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# STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE SEAPORT OF KOPER, SLOVENIA

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**Abstract:** Presented is the development of the city and the port of Koper in the Upper Adriatic and its role as a regional transport node. Koper is in fact a substitute port-city; it developed after the decline of Trieste in the post-WW2 period because of the needs of Slovenian economy within ideologically polarized Europe during the 1950s. Favourable economic connections between Slovenia and the wider hinterlands in Central Europe facilitated the development of this port into an important North Adriatic transport node, with over 20 million tons of cargo per year and specialization for transportation of cars, timber, containers and finer commodities.

**Key words:** Koper, maritime transport, Slovenia, Central Europe, geopolitics, Adriatic

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## 1. Introduction

Never in recent history have traffic connections between the Baltic and the Adriatic areas been so extensive as they are nowadays. The increased importance of pan-European transport corridors offers maximum economic and social opportunities to the key nodes, to metropolises with airports and railway nodes in particular. However, the transcontinental character of the new connections most directly affects seaports (and river-ports as well). One of them, Koper, a small Slovenian town (close to 26,000 inhabitants, 2015) on the Adriatic coast, has developed into an important regional European port, thanks to the changed political circumstances, and its name has been put on the European transport map. Like Gdynia in Poland, Koper is actually a substitute port, created after the older maritime centres, Trieste for Slovenia and Gdansk for Poland, had been, in the geopolitical dynamics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, lost (temporarily at least)

for these two countries; hence they decided to build new ports close to the old port-cities. Koper was a Slovenian political project born out of defiance and also out of economic needs; it was developing in dependence of broader geopolitical circumstances in the neighbourhood, in the North Adriatic and Central Europe – and the outcome was a success. Constant traffic growth and diversification of transshipment structure in both these ports are a proof to the justified audacity of political decisions decades ago. However, new pan-European corridors provide new opportunities to them and dictate the tempo of spatial development on the local level, and consideration of the premises of geopolitical relations in the future on the global, or at least European, level.

The city of Koper is the topic of the paper, its port in particular. The city developed thanks to the port activities, and indirectly thanks to political circumstances which created the conditions for a rapid growth. The rest are just the nuances of development,

being either locally-specific or belonging to the national or even broader context. Outlined are the main features of urban development of Koper under the influence of the dynamics of port activities, its present transportation structure with maritime transport and its integration in broader regional and European contexts. The understanding of these dynamics can be facilitated by the illustration of the changed geopolitical relations in the North Adriatic as the natural hinterland of Koper.

The purpose of this contribution is to enlighten the development of the city of Koper in connection with the increase of maritime transportation as a key factor of integration of the city and its hinterland. While taking into account the specificities of the political development of Slovenia (particularly after WW2) and the much wider geopolitical circumstances in the large area of the Upper Adriatic, mostly in the last century.

## 2. Development and present spatial structure of Koper

The city of Koper has had a traditional urban continuity from the Roman period onwards. Its location on a little island close to the Istrian coast provided safety in the case of attacks from the mainland. In this, Koper was not an isolated case: there are several other littoral towns of this kind along the Slovenian (Izola and Piran) and Croatian coast (Umag, Poreč, Rovinj and Novigrad) and Trieste in Italy. The function of a port was not

particularly expressed in any of them all until the late 18th century. The islet on which the original core of Koper had emerged was connected to the mainland by means of embankment in the first half of the 19th century, and the shallow sea in between turned into shallow marshes and became a kind of artificial coastal lagoon. Salt pans also developed there. Otherwise this place had no special function for quite a long time. For centuries Koper was part of Venetian possession, as were the other settlements along the Istrian coast. In such a position it was always an important city but due to only a modest local hinterland it was never really influential (tab. 1). Although Slovenian immigration to the coastal towns was quite intense, they retained a predominantly Roman character (Božič, 1980, p. 45). At the end of the 18th century, when the Habsburg Empire gained the entire area of the eastern Adriatic coast together with the hinterland, the development of Trieste began which made it the main port of the monarchy. Later on, Trieste got a modern railway connection with Vienna and Prague and the city developed into one of the most important south-European ports (Pirjevec, 2008, p. 17), whereas Koper and other coastal towns began to stagnate. Stagnation continued after Istria and its hinterland were annexed to Italy after WW1. The fascist Italy was planning its territorial and economic expansion into the eastern hinterland (Burgwyn, 2009, pp. 17-20). Koper was insignificant in these plans. But it was Trieste that was important and was given an ample Italian state support in the form of intense planned industrialization (Pirjevec, 2008, p. 22).

Tab. 1. Development of the population of Koper in the period 1869-2015

Year	1869	1900	1931	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002	2016
Number of residents	7,773	8,614	8,542	10,971	17,608	23,581	24,704	25,204	25,975

Sources: *Krajevni leksikon Slovenije* (1995), *Statistical yearbook of Slovenia* (2016).

Political borders moved even closer to these two cities after the Second World War. This area and its surroundings were transformed into a specific temporary political formation – the Free Territory of Trieste, divided into military zones A and B: Zone A was subject to the Anglo-American military administration and Zone B was controlled by the Yugoslav authorities (partisan forces). Diplomatic negotiations on the final settling of border issues were going on for a whole decade after 1945. This process, referred to as the 'Trieste crisis', was the first of serious conflicts and measuring of military and political balance of powers between the socialist "East" under the patronage of the Soviet Union and the capitalist "West", controlled

by the USA. In this atmosphere of the geopolitical west-east rivalry the term of the "Iron Curtain" emerged; the area of Trieste should have been protected by an impassable border barrier against the "red", or Slavic (often interpreted as Slovene), threat (Kacin Wohinz, Pirjevec, 2000, p. 128). This idea was not long-lived. In 1948, Yugoslavia declined the Soviet model and the Soviet Union patronage (what is known as the Informbiro-conflict) and established its own, Yugoslav, socialism policy. Socialism was preserved, but not in its strictest version, which helped it to re-open to the "West"; cross-border relations improved and opportunities for economic cooperation emerged. In 1955, relations between Yugoslavia and Italy were

provisionally settled; the border line was drawn as it is today. According to this agreement, Trieste belonged to Italy and Zone B to Yugoslavia (Pirjevec et al., 2006, p. 231) where it was divided between Slovenia and Croatia. With this act Slovenia finally became a maritime country with its own access to the sea. But on the other hand, Slovenia, the north-western federal unit of Yugoslavia and industrially its most developed part, was left without a port (Kristen, 2006, pp. 4-27). However, it was absolutely necessary for economic autonomy of the Federal Republic – for the highly export-oriented Slovenian economy in particular – to have a port of its own. This should be understood within the context of ethnical and political relations in the Yugoslav Socialist Federation. The tendency for actual autonomy of its six constitutive units was based primarily on economy support; therefore the building of a “national” port was highly valued in domestic political relations (Klemenčič, Žagar, 2004, p. 209). A few years later, this (economy supported) autonomy was recognized as an anti-centralist feature (against Belgrade) of Slovenian policy. The idea to construct a new port in Koper was highly promoted by the Slovenian political management of the time, since it was a kind of economic and cultural imperative for Slovenia; therefore the planned construction of the new port in Koper was also supported by the authorities to improve the political relations of Yugoslavia with the countries of the European Economic Community. Also for the growing Slovenian economy, which was based on the industrial paradigm, the new port became an important developmental advantage (Zupančič, 2012, pp. 16-19). In 1957, only two years after the Memorandum (in Rome, 1955; agreement between Italy and Yugoslavia), the company of Luka Koper (Port of Koper; company for maritime transport) was officially founded. Less than a year later (in 1958), the first trans-ocean cargo ship “Gorica” moored at the quay in the port of Koper. Thus, the official development of the Port of Koper started in 1957 (Jakomin, 2007, pp. 4-26). Yugoslav maritime authorities were not particularly glad about Slovenian attempts in maritime activities. After several years of negotiations, the Port of Koper became a member of the Yugoslav maritime port union in 1961. On the other hand, the Slovenian authorities failed to fully support the newly established port by building adequate railway connections. After a decade, this project became a local enterprise and the construction of the railway connection from Koper to Divača (26 km) was financed by the Port of Koper and the Municipality of Koper. It was technically a very demanding project due to the complex geology structure of the terrain. In 1970, a single-track railway connection from the Kras plateau across the lower-lying flysch slopes was

ready. The growth of transshipment in the port steadily increased; in 1968 it exceeded one million tons of cargo for the first time, and it doubled the following year. Transshipment in 2015 amounted to about 20.7 million tons and ferryboat transport also grew in importance (www.lukakoper.si, 2016). Due to poor transport connections (single-track railway) the possibilities of inland transportation heavily lagged behind the offer, especially after 1990 when the markets of Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic opened. Throughout, Austria was practically the principal trading partner because it particularly depended on the port of Koper due to its proximity and economic links (Černe, 2004). On the other hand, pending over the maritime orientation of Slovenia has been the outcome of fixing the maritime boundary with Croatia (Ortolland, Pirat, 2008, p. 77).

The development of the port traffic has undergone several phases. It has been substantially affected by the changes in political borders, border regimes and border policies. Its future development likewise highly depends on the positioning of Slovenia in Central Europe. Included among the most important developmental impulses is the EU enlargement. The policy of open borders and common European market reduces the barriers, handling time and costs which are the key categories in almost all transport strategies. Inter-modality is the next key factor. Ports are the sea-land contact points and therefore, by definition, also transport nodes. There are some obstacles for Koper in fulfilling this function, primarily due to the lack of railway network modernization (another railway, called “the second track”, has been planned for two decades at least, but its construction has not even started yet). Both these aspects should also be seen in the light of the competitive conditions in the (North Adriatic) region.

### 3. Koper: portrait of a small littoral city

The city of Koper consists of four urban areas. The old city core on the islet undergoes intense tertiarization and renovation, and old buildings recognized as cultural heritage are under monument protection. The new, i.e. residential, part (Semedela) spreads uphill the Istrian flysch mainland. A third part is the reclamation ground in between which now makes the place for roads and for commercial and business centres. Being the space in between, it has undergone a rapid structural transformation and is changing its image. A fourth, the largest, part consists of port facilities: three operational piers, complex of warehouses, workshops, services and transport areas. Spatially, the company of Luka Koper/Port of Koper is

the biggest local agent which indirectly generates more than a third of jobs in Koper proper and additional several thousand jobs in the hinterland. In fact, we should also name a fifth area: Škocjanski zatok (the Škocjan inlet), the only surviving sea relic that was transformed into a lake by artificial barriers and is also protected. As a combination of brackish and freshwater habitats (of birds and small animals) it has the status of Nature Reserve – Ecologically Important Area. However, the status is somewhat disputable from the viewpoint of both ecology and economy. The area of Škocjanski zatok is practically completely surrounded by transport and business areas. The business part with transport veins and the port itself as a whole were namely created on the reclaimed ground and reach to the mainland with their margins only (Ogrin, 2012, pp. 4-8).

A rather extensive littoral plain offers Koper excellent opportunities for spatial development. For the needs of port activities the channels for marine traffic in the very port need constant deepening. Silt from the seabed is deposited at the edge of the port and thus the littoral plain, after having been drained, is well fortified and is gradually getting ready for new investment actions. No other northern Adriatic city has such favourable local conditions. As a second favourable moment the mild maritime climate can be taken into account, with a lesser frequency and poorer strength of the NE wind (bora) if compared to Trieste. This cold continental wind can significantly impede operative services in the port. Especially for certain types of cargo (crude ores, fruits, timber) that require certain conditions in port warehouses prior to reaching the consumers in Central Europe, Koper represents a climatic advantage (Jakomin, 2007, p. 12).

But economic and political circumstances are not so favourable. Although Slovenia has all the time officially declared the operation of the Koper port as one of its strategic orientations, a series of facts in the last quarter of a century have shown that the maritime orientation of Slovenia was rather a declarative matter, since practical measures have been significantly behindhand. For example, the local tourist-spa complex set up in the neighbouring Ankaran as well as the above-mentioned protected Škocjanski zatok Nature Reserve pose obstacles to spatial development. New transport areas are imperative because of the increased transport needs. The undeniable and undesirable facts are that the Port of Koper funded the railway connection from the railway node of Divača to the sea on its own; that the second railway is still questionable; that the train ride from Koper to Ljubljana (capital of Slovenia; the most important hinterland city) is three times longer (circa 3.5 hours) than a car drive along the highway (about 1 hr – 110

km). A shipyard was set up in the nearby small town of Izola (at the distance of 7 km), and the headquarters of the only Slovenian shipping company (Splošna plovba Piran) are located 15 km away, at Portorož, which also seems to be a sign of a not very ambitious maritime policy of Koper. Attention should also be called to the fact that Koper has a powerful rival at a distance of 14 km to the north: Trieste in Italy (190.000 inhabitants); and in a broader sense, there are also Rijeka in Croatia (200,000 inhab.; 85 km from Koper) to the south-east, and the agglomeration of Venice-Mestre in Italy (0,5 million inhabitants.; 176 km from Koper) to the west. Koper is now a university city with a fairly diversified social infrastructure – the Slovenian littoral business, cultural and educational centre (Natek, Natek, 2008, p. 133).

#### 4. Geopolitical features of the Upper Adriatic

Koper and Trieste (at a mere 14-km distance) are located in the eastern arc of the Upper Adriatic. This is the sea area north of the line between the southernmost point of the Croatian peninsula of Istria and Ancona in Italy. The western part of the Adriatic arc has a low lagoon coast which reaches into the plains of the inland and was historically connected mainly with northern Italy. Because of political reasons, the western part of the arc was delimited with the barrier formed by the Alps; the eastern part is much broader, although the mountainous hinterland is of higher altitudes. In the hinterlands of the eastern part of the North Adriatic littoral one of the biggest European states expanded its territory in the modern era, i.e. the Habsburg Monarchy. The transport route from Austrian and Czech mining, industrial and energy centres ran across the Alpine and Dinaric passes to the nearest coastal zones. For Austria, it was Trieste in the first place: a window to the sea for the dual-monarchy, a multicultural centre with cosmopolitan pulsation, with exceptional spatial and economic dynamics. The power of the Monarchy and its prestige was also measured by its maritime power. Rijeka (now Croatia) was the second maritime centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and mainly provided shipping services to the Hungarian part of Austria-Hungary. In between was a naval base at Pola, a military port at the southernmost point of the Istrian peninsula; and there was also the most exposed Adriatic island of Vis, located nearly at the geometric centre of the Adriatic Sea. Trieste was a multi-ethnic city with a relative Italian ethnic majority in the centre and an absolute Slovenian ethnic majority in the suburbs and in the closer hinterland. In addition, the following ethnicities also lived in the city: German, Czech, Jewish, Greek, Serbian,

Croatian, Friulian, Hungarian, Ruthenian (Ukrainian) and Polish, and other representatives of the multi-ethnic Danubian empire. Trieste merged the variety of economic interests of Central Germany, the whole of the present-day Austria, Bohemia, southern Poland and the Carpathian Basin (Pirjevec, 2008). The hinterlands underwent marked modernization and high pressures on the environment and local rural societies. For many emigrants of various ethnic origin from Central Europe and the Danubian basin the port of Trieste was an important outlet station on their way to the "New World" of the two Americas and elsewhere. Exclusively predominant in the era of the Habsburg rule were the north-south strategic directions, while the meridian directions were not observed at all.

The situation radically changed after the First World War when the area came under the rule of the Kingdom of Italy as required by the Treaty of Rapallo (1920). The Italian 'East Policy' referred to the historical law on the right to possess the east-Adriatic coast with its hinterlands (the Roman heritage of small littoral towns in Istria, and the possessions of the Most Serene Republic of Venice until its fall in 1801), and it also reckoned on its territorial expansion to the Balkans. Had these claims been realized, the Adriatic Sea would have become the Italian inland sea or "*mare nostrum*". However, the Italian irredentism attained but curtailed goals. By all means, the possession of Trieste was a great diplomatic achievement and geopolitical shift. Only a few decades after its formation, Italy established itself as one of the major European powers. But Trieste seriously declined due to the loss of its hinterland. Maritime transport was replaced by planned, forced industrialization (Del Boca, 2007, pp. 44-45) and the city turned into a military-industrial complex. The newly established longitudinal connections served almost exclusively the purpose of geopolitical expansion.

Political developments after the Second World War created a completely new situation. The North Adriatic became a geopolitical junction of the two ideological blocs (Parker, 1997, p. 76). Although fairly homogeneous as to ethnic identities (Italians in the west, Slovenians in the middle and Croatians in the south-east parts of this area) and also cultural provenance and tradition, this space became a conflict area for which and in which the two key powers fought for dominance (Lacoste, 2009). Its exceptional traffic location became traffic-irrelevant; Trieste actually became a sort of European tail end. An idea emerged and a plan for an "Iron Curtain": a concept that for long four decades fixed the boundary between the European socialist "East" and the capitalist "West" (Pirjevec, 2008, p. 14). Socialist Yugoslavia deviated from the Soviet block in 1948 and subsequently the relations significantly

changed. The neutrality of Austria, the non-alignment of Yugoslavia and, twenty years later, the isolation of radically socialist Albania – all of these created a strategic vacuum-area almost in the middle of Europe, i.e. a territory that did not belong to any block (Lacoste, 2009). However, it was vital for the Western powers that the Soviet Union, being the core of the global "Heartland", did not reach the warm sea at any point and it thus remained curtailed in maritime access and consequently limited in its military control and expansion opportunities.

The European integration prelude reached an important and – from the standpoint of transport strategies at least – interesting stage in this area. In the 1970s, two important shifts happened. The Yugoslav-Italian Ossimo Treaty (signed in 1975; ratified in 1976) radically changed their reciprocal perception and created the concept of open border in the very area in which only two decades earlier the idea of the "Iron Curtain" emerged. In the following years Italy and Slovenia (as a part of the Yugoslav socialist federation) developed one of the most open European borders, much earlier than the European Union did. Information-, transport- and technical instrumentalization of border lines and key nodes began, and location by the border became a local advantage; diversity was declared a value, and cooperation was planned to overcome the differences, barriers and historical resentment (Bufon, 2008). The second shift happened in 1978, when the regional association was formed, called the "Alps-Adria Working Community". This territorial formation soon admitted regions to the north of the Alpine bow and also to the east, beyond the still existing "Iron Curtain", i.e. several districts in Hungary. It is true that this regional initiative did not overcome the strategic distrust of the "east" and the "west", but through various actions it attempted to affirm the advantages of individual regions in this area. Indeed, the Alps-Adriatic regional association was probably the prototype of the Euroregion which united ethnically, politically, militarily and ideologically different units. This, however, cannot be understood without the inclusion of powerful regional and anti-centralistic movements in Europe during the last two decades of the 20th century (Zupančič, 2004). These initiatives did not create the new, united Europe, but demonstrated the power of regions and proved that branch-connections are possible and useful. At the top of the task list of the Alps-Adriatic Working Community were precisely the reconstruction and construction of transport routes and the solving of transport-logistics problems. The initiative was a valuable European experience, offering also powerful developmental chances to the key transport nodes. The mentioned circumstances were

extremely important for the development of Koper and its transport activities, maritime transport in particular.

European integration processes brought the area of the Upper Adriatic into focus again and assigned it the role of a typical "gateway" (Zupančič, 2004). This was an opportunity for the revival of the old centripetal traffic directions (towards larger urban agglomerations in Central Europe and the Danubian basin) and the establishment of new ones. Two major European transport corridors meet in this area now: (a) the Baltic-Adriatic axis and (b) the trans-Mediterranean route. The former runs along two arms: one from Gdansk-Gdynia on the Baltic coast (Poland) across the Czech Republic and Austria to Koper, Trieste and Italian north-Adriatic seaports all the way to Ravenna; another from Warsaw to Riga (Latvia). The latter transport corridor connects Spain via southern France, northern Italy and the Northern Adriatic area, with Koper and Trieste as two important traffic nodes, and further on via Hungary with Ukraine and Russia. The removing of economic, military and police border controls resulting from the integration of European countries into the EU gave rise to certain flows which offer new opportunities to the key nodes, including Koper as a contact of land and sea. Traffic strategies that have never been so vivid and powerful are growing in importance nowadays.

## 5. Recent maritime transport role of Koper

Increase in transport activity in Koper used to be only gradual, because the port started its complex construction and affirmation practically from zero. Transshipment in Koper in numbers was as follows: in 1962 it amounted to 270,000 tons, a year later 628,000 tons, and in 1966 already 789,000 tons; in 1968 the mark of 1 million tons was exceeded for the first time, and two years later the mark of 2 million tons was exceeded. The main bulk of cargo was transshipped for Slovenian companies. In the following years the growth was somewhat slower due to the economic crisis and logistic difficulties. The real bottleneck was represented by the railway. Later on, enterprises from two socialist countries, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and also from the neighbouring Italy and Austria participated in the transportation services. Transshipment reached 4.5 million tons in 1975; 5.7 million tons in 1979; and around 7.5 million tons in 1982. But 10 million tons were only reached in 1998. The intermediate decade was less favourable for maritime transport due to the Yugoslav economic and political crises; nevertheless, Koper as a port was quite attractive for enterprises from Austria and Italy.

Especially after 1990, it was a foothold for cargo for Austrian companies, to a large extent due to the general (bulk) cargo (various minerals, ores, coal) and wood. Transshipment of sawn timber from Austria for companies in the Arab world constantly increased: in 2009 it was around 13 million tons; in 2010 over 15 million tons. In spite of the global economic crisis transshipment in the port of Koper increased due to the ever broader range of freight assortments. The entire transshipment in 2015 was 20.712 million tons (www.lukakoper.si 2016).

Initial port activity comprised various so-called general cargos (fruits, cereals, foods, a bit of wood) and was oriented to the needs of Slovenian industry. Import was up to 80% of transshipment in Koper and only about 10% was export; about 10% was transit for Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The port had to compete with the already well-established and well-known ports in the vicinity, Trieste and Rijeka (tab. 2). The development of port activities was significantly related to broader geopolitical situation in the hinterland of Central Europe, and to the forms of cooperation with the neighbouring countries. The development of the port and, indirectly, of the city was not fostered by the development of Slovenian economy, but primarily by the size of economic hinterland of the port that was spreading in the countries of Central Europe. While Italy has a number of ports with a centuries-long tradition and the location of Koper is but marginal and optional for it, Koper (besides Trieste) is a logical choice for Austria, and partly also for Bavaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, which means for the parts of the Danubian Central Europe without contact with the sea. Political development in itself did not stimulate traffic (the port had to prove its competence of speedy and high-quality operation and competitiveness). The inadequate railway network (which remains a blemish to the date) was somewhat compensated for with ro-ro cargos and containers (Černe, 2004).

Another key advantage in the development of the port can be seen in cargo specialization, technical and organizational preparation for the manipulation of certain shipments (especially fruits, wood) which had to be conditioned prior to subsequent transport. These services also created numerous jobs, thus benefiting the local as well as the broader, i.e. hinterland, economy. Koper has the advantage of extensive areas of land reclaimed on the sites of former lagoons. The port has spread to the sea with its piers and on the shore through land reclamation from former lagoons. This became particularly important with voluminous bulk cargoes, such as ore and coal, and of course sawn wood, and also with live animals. The availability of an extensive port area became an important

advantage especially after 1990 when the European borders opened after the fall of the "Iron Curtain" and the needs increased for cheaper industrial commodities. However, crucial for Koper were cars; it actually became the most important South-European

port for car import and export, and industrial commodities in containers were the second most important cargo. Koper thus became the foremost container port in the North Adriatic (Jakomin, 2007, p. 15).

Tab. 2. Transshipment of containers in North Adriatic ports in 2015

Port	Country of origin	Transshipped volume (in TEU)
Koper	Slovenia	790,740 TEU
Trieste	Italy	501,300 TEU
Rijeka	Croatia	200,100 TEU
Venice	Italy	560,310 TEU

Source: <https://luka-kp.si/slo/novice/single/z-novo-tehnologijo-do-visje-produktivnosti-in-vecj-10028>.

The Port of Koper can now manipulate various types of cargo, from the so-called general cargo (fruits, different food items, consumers goods), sawn wood, live animals, oil, metal products (cast iron, copper, aluminium and semi-finished products /plates, rods, rolled sheet/ made of metal), bulk (ores, coal), grains, petroleum products, to ro-ro cargo, containers and cars (fig. 1). The port has 13 terminals altogether, specialized for different types of cargo. In view of the hinterland structure and the ambitions to spread strategically, the port's diversity is as important as the possibility of rapid and inexpensive railway transport. On the other hand, specialization is important for the port to be easily recognizable, for the simplification of logistics, for lessening environmental impacts and also for economic effects. Transportation of cars and manufactured goods generates higher income than

transportation of raw materials but requires different handling, climate and storage conditions, qualified staff and possible services. The use of containers is a worldwide growing trend in maritime transport, and to attract containers transport to Koper it was primarily necessary to compete with Trieste and Venice, the two long-established Mediterranean ports; but it was the transportation of cars in which Koper had good developmental priorities. Demand for cars was rising sharply in all former socialist countries precisely at the time when Koper was undergoing a rapid modernization and gaining recognition, and the Asian market was also opening widely. The production rise of "Asian Tigers", with China at the head, had the crucial, even an exceptional, role in the expansion of Koper as one of the key south-European ports. Transportation of cars has some specific features

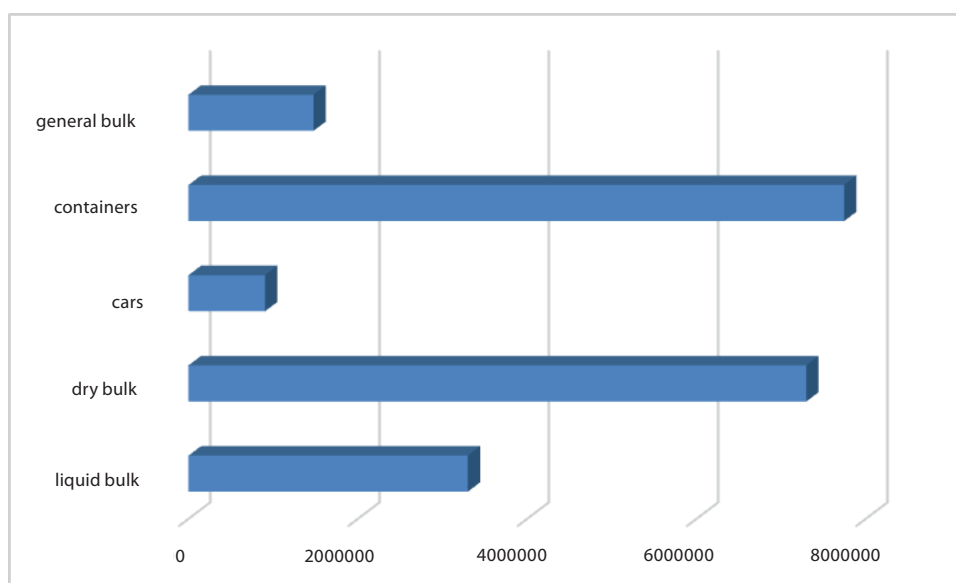


Fig. 1. Structure of transported goods in Port of Koper in 2015 (million tons)

Source: <https://luka-kp.si/slo/statistika-pretovora>.

because of technical regulations in individual countries in the hinterland. Because of the standards to protect their own engineering industry, Hungary and the Czech Republic restricted the import of cars. Therefore only semi-finished products were shipped to Koper and were subsequently assembled in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland; but in some cases (because of easy transport by sea) they were also partly disassembled after unloading, conserved and sent forth in parts to destinations in the hinterland (Jakomin, 2007, pp. 28-44). Due to dispersed market, road transport was even more suitable in terms of lesser manipulation costs, therefore poor railway network was not such a serious obstacle.

A passenger terminal is the newest facility of the port, which concludes the range of transport services of Koper. Passenger traffic is mainly related to tourism in both forms, as ferry routes and luxury cruisers landing. About 70,000 passengers are transported annually.

In the discussion about the strategic dimensions of the port of Koper, three levels should be taken into consideration: national, regional and transcontinental – European. Crucial for the national (in this case Slovenian) level is adequate transport service for the needs of import and export of Slovenian companies. In this way the Port of Koper guarantees and supports competitiveness of the national economy (Bricelj et al., 2007). All jobs that the port of Koper has created both directly and indirectly represent the second support. For Slovenia, the Port of Koper/Luka Koper is strategically important. On the regional level, embracing the area of the North Adriatic and its regional hinterland in between the Alpine bow, the Dinarides and the Pannonian lowland, elements of cooperation and partnership have been established on the one hand, and rivalry has grown on the other. The North Adriatic ports compete with the North Sea ports and partly with the Baltic ports, which is most evident in the Danubian basin areas that are the most remote from the sea, i.e. between the Rhine and

the Carpathian arc. Mutual connection of ports mainly results in key investments along the Pan-European corridors into infrastructure and into producing intermodal effects with other forms of transport on the level of international cooperation on the regional scale. Cooperation makes the main traffic routes more distinguishable. But relations of rivalry between the ports have developed to an almost equal extent. It applies to Koper particularly in relation to Trieste and Rijeka because they are located very close together. All of the three ports can use a common transport infrastructure across the Slovenian territory. This is the shortest route to Central Europe, but not equipped in the most modern way. Construction of railway and road infrastructure and affording adequate transport nodes is Slovenia's priority in terms of ensuring the competitiveness of Koper (and resultantly of Slovenia), but it also increases rivalry. All of the North Adriatic ports take advantage of the proximity of Pan-European corridors (Baltic-Adriatic and from Spain to Ukraine – fig. 2) (Černe, 2004). The transcontinental level is evident exactly in deriving benefit from the advantages



Fig. 2. The position of Koper and Central European Transport Network



provided by the intersection of the two corridors (which gives the greatest emphasis to the excellent transport position of Koper), while the successful operation of the port brings benefits to the wider region as well as the European population as a whole.

## 6. Conclusion

Pondering over the strategic importance of the port of Koper and its maritime role in the national, regional and continental, or European, context is ultimately a matter of strategic calculation. Being an old but minor town, Koper grew in importance as a vital North Adriatic regional port only after the Second World War, and that as a substitute port. It was an anti-centralistic measure of Slovenian regional policy, the expression of defiance and self-confidence after the loss of Trieste and Gorizia after World War II, a project of growing regional trends during the liberalization of European economy policies from the Treaty of Ossimo of 1976 onwards, and an exponent of the United Europe project of 1992 and beyond; the latter period was also the time of the greatest economic prosperity of both the port and the city. The subsequent development in political borders and international relations provided circumstances for continuous growth of port activities, which resulted in the increasing importance of Koper. The port in fact is a function of the port's hinterland and concurrently also of the geopolitical dynamics in the broader European space. This political heritage also reveals a strong dependence of the port on political changes and therefore dictates a high degree of flexibility, notwithstanding the fact that the concept of developing port activities on the Slovenian coast has so far undeniably been successful.

In a good half of a century, Koper has developed from a small cabotage (littoral) port to one of important maritime points in South European transport zone. Today, beside ever important general cargo, the transport of cars and containers are exposed as probably most perspective orientation in maritime transport manipulations. At the same time raises the dilemma of cooperation or conversely on the other hand, the competition between North Adriatic harbours (Venice, Trieste, Koper and Rijeka). The winner of this competition depends increasingly of transport connections with the hinterland and abilities of the economic and political management of Slovenian authorities. Another important factor is the main maritime corridor between South Europe and Asia through the Arab arc.

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