



Vienna Process for the Greening of Eurasia

On the historic date of March 08th – International Women’s Day, a large number of international affairs specialists gathered for the second consecutive summit in Vienna, Austria. This leg of the Vienna Process titled: “Europe – Future – Neighborhood at 75: Disruptions Recalibration Continuity”. The conference, jointly organized by the Modern Diplomacy, IFIMES and their partners, with the support of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, was aimed at discussing the future of Europe and its neighbourhood in the wake of its old and new challenges.¹

Along with the two acting State Presidents, the event was endorsed by the keynote of the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Excellency Olivér Várhelyi. Besides discussing the strategic neighbourhood and the Union’s approach to it, underlaying leitmotif was deliverability of the Union’s ambitious New Green Deal for Europe. Numerous panellists (nearly all of the Conference’s Panel II and III) warned that there will be no success in the EU Green Deal without balanced and politically unbiased approach to Energy, Infrastructure and Transport.

¹ This highly anticipated conference gathered over twenty high ranking speakers from three continents, and the viewers from Australia to Canada and from Chile to Far East. The day was filled by three panels focusing on the rethinking and revisiting Europe and its three equally important neighbourhoods: Euro-Med, Eastern and trans-Atlantic (or as the Romano Prodi’s EU Commission coined it back in 2000s – “from Morocco to Russia – everything but the institutions”); the socio-political and economic greening; as well as the legacy of WWII, Nuremberg Trials and Code, the European Human Rights Charter and their relevance in the 21st century.

*Senior researcher and geoeconomics specialist from Ukraine, **Maria Smotrytska**, elaborated on the topic of greening, as follows:*

Today the whole world is aware of the global problem of climate warming. Due to the increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases and harmful emissions into the atmosphere, this problem is getting worse every year. And the main question is how we can answer the fundamental challenge of global warming. The core issue is decarbonisation, but to ensure the economic growth in countries around the world, the link between the development of transportation and solution of the problem of global warming should be considered as the main.

The most inhabitant part of the world and the largest landmass of the Globe is Eurasia. Thus it is the biggest producer of CO₂ and, hence, the most polluted part of the world. But we cannot leave it as it is right now. Also important to understand that the biggest countries-producers (Far East) and countries-consumers (West Europe) are located on the edge of the Eurasia. These countries drive world's economies and may play crucial role in improving ecology and environmental standards.

Transportation logistics between Far East and Western Europe is vital for world's economic development, but today we do not have reliable technologies and transport lines. Due to this it is necessary to think on few aspects, which may determine the development of environmental friendly economies in future :

- reliable transportation (safe and environmentally friendly) ;
- cheapest modes and transshipment lines ;
- fastest modes of transportation

The most reliable mode of the transportation is railway. It has certain advantages (compared to air and maritime transport) in the following areas: regularity (rhythmicity), reliability (guaranteed on-schedule delivery and cargo preservation) and the ability to deliver the cargo to any destination.

When comparing cargo transportation from the Far East to West Europe by sea and by rail, the delivery time is often the key argument in favor of the railway. At the same time, the amount of 14 – 15 days is often mentioned. In practice, it takes longer: 35 – 50 days by sea, 28 – 32 days by rail, 6 days by plane and 4 days by roads (See Figure 1). This difference in numbers is caused by the need to form a train, delays at some stations, etc.

Underlining the reliability of the railway transshipment lines in terms of friendly environmental standards it is assumed that carrying a TEU between the Far East and West Europe using diesel trains would result in emissions of around 0.7 tonnes of greenhouse gas emission. However, the emissions from electric trains could be lower, possibly even falling to zero if they were powered entirely by renewable sources. This suggests that, by using railway mode, the Eurasian transshipment lines are likely to be beneficial to the environment.

While in theory, the implementation of railway electrification and the use of renewable energy sources can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, perhaps even to zero, in practice this process can take decades that our planet is unlikely to have.

This fact makes us think about other possible modes of transportation that are both “convenient” (speed, regularity and accuracy of delivery), and beneficial to the environment.

The cheapest mode of transportation is by the sea, but it also has some pros and cons. Thus, the warm waters (red) shipping line from Far East to the port of Rotterdam in Netherlands today has great logistics prospects. Currently, 80% of cargo from Far East to Europe goes through the Atlantic ocean to the ports of Northern Europe. The warm waters shipping line through the Arabian sea and the Suez canal to the Balkans reduces the transport time by 7 – 10 days: this is so far the shortest sea route from Far East to Europe. Thus, the cheapest in the cost, this transshipment line is not beneficial in terms of second criteria – time-frame (See Figure 1).

Another waters shipping line (cold waters – blue line), which emerged as a result of the rapid melting of the North polar icecap, opens the prospects of shortened transport waterways in the ice-free areas. There are basically three possible routes, each of significance :

- The Northwest Passage, connecting the American Continent and Far East Asia;
- The Northern Sea Route, offering a shorter way from West Europe to Far East along the Russian Arctic coastline ; and
- The Arctic Bridge, connecting Canada and Russia (See Figure 2).

Geographically the position of the North waterways is very beneficial since they are cutting the distance between the edges of two continents, making it shorter by about 40% in comparison to the traditional, warm seas transport routes via the Suez or Panama Canal. The Arctic Bridge for now is a seasonal route. Nevertheless, the observation shows that it might be in reach earlier than expected due to climate change.

Thus, in terms of logistics, the cold waters shipping line (blue) will allow to deliver cargo to West Europe by sea faster than the 48 days (that it takes on average) to travel from the Northern ports of Far East to Rotterdam via the Suez canal, considering that the passage of a cargo ship along the North sea route is 2.8 thousand miles shorter than the route through Suez canal (See Figure 1).

The criteria of reliability also plays a positive role. In regards with the environmental issue, this means that, if maritime services lose their most time-sensitive cargo to rail, they might in practice sail their ships slower, extending transit times but reducing fuel costs and hence prices, and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to the time-frame criteria, a cold water shipping line is beneficial in terms of capacity. It is usually characterized as the shortest sea route between West Europe and Far East, the safest (e.g. the problem of Somali pirates) and has no restrictions on the size of the ship, unlike the route through the Suez canal. Current data makes it clear that the cold water transshipment line will allow to deliver cargo to Europe faster by sea, reducing the route by 20 – 30%, and hence being more environmentally friendly (by using less fuel and decreasing CO₂ emission) and saving human resources. Nevertheless to capitalize on that opportunity requires much work in terms of improved navigation procedure and installation of safety-related infrastructure.

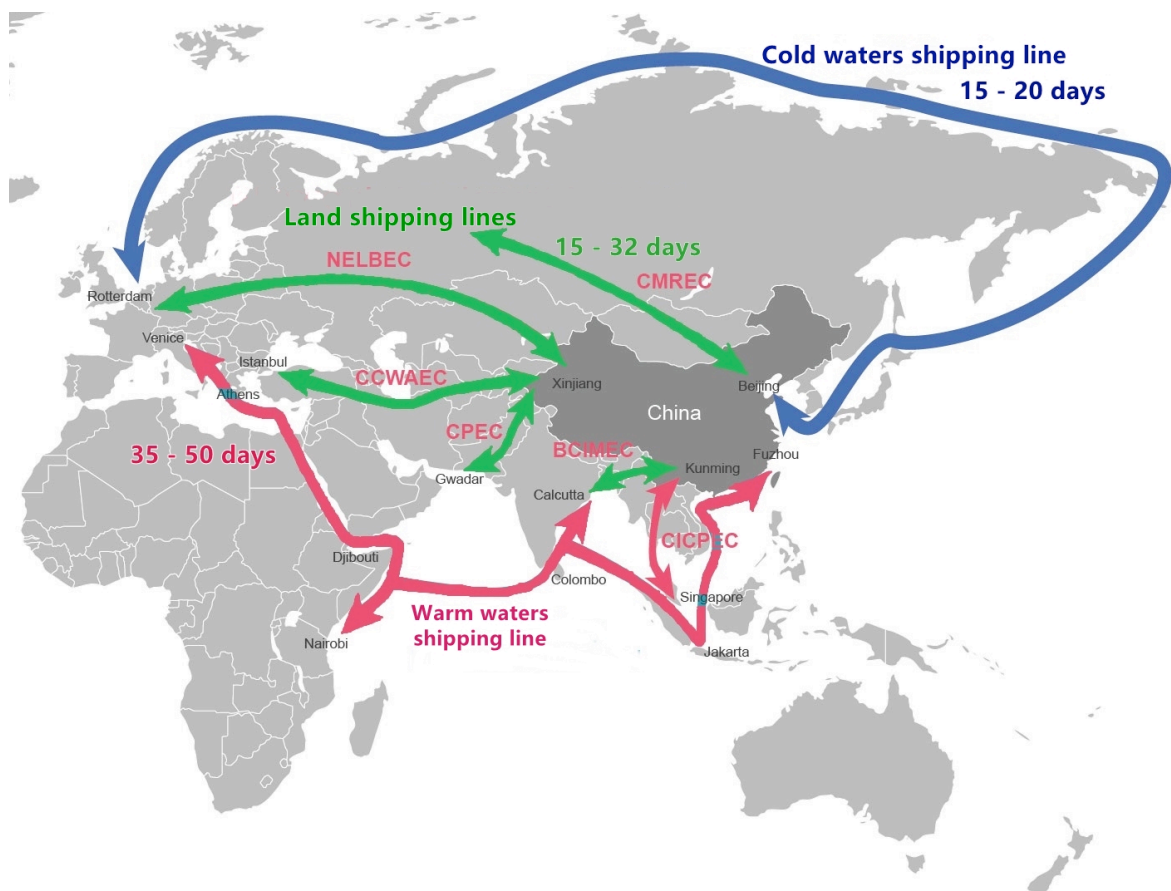
For now it can be seen that there are two possibilities for developing transport systems and economies in accordance with green standards :

- Transcontinental railroad system (which requires huge amount of investments);
- Optimization of the cheapest mode of transportation (maritime warm waters transshipment lines).

But while thinking on the best ways of the decarbonizing of transport connections, all the existing risks should be taken into account. The current warm waters transshipment lines present certain dangers, being high congested and unsafe (both for trade security and environment), and hence rather vulnerable. Due to this fact, it is crucial to consider other alternatives of connecting the biggest countries-producers (Far East) and countries-consumers (West Europe).

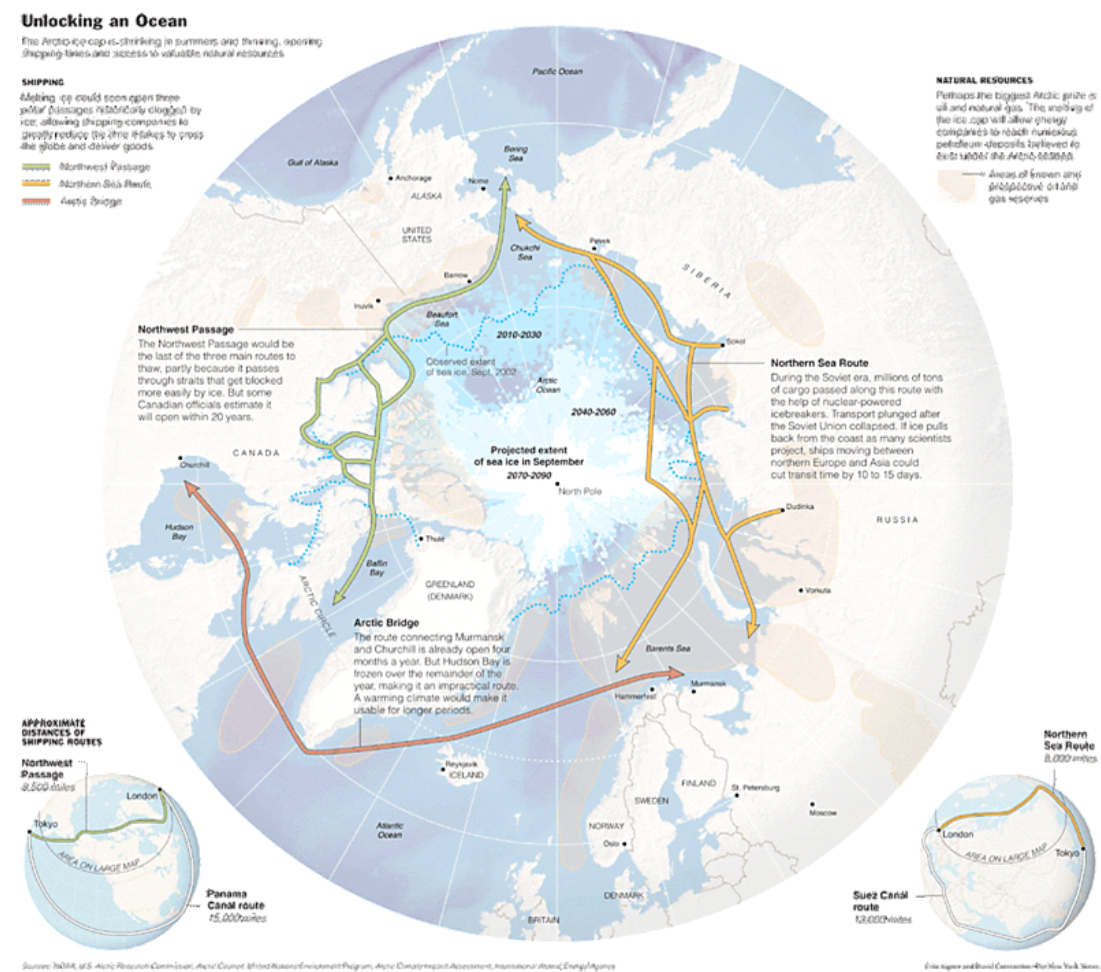
While summing up the data on the logistics, it may be seen, that Blue shipping line along with Green one (See Figure 1) will dramatically reduce the time between the most-producing countries of G-7 and advanced OECD markets. But to reach consensus in timing, price and environmentally friendly standards the growing push to decarbonize economies, implement the green construction methods should be done. Unfortunately this approach may take decades to be adopted, which our planet may not have. And understanding of this fact should underlie the development to all the countries of the Globe without exceptions.

Figure 1. Transshipment lines from Far East to Western Europe



Source : EDB, 2019

Figure 2. Northern shipping. Major transport routes through the Arctic



Source: Centre Port Canada, 2008.



About the author:

Chloé Bernadaux is an International Security specialist (Sciences Po Paris), prolifically writing on the neighbourhood policy, Euro-MED relations, and disarmament affairs. She is the IFIMES newly appointed representative in Paris (UNESCO).