
Dr. Markku Heiskanen

Eurasian Land-Bridge Viewed From the North

Dr. Heiskanen is a senior fellow of the Nordic Institute of Asia Studies, working in Denmark. This is his presentation on March 22 at the Bad Schwalbach conference.

Thank you very much, Mme. Chairperson. First of all, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this impressive and very important conference, and extend my warm thanks for the opportunity to speak in front of such a dynamic and young audience, which is quite an exceptional process, and noted also by Ambassador Kim.

I am speaking here, primarily in the capacity of a visiting senior fellow of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. It's an institute which is maintained by the Nordic countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland. I basically come from the Finnish Foreign Ministry, where I have been serving as the Deputy Policy Planning Director; my special focus of interest being the Northeast States of Eurasia. In that capacity, as the Deputy Policy Planning Director, in 1999, when Finland held the presidency of the European Union, I had the honor to chair the policy planning and analysis working group of the European Union. And the working group produced a 30-page report, entitled, "Perspectives for Multi-Lateral Support to Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia: The Role of the European Union." I return to this report a little bit later in my presentation.

A third role that I have also, in a way, today, is that in my private life, I'm chairman of the Finland/Northeast Asia Trade Association. I think this capacity links me to the concept of the Eurasian railway, not only as a transportation link, but particularly as a geo-economic, and increasingly, as a geopolitical factor, as was referred to by earlier speakers today and yesterday.

I think this is the seventh conference, symposium, meeting, workshop I'm participating in, dealing with the question of Eurasian railways. Last year in April, my association organized a Eurasian railway symposium in Helsinki, which was very successful; and I think the most important thing—we had, certainly, all relevant countries participating, including both Korean states. That was the first time that North Korea participated in such a meeting. And the last meeting, last year, before this conference, was in Beijing in December. And the map you can see here—I think it's a very interesting and important map; because it doesn't show only Eurasia, but also



Dr. Markku Heiskanen: "There is already a functioning Eurasian railway connection."

the Northern Hemisphere including North America. I'll return to this map a little bit later.

How Eurasian Railway Functions

Perhaps I can say a few words about the conclusions of the informal, and "Track II" symposium we had in Helsinki. The basic point of convening such a symposium was, that we wanted to make known that there is already a functioning Eurasian railway connection, which is quite unknown for the time being. As the previous speakers said, there are a number of problems: opening the transport and railways connecting the different railways you can see there to the European system. There are problems with crossing the frontiers, and so on and so on. One of the conferences in which I participated last year was in Lianyungang in China, a Chinese harbor which is the terminal of the Euro-Asian railway which was initiated ten years ago. The other terminal, in Europe, is Rotterdam. And that was quite interesting, because it was the Euro-Asian Land-Bridge ten-year anniversary. And some 250 participants: I was the only European there, and I am not even related to the connection in Rotterdam. So it says something about reality of this Lianyungang-Rotterdam corridor. It's working; but so many problems. Because you have to cross so many countries with different gauges; the width of the rail; electronic systems, locomotives, whatever—I'm not a railway man, so I don't know so much about the technology; but it doesn't work very well.

On the other hand, what is fairly unknown (not as much as it was in April 2002) is that from Finland—it's not exactly from the capital of Finland, Helsinki, but close to Helsinki—

we have very large logistics centers, which provide daily train connections; about 1 kilometer-long freight train is leaving every day from Finland, for Vostochny, which is the port of Vladivostok in the Russian Far East. And unlike it was formerly believed, the trains are very, very punctual. I think you have this high-tech monitoring, so the customers know the time, where the containers are, what time they are arriving in their destination port. Many people remember the old days when there was a department in the Russian, and probably in the Soviet, Ministry of Railways, "Department of Missing Trains"; and I think the trains really were missing sometimes. I had a friend of mine, a diplomat from Poland, who moved from Tokyo to Helsinki, and all his home disappeared on the way from Vladivostok to Helsinki. And he got compensation from the insurance company, and two years later, the container was found. And I don't know even today, how it was solved by the insurance company.

So, the point is, that there is a working and operating, very effective, and increasingly used, Eurasian railway, from Finland to Vostochny, but not only to Vostochny. The majority of the freight from Vladivostok/Vostochny goes to Pusan, in South Korea. And of course, it is—for everybody using the Eurasian railway lines—very important if one day we can reconnect with the Trans-Siberian Railway. But it may take time. It's very much possible that in spite of all the nuclear tensions and so on, on the Korean Peninsula, the final reconnection of the railway tracks will take place this week, or next week, according to information we have received through international media from the two Korean states.

But, however, connecting the Trans-Siberian Railway:

I think primarily it is a symbolic, psychological, and very important political confidence-building measure in Korea, and in the region at large. It may take several years, I think, before the Trans-Siberian network can really serve as an effective destination of the Eurasian railway.

So, this railway-ship connection between Finland, Moscow, Vladivostok, and Pusan can work pretty much to the concept which was mentioned by the previous speaker, which was multimodal transportation systems. That is a multimodal transportation system. It's working very well. From Helsinki to Vladivostok, it's, I think, more than 9,000 kilometers. Even if the freight trains run quite slowly at the moment, it takes only 12 days. Then, when you reload the freight, and transport it by ships to Pusan—so, 16 days, only about two weeks later, they're already in Pusan. If you use more common means of transportation through the Suez Canal, it takes about 45 days average—and you are never sure exactly when the goods are arriving in their destination.

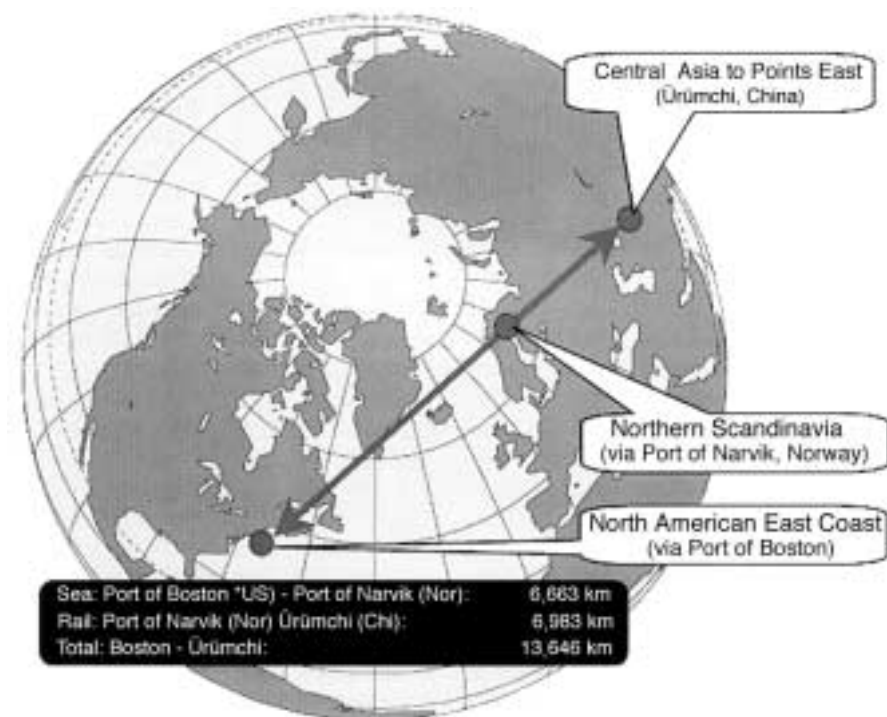
So, I think this multimodal system, combining freight transportation and road transportation, of course. The Korean Demilitarized Zone is now connected, and it's open—I think the two road corridors are open. So, of course, the multimodal transportation includes also road traffic, shipping, and naturally, to a certain extent, also air traffic.

Northern East-West Corridor

Well, then, I think there's no time now to speak on the geo-economic and geopolitical importance of the railways. I think on the Internet you can find a lot of material on this, by clicking the keyword "Eurasian Railways." You can also find the report of the meeting we held in April; it's about a 200-page report with a lot of power point material, statistics, like was shown by the previous speakers' presentations; various presentations by dignitaries, participants in the symposium, and so on. But, at the end of my presentation here, I would like to say a few words about this map you can see, which has been produced by the International Union of Railways. And the International Union of Railways—which has about 160-170 railway companies, from all over the world, as its members—they organized, in cooperation with the Chinese Ministry of Railways in Beijing, in December, a very large international conference on a project which is called Northern East-West Freight Corridor. The basic line, as you can see on the

FIGURE 1

Northern East-West Sea/Land-Bridge, Boston to China



Source: Adapted from Transportviking.

map, is from Lianyungang, China, via Beijing, via the Trans-Siberian Railway—on that map it goes through Kazakstan, but there are also possibilities to use the Vladivostok and other connections. So, the idea, and I think quite revolutionary, in a positive sense, is that you connect this Lianyungang connection up from Russia, through Finland, to Sweden, to the port of Narvik, in Norway.

The rationale of combining or connecting this railway to the port of Narvik in Norway, is that Narvik is the only Atlantic harbor in northern Europe, which is a deep-water harbor and an ice-free harbor; and what's even more important, that it's connected by railway to the Swedish and Finnish, and then Russian system. We must keep in mind that, for historical reasons, Finnish and Russian railways have the same gauge. The same width of rail, which facilitates very much also the running of the present northern-most Eurasian corridor. When the train starts from Vladivostok, so it's about ten days later on the frontiers of Finland, you don't have to change any wheels, and it takes about half an hour to cross the frontier. So, by utilizing this connection, and taking the containers to the port of Narvik, you can then use already-existing ship transportation lanes, to North America.

And there's also interest—besides the Chinese and Russian governments, who participated in the Beijing meeting at the vice-railway minister level—there's also concrete interest

in the United States and also in Canada, in this project. At the moment, the port of Boston is the key connection, and the director of the port of Boston also attended this Beijing conference.

What was also important was that—not at a very high level, but anyway—there was also a representative of the U.S. government, from the Department of Commerce, who had participated in this conference. So, I think at a certain level—we heard some quite pessimistic views, by my Korean colleague [Ambassador Kim] about the situation at the moment, and I agree with him, to some extent. But on the other hand, especially if we read the recent international media, it's very difficult to find any good news from Korea, from that region, from these things—I think we should do something to make also this positive development more largely known.

A Step Towards Eurasian Union

I would like to conclude by saying just a few words about the European Union, which I referenced at the outset of my presentation. Very recently, only a few weeks ago, in the United States, there was a very authoritative taskforce, which was chaired by one of the leading U.S. experts on Korea, Selig Harrison. They produced a 30-page report, entitled “Turning Point in Korea: New Dangers and Opportunities for the United States,” and I think it's a very timely report; you can find this on the Internet.

What is interesting is that, in this report, they are suggesting that a seven-nation conference should be convened in Brussels, with the European Union as host, on the topic of Security and Economic Development in Korea. With the participation of the European Union, as the host of the conference, plus the United States, South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia, and Japan. Also, the European Parliament has suggested in January, the end of January this year, that the European Commission—that means the Commission of the European Union—should convene in the late Spring, or early Summer, seven nation talks, about the situation in the Korean Peninsula, focussing on economic security and nuclear disarmament issues.

I haven't seen any official reactions yet to this proposal, but I think this raises some hope, that some serious multilateral prospects will be discussed, and I do hope that this conference can be convened. I believe that it's quite difficult to have an overall conference on the Korean question—the highly political nuclear issues, and so on, and not situating the questions at large. But I think the conference could be started by very good preparation in the working groups dealing with economic cooperation, and I think the railway is really one very concrete thing.

I may finish my presentation—thank you very much for your attention—by saying the same thing I said in Beijing, when I was speaking under the title “Eurasian Railways: Toward a New Logistical World Order.” I said that what's going on now, could be the first step toward a future Eurasian Union. Thank you very much.