
Interview: Grigori L. Bondarevsky

The Strategic and Economic Importance of Eurasian Integration

On the occasion of his 75th birthday in 1995, Professor Bondarevsky participated in an EIR seminar on Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, in Wiesbaden, Germany, where he was interviewed on Feb. 16, by Mark and Mary Burdman (EIR, April 7, 1995). One month later, Professor Bondarevsky informed EIR of a new and very important development: that Iran had opened the new railroad line to Bandar Abbas, the port on the Straits of Hormuz. This new line, connected to the main east-west trans-Iranian rail line, had been built secretly and very rapidly. When the new Mashad-Ashkabad rail line linking Iran to Turkmenistan opened in May 1996, the Bandar Abbas line gave landlocked Central Asia its first rail outlet to the Indian Ocean.

A part of the interview is republished here.

EIR: What is the significance of the Eurasian union in the highly volatile situation in Russia and Central Asia in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the brutal looting of the entire region under “Washington Consensus”-dominated “Shock Therapy”?

Bondarevsky: Yes. Let me explain. After one or two years, the people in the [Central Asian] republics understood that it is time, after disintegration, to start this integration process. [Kazakhstan President Nursultan] Nazarbayev’s idea [for Eurasian integration, first put forward in April 1994 at Moscow University], was based on the necessity of this economic—not political—integration. Therefore, his idea of Eurasian union is based on economic necessity, and on the geopolitical position of Russia, plus Kazakhstan. Russia plus Kazakhstan, as you know from maps, starts from near the Polish border, and extends up at the Chinese Great Wall. It is one geopolitical unit.

In this situation—the idea of Eurasian union, opposed by nationalistic and some other forces—one of the best possibilities to start with, is railways. Even the railways are nationalized now. Only five years ago, we had one state company for the Central Asia railway system, which was built by Russia in the old days, and the center was in Tashkent. Then the Kazaks said, “No, we are an independent republic,” and they cut out the Kazak system. Turkmenistan’s [President Saparmurat] Niyazov said, “No, we want to have a Turkmen railway.” Then they converted the Central Asia into Uzbek and Tajik railways; then [Uzbekistan President Islam] Karimov cut in

two the administration of the railway from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan.

But the railway still exists. It functions, but badly. If you are an Uzbek, and I a Tajik, if we go together in Tashkent to buy tickets to Tajikistan and back, you produce your passport, and you will get a much cheaper ticket, for the same railway car, because you are a proud Uzbeki citizen, and it is your Uzbek railway.

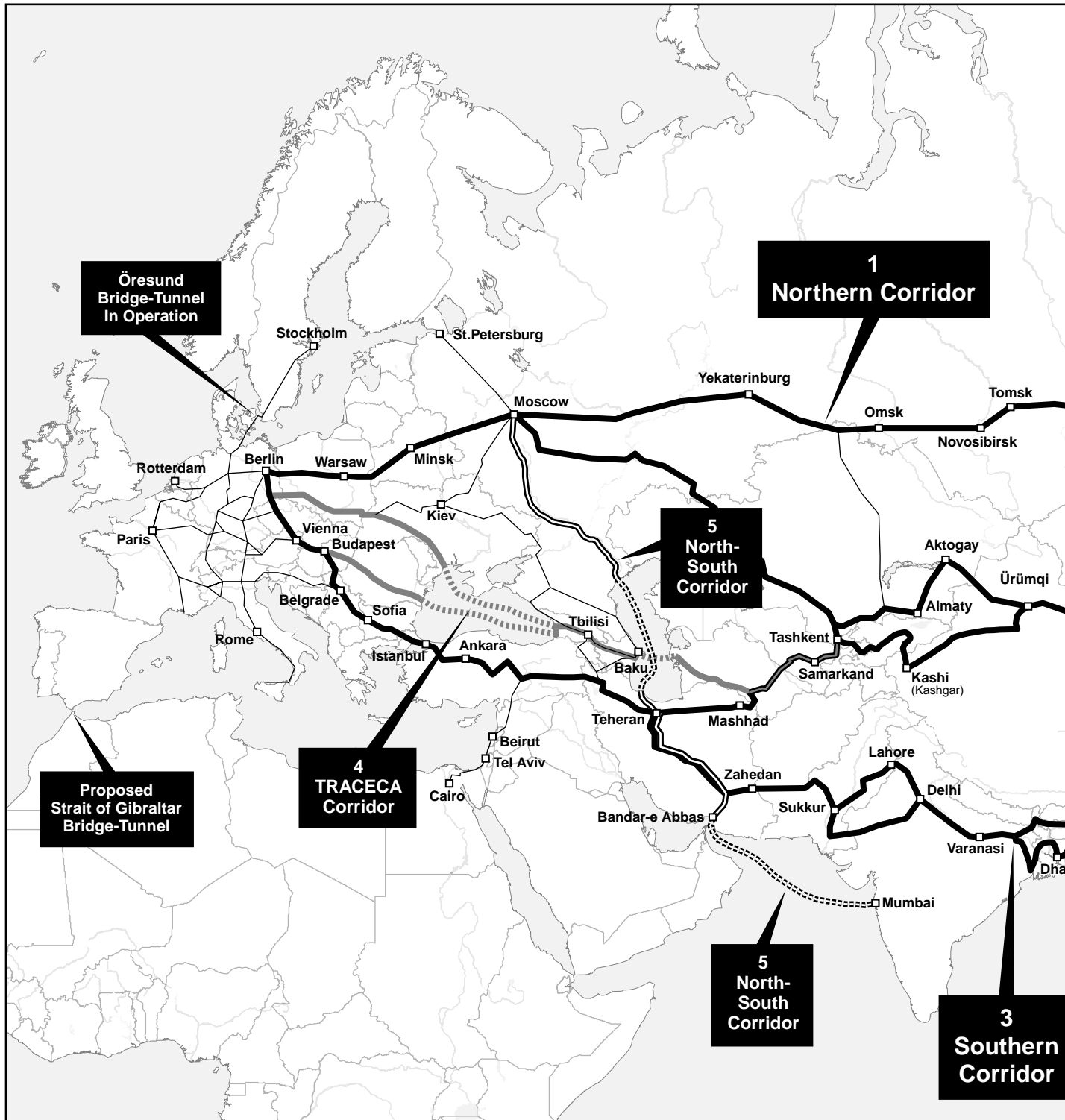
But the economic issue is stronger. Therefore, after prolonged discussions for five years, the Central Asia-Chinese railway system started. The railway link between Kazakstan, a little northeast of Almaty, and Xinjiang, in Chinese territory, was nearly ready, needing only 20 kilometers to be built on the Russian side and another section on the Chinese side, in 1959. Everyone thought that it would begin operating in 1960. Our railway station on the border was named “Friendship.” But instead of friendship, you know what happened then between Russia and China. Building the railroad was stopped.

Only after prolonged discussions and delays, in the late 1980s, the line was ready. Therefore, it became—first technically, and then economically and politically—possible to buy a ticket in Beijing, to proceed on the same railway through all China, through Xinjiang, through Almaty in Kazakstan, through Uzbekistan, Tashkent, through Ashkabad in Turkmenistan, and then come to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea, which is renamed Turkmen Bashir now. A ferry, which has existed for 20 years, brings the train to Baku, and from Baku through Tbilisi, which has a straight railway connection with Turkey. The railway connection Russia-Turkey has existed for 30 years. You could buy a ticket in Moscow, proceed through Baku, Tbilisi, Yerevan, straight to Turkish territory, to Istanbul and Europe. It was not often used, but it existed.

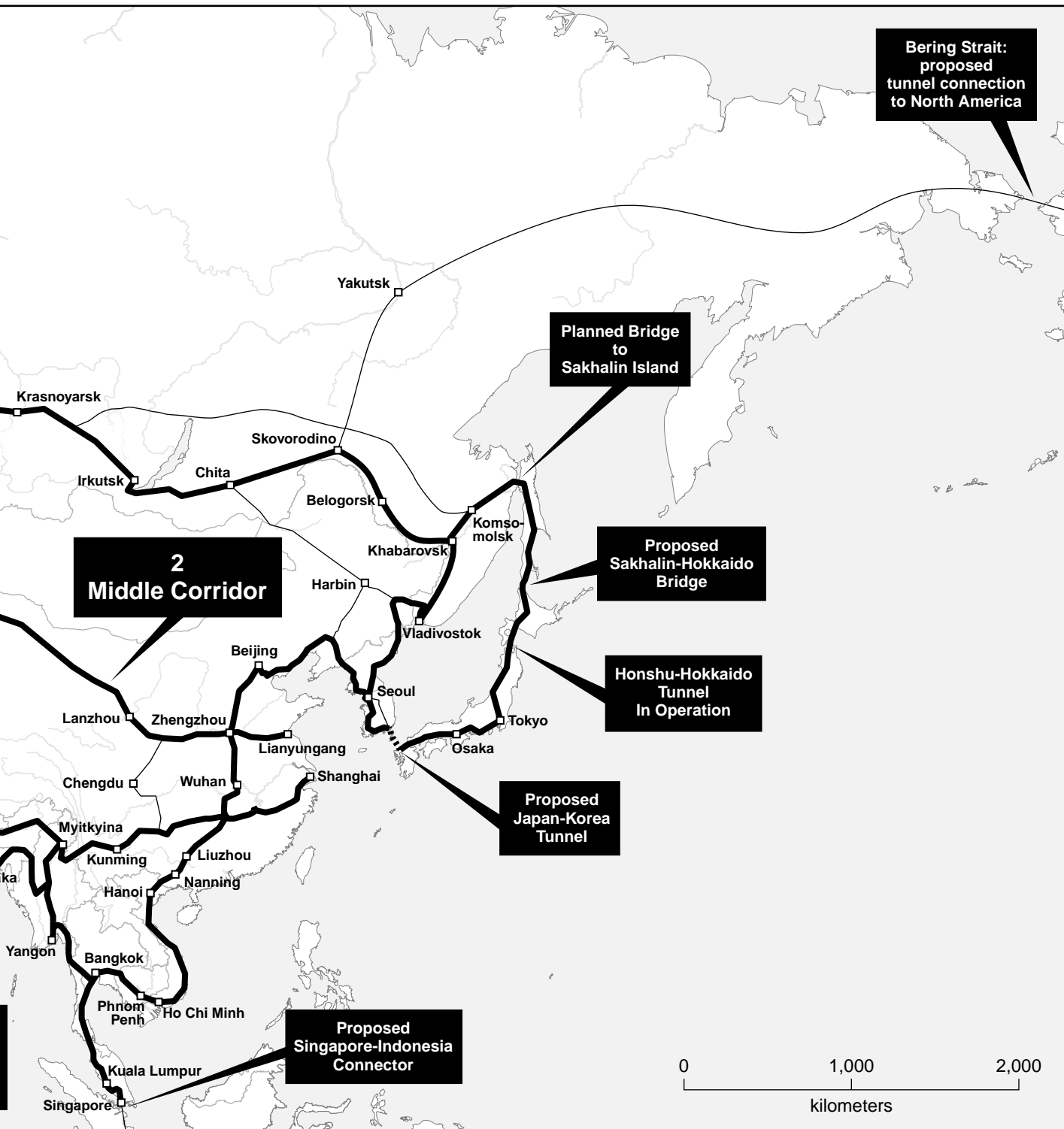
In 1992, the international Central Asian Railroad Association was created. The Chinese government, the Kazak, Uzbek, Turkmen governments were in this group. This was joined immediately by the Turks, who have the extension to Europe, and by the Iranians. The Iranians were especially active. In 1989, when the U.S.S.R. still existed, there was an official treaty between the U.S.S.R. and Iran, to build a short railway, Ashkabad-Mashad. It is 300 kilometers long, 150 on Turkmen territory and 150 on Iranian territory. Mashad is the capital of the greatest Iranian province, Khorsan, and Mashad is con-

FIGURE 1

The Five Main Corridors Of The Eurasian Land-Bridge



The full scope of the Eurasian Land-Bridge policy perspective, as Grigori Bondarevsky's discussions with Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche helped develop it: "The moment that the Triangle [the highly developed Paris-Berlin-Vienna triangle at the West] will become the vehicle to open everything to Asia, to open this magnificent area to investment." The Central Asian Railway to which Bondarevsky gave particular study and emphasis, is the "Middle Corridor" from Seoul and Beijing to Europe shown here.



nected through railway to Tehran, and from Tehran a line goes to the Persian Gulf and a second line to Tabriz and Turkey. It was built by the Germans, from 1927-29. This year, ahead of schedule in April-May, the line will be ready.

The railway line does not run straight, because there are mountains; it makes a curve from Ashkabad to Serachs a little southeast, and then from Serachs—there are two Serachs, Iranian and Turkmen—to Mashad.

EIR: What is the strategic and economic significance of this line?

Bondarevsky: Extremely great! I am afraid that the people in Europe still do not understand how important it is.

If, today, the Japanese or South Koreans want to send their goods to Azerbaijan, how can they do it? Through the Trans-Siberian line, through Moscow, and then again a long way south; but, if Grozny [the capital of Chechnya] is at war, there is no connection at all. From September 1994, there has been no railway connection between Russia and the Transcaucasus. There are two railways, one from Rostov in the north, through Grozny, through Dagestan, Baku, Tbilisi, and Yerevan. The second railway, built only in 1929-30, runs from Tuapse, Novorossisk, through Sukhumi, a shortcut to Zugdidi, to Tbilisi, but this second railway was cut after the Abkhazian-Georgian war. From September, we had to stop sending trains through Chechnya, because during the six months of 1994, there were 1,400 rail cars looted by brigands from Chechnya. What is notable, is that when the brigands attacked trains, they knew exactly in which wagon the most important goods were. Therefore, not only the Chechen mafia, but also the Moscow mafia gave them information.

After both lines were cut, it was a tragedy for Azerbaijan, and especially for Georgia and Armenia. They do not receive food. Azerbaijan can produce food, Georgia less, and Armenia cannot at all. The land is stones. If this Central Asia railway works, you do not need the North Caucasus lines. You have a shortcut from Japan and Korea to Transcaucasia, and from Turkey to Europe.

On the second line, Ashkabad-Mashad, the goods go to the Gulf, to the very important port called Bandar Shahpour, now called Bandar Khomeini, the Port of Khomeini. It is a good, deep-water port, and from this port, there is a shortcut to Bombay by steamer, or to the Red Sea, or to East Africa. In the 19th Century, there was a British-Indian steamship company, for Bombay and the Persian Gulf. From 1901, Russia also had such a steamship company, which ran from Odessa on the Black Sea, through the Black Sea, to the Aegean, Mediterranean, Suez, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Now, with this new railway system, which is working, the state decisions of whole governments are signed, it is not a plan for the future. It is working! From late this year, the line to the Gulf will be open.

This is of greatest importance. If you look at a map of Europe and Asia, you see the old Trans-Siberian Railway. Now, there is the new Central Asia railway.

Note that in Russia, there are two terms. In English there is only one term, Central Asia, but in Russian, there is *Srednaya Asia*, "Middle Asia," and *Tsentrlnaya Asia*, "Central Asia." For Russian geographers, politicians, and experts, there is a great difference. In Russia, Middle Asia is this Central Asia about which we are speaking, plus Kazakstan; Central Asia is Tibet, Mongolia, the Pamirs. Two years ago, the Presidents of the Central Asian republics had a meeting in Tashkent and announced they do not want to be Middle Asia, but Central Asia. Even our great political experts in Moscow did not grasp what it meant. I tried to explain to them at that moment, that the Central Asian leaders did not want to be a part of the old U.S.S.R., this Middle Asia; they want to be part of a larger unity, Central Asia.

The rail route starts in Beijing, then you have Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, then Almaty, then Tashkent. The railway goes from Samarkand to Turkmenistan, and has a continuation to the Caspian Sea. Now, it will go to Ashkabad, to Mashad, Tehran, Tabriz, and to Turkey.

In the vicinity of Turkmenistan is a very important railway station, Chardzhou. Chardzhou is on the mighty River Amudar'ya [the Oxus]. Chardzhou was built by Russians at the end of the 19th Century. There are two lines: One runs from Chardzhou to Ashkabad, and then to Krasnovosk. The second runs from Chardzhou straight to Russia, to Guryev and Saratov. This exists, and has for 40 years. Therefore, Russian goods using this way through Chardzhou and Mashad, can reach the Gulf. This is a two-way line. It is extremely important to understand all these possibilities.

When this Mashad-Ashkabad line is open for operation, say in a year's time, it will be extremely important economically. You know that economic development starts around railways. It will help to create new factories, to fight unemployment, to bring goods and tools, and so on. This would be a very important vehicle—an *extremely* important vehicle—for economic union.

The railway is stronger than nationalist feelings, and when the railway runs, economic development will be quicker. Then the people in Central Asia, who now know nothing about [Lyndon LaRouche's proposal for a European] Productive Triangle, and nothing about Germany, will have not only the deutschemark—which they buy on the black market—but also the straight connection to Europe! Your businessmen and investors, who are still hesitating about whether they should invest or not: Here is this link with new perspectives for the 21st Century, which is not far away. It will open the way for great investment. Thus, the Eurasian idea will be implemented.

In a letter which we sent to Nazarbayev, prepared and signed by myself and two other experts, we just explained the linkage between the Central Asia railway and the Gulf, and his beloved idea of Eurasian union. This Eurasian union, with railways, will also include the Transcaucasus in this system.

EIR: You are familiar with the LaRouche Paris-Berlin-Vienna “Productive Triangle” proposal for rail and rail-infrastructure development for Eurasia. How do you see this idea corresponding to what you have been outlining?

Bondarevsky: On the Productive Triangle: According to my understanding, in the contemporary deep economic and financial crisis in western Europe—and the contradiction between Britain and western Europe and some western European groups—although there are decisions about investing in this Triangle area, I have a suspicion that if there will be no new push; the investment will not be found. But, at the moment when you proclaim that this is not a simple Triangle, it is the Triangle *plus* Central Asia, the Far East, and the Gulf—and it does not need new investment on this side, the railways are ready!—the Productive Triangle will receive many more incentives. Today, some person in France will say, why should we invest in the Triangle, and make Germany, which is now too big, bigger? The British do not want to have anything to do with this. But the moment that the Triangle will become the vehicle to open everything to Asia, to open this magnificent area to investment, then it will be a very important impetus.

EIR: As you know, the “Triangle” idea was expanded, in our thinking, to the idea of the “Eurasian Land-Bridge,” once the situation in China began to evolve in a direction where such a policy would become more possible.

Bondarevsky: Yes, but I want to mention, that I began to talk about this two years before you started, in 1990, during my first meeting with Mrs. LaRouche, when she explained to me that the only important topic is the Triangle. I dared to explain—you were there—that the Triangle can only be if you have the continuation to Warsaw, Minsk, and Moscow.

But I am in the Triangle, I consider the Triangle extremely important, but in the contemporary situation, the political situation in Europe has changed. The Triangle idea was magnificent, five to seven years ago. Now it can have additional life, if it is combined with the Asian railways!

EIR: Is the proposal for a high-speed rail link connecting Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Moscow consistent with this overall approach?

Bondarevsky: We started asking ourselves, why do we need, in the midst of a terrible economic crisis, to build a new high-speed link between Moscow and St. Petersburg? For Europe, it is extremely important for business reasons to be quicker by 3-4 hours. But for us, our main trains start from Moscow, usually in the night at 11-12:00, and at 7-8:00 in the morning you will be in Petersburg. If it only takes four hours, then you will arrive at 3 in the morning. Who needs it? We have one daytime speed train, which takes four hours, but it is not so popular. Why do we need a train that will connect two cities in 2.5 hours, in this terrible economic situation? Also, between Moscow-St. Petersburg, it is impossible to use

the existing railway. It will be necessary to build the whole railway, of 650 kilometers. The old line, built 140 years ago, cannot be used for a speed train. But somebody from abroad is there, so this plan is implemented.

What I consider important is not speedy links, but railway links in general. If you go very speedily from Paris and Berlin, to Warsaw and Moscow, this is fine. From Moscow you will go, not so quickly, because the distance from Moscow to Vladivostok is 9,000 kilometers, so you cannot get there, even at extreme speed, in five hours. It is not so important.

It is important to have this speedy link between Moscow and the West and the Productive Triangle, and then to use this extremely important line, in two directions: from Moscow to the Trans-Siberian line, from Moscow through Chardzhou and Central Asia, and from Moscow—we think and pray we will finish with the fight in Chechnya—and then from Moscow, through North Caucasus, through Transcaucasia, and south. So it will be a link from East and West Europe, a link from Turkey, and a link from the Persian Gulf, and all *this* will concentrate in Central Asia. I consider it one of the most important events of the end of the 20th Century, I would call it a 21st-Century event, because the real result will come in the 21st Century.

EIR: Many of these very good railway-development ideas were thought of by Russia’s Count Sergei Witte in the late 19th Century, in cooperation with France’s Hanotaux; but this produced a violent reaction from the geopoliticians in London, determined to oppose development in what they called the “Eurasian heartland.” How do you see the British, today, reacting to these proposals for rail-vectored economic/infrastructure development?

Bondarevsky: Why should you remind them of this? I will tell you an important example: In 1989, Rafsanjani, the President of Iran, visited Moscow and had confidential discussions with Gorbachov. They signed this agreement about the Ashkabad-Mashad line. The next day, I was consulted on the matter, and that the agreement for the Ashkabad-Mashad line was only the beginning. I said, “I know, you discussed the continuation from Mashad up to Chaknehar, here in the Arabian Sea.” I was asked, “How can you know, we discussed it only yesterday with Gorbachov?” I said, “Yes, but I discovered the blueprint of this railway, made by Russian experts in 1901, in the archives.”

So many current ideas also existed at this time, you are right. I will send you a book of my daughter’s doctoral thesis, on the Iranian railway. The British tried to stop the building of railways through Iran, because of this trans-Asian railway. As a result, up to 1928, Iran did not have railways, because of this Russian-British controversy, and all the activity of the British geopolitical school! You are right. Afghanistan, up to today, has no railways.

It is correct, but the epoch is totally different. If the French and Germans invest in Central Asia using the railway, you may be sure that the British will run behind.