believed that it was time to restore friendly relations with the Croatian people who have lived with us in a state union for almost 800 years, as a "quasi-compensation" for the tensions that were very strong, especially in 1848, when the Croats, together with the official Vienna joined in crushing the Hungarian revolution. The Croatian request was approved by the inter-ministerial committee, together with other parties to the arms trade treaty (Bali, L. 2022). The development of Croatian-Hungarian relations was intensive in the first years of Croatian state independence. Among the points of Croatian-Hungarian cooperation was the coordinated development of Corridor V /C, and this could also expand the connection points of the two countries' economies, for example to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would improve the sustainability of the poorly functioning Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion. The inauguration of the 2nd Orbán government marked the beginning of a new era in Hungarian foreign policy. The previous "follower" attitude, especially on issues concerning Eastern and Central Europe, was replaced by the spirit of a new Hungarian initiative. In several cases, Hungarian governments criticized the main direction of the EU, due to its views on migration, border protection, the energy issue, Eurasianism and Christianity, and gender ideology. In the first half of 2011, Hungary took over the EU presidency. The Hungarian state invested significant efforts to accelerate and complete the Croatian accession process as soon as possible. "Hungarian diplomacy successfully advocated for the implementation of Croatian interests within the European institutions" (Szilágyi I. 2012). The Croatian accession treaty was signed in Brussels on 9 December 2011.

However, after Croatia's entry into the EU and NATO, Croatian-Hungarian relations have "cooled down" for several reasons:

1. Business tensions between MOL-INA, illegal and hostile takeover of the Croatian oil company (indictment against Z.Hernady). Croatia lost international arbitrations in Washington and Geneva (<https://www.international-arbitration-attorney.com/hr/investment-arbitration-and-the-never-ending-mol-v-croatia-saga/>. 7.4.2025), with huge financial damage.

Table 1: List of contracts between Serbia and Hungary 2022-2025

Form of cooperation	Cooperation sector
1. Hungarian-Serbian Council for Cooperation in the field of telecommunications	Improvement of Serbian-Hungarian cooperation
2. Interstate agreement	Traffic and infrastructure
3. Interstate agreement	Infrastructure and environmental protection
4. Consultations	Energy
5. Decree on changes to the spatial plan with the aim of the Serbian-Hungarian oil pipeline connection	Energy
6. Interstate agreement	Asylum and migration
7. Interstate agreement	Border traffic control in road, rail and water traffic
8. Consultations, Hungarian-Serbian	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
9. Interstate agreement	Interstamilitary and defense cooperation

source of contracts and agreements: (<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/835921/unapredjenje-srpsko-madjarske-saradnje-u-oblasti-telekomunikacija.php> 7.5.2025. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/713745/napravljen-strateski-iskorak-u-odnosima-srbije-i-madjarske.php>, 1.3.2025. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/694119/nastavak-podrske-madjarske-realizaciji-projekata-u-srbiji.php> 2.3.2025. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/621829/bliska-saradnja-srbije-i-madjarske-na-svim-poljima.php> 7.3.2025.),

2. Hungary's eastern opening towards Russia and China.
3. Different views on migration, border protection, energy issues.

Hungary is turning strategically towards Serbia, especially after 2022, when it won all arbitrations against Croatia as evidenced by numerous bilateral agreements in transport, energy and military cooperation.

(<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/870346/nastavak-jacanja-saradnje-srbije-i-madjarske-u-oblasti-energetike.php>.

<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/857272/dokraja-godine-pocinju-radovi-na-izgradnji-naftovoda-srbijamadjarska.php>.

<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/713688/srbija-i-madjarska-potpisale-vise-sporazuma-u-cilju-jacanja-saradnje.php> 1.3.2025.

<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/610012/saradnja-srbije-i-madjarske-na-istorijskom-vrhuncu.php> 2.3.2025.),

(<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/869977/potpisan-sporazum-sa-madjarskom-u-oblasti-odbrane.php> 7.4.2025).

3. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE CROATIAN PORT OF RIJEKA

SWOT analysis has its conceptual and linguistic origins in the American climate: It is a strategic planning instrument consisting of an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, chances and threats, and is used for positioning and developing the strategy of a company or organization. (Šarić, M. and Šprem, B. (2017). SWOT and PEST analysis of the Federal State of Bavaria. Proceedings of the Međimurje University of Applied Sciences in Čakovec, 8 (1), 89-99. Retrieved from <https://hrcak.srce.hr/182991>. 7.3.2025).

STRENGTH: It is located in a well-protected, deep bay, at the beginning of Corridor Vb, one of the most important transport routes in the EU. The shortest connection between the mainland and Central Europe. (Bratislava, Budapest, Prague, etc.). Project for deepening the coast to accommodate larger draft ships.

WEAKNESSES: Many laws and regulations that limit development. Disproportion in transport capacities according to different types of transport (from the port of Rijeka only about 25% of containers are transported by rail because there is a lack of wagons). Dominance of road transport. The largest part of the port of Rijeka is located in the very center of the city, which leads to a lack of quality flat areas along the coast.

THREATS: Insufficient space to expand the port for very rapid growth. In container traffic, the Croatian port of Rijeka lags behind Trieste and Koper. Insufficient use of the potential of renewable energy sources. Poor and unpredictable Croatian-Hungarian relations. Hungarian support for Russia in its aggression against Ukraine.

OPPORTUNITIES: By signing certain bilateral and multilateral agreements, the Republic of Croatia has committed itself to the introduction and development of intermodal transport. Development of rail and road connections with the hinterland, better integration into international transport corridors. A new multi-purpose terminal at Prague Pier, worth 145 million euros.

Source: adapted by the author according to Šarić, M. and Rosi, B. (2020). SWOT Analysis for the Cities of Hamburg and Rijeka, <https://www.saspublishers.com/article/973/download/>. 1.3.2025.

The Hungarian state is investing over 200 million euros in the port of Trieste in 2025, and it will have a capacity for 78,000 TEU of cargo per year, at full capacity by 2028, on an area of 30 hectares that is being built, there is 650 meters of coastline (<https://magyarepitok.hu/mi-epul/2025/02/elrajtolt-a-magyar-kikoto-epitkezese-triesztben> 7.4.2025). By the end of this year, the Rijeka Gateway container terminal on the Zagreb coast should also start operating, with a capacity of 600 thousand TEUs in the first phase, and in the second, within ten years, when an additional 280 meters of operational quay are built, this terminal alone will be larger than the Hungarian multipurpose terminal in Trieste in

terms of both the length of the operational quay and the terminal area, and its capacity will be increased to slightly more than a million TEUs. Together with the AGCT container terminal, to which two new post-Panamax generation coastal container cranes are arriving in October, Rijeka will be the only port in the northern Adriatic that will be able to simultaneously tranship cargo from two so-called container ships, i.e. large-capacity ships (<https://www.glas-slavonije.hr/novosti/hrvatska/2025/03/03/adria-porta-u-trstu-ne-moze-ozbiljno-konkurirati-nasoj-luci-madarski-terminal-ne-ugrozava-rijeku-679129/>. 1.4.2025).

4. CONCLUSION

The Hungarian terminal in Italy is more an expression of the Greater Hungarian colonial view of Croatian ports and Croatian territorial sea, especially after the strategic rapprochement of Belgrade and Budapest, than a real competition to the Croatian Rijeka. Hungarian underestimation of Croatian interests has a long tradition ("Riječka krpica", Croatian-Hungarian settlement of 1868, seizure of Croatian Međimurje in 1941 by Horthy's government, Serbian autonomy during the time of Hungarian Ban Khuen-Héderváry to the detriment of Croatian interests, 2009 and 2010 illegal takeover of INA by Hungarian MOL.). The Hungarian government cannot determine the flow of cargo, nor the ports in which it will be unloaded, but it is a matter of the market - cargo owners, shipping companies, logistics companies, geo-traffic and geo-strategic determination of a particular port, and others in the transport chain who are guided primarily by economic logic and supply and demand in a globalized world.

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