



New Europe with new railway passenger services



SEE countries have always been the subject of an international interest associated with their position on the border between Europe and Asia. To a large extent it is also valid for the railways, which are important part of the freight chain West-East, and also provide transport services to millions of passengers within the region and beyond it. EU membership of Bulgaria and Romania did not reflect significantly the routes of international passenger trains. Essential importance had only the financial crisis of recent years, which delayed opening of new services, and in some cases terminated existing one.

New Europe Bridge

However, the "new" EU members put considerable efforts for long term connection of their economies and infrastructure with Pan-European. A good example of this is the opening of the New Europe Bridge which connects two neighboring cities in Bulgaria and Romania – Vidin and Calafat. Originally planned as a rail bridge and then constructed as a combined road-rail, the bridge begins to change European trade routes. And if car and truck traffic have already exceeded the expected value of loading, rail traffic is expected to reveal its potential from now on. The first step in this direction is the launch of regular passenger services across the bridge between Vidin and Golenti.

Awakening of Greece

Probably one of the mirthless symbols of the global financial crisis was Greece. The political and economic situation led to the suspension of all international train connections of Greece with the region in 2011. Passengers didn't disappear. The lack of competition logically led to expansion of bus services and increased car traffic. The key for improvement of Greece during

the post-crisis is related to the reopening of the country to neighbors, which will not happen easily without the relaunch of international railway services.

The new international railway services in New Europe

Starting from 10 May the timetables of railway operators of Southeastern Europe include new international services. These are between Bulgaria and Romania across the New Europe Bridge and between Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia. Launching of the new services was a result of international cooperation in various projects, mainly RAIL4SEE. The project studies and analyses the possibilities for improving existing and introduction of new passenger railway services in Southeast Europe and the possibilities for the integration of railways with other transport modes in order to create reliable and sustainable integrated transport services. Participation of experts from leading transport research institutes and transport companies from Western Europe is very important with regard to the exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of research, planning and launching of new services. In addition to the above mentioned lines, railways in the region have a plan to open additional services, such as Alexandroupolis (Greece) – Svilengrad (Bulgaria), and the harmonization of timetables of existing services between Sofia, Belgrade, Istanbul and Bucharest. The project also aims to help introducing new tourist services (thematic trains), which will relate to the newly opened international connections. This will allow railways in the region to provide not only transport services, but also attractive possibilities for the use of rail transport for tourist purposes.

Train services Vidin – Golenti

Two pairs of passenger trains will run daily on twenty kilometer route between Vidin and Golenti across New Europe Bridge, making no other stops. Travel time will be 20 min. Trains timetable provides convenient transfer conditions to continue traveling towards Craiova (from Golenti) and Sofia (from Vidin). The route will be operated by the Romanian state company CFR

Călători with Siemens Desiro DMU's. Maximum operational speed in the section Golenti–Vidin is 100 km/h. However operation of trains with electrical traction is not envisaged, despite the fact that bridge and the adjacent sections (incl. Golentri station) are electrified. The main argument is that on the Romanian side railway line from Golenti to Craiova (96 km) is not electrified. The price of a single ticket between Vidin and Golenti is 3.80 EUR and from Vidin to Craiova – 7.80 EUR.

Train Nr.10011		Train Nr.10013		Station	Train Nr.10012		Train Nr. 10014	
Arr.	Dep.	Arr.	Dep.		Arr.	Dep.	Arr.	Dep.
<i>10:38</i> <small>1)</small>	10:40	<i>16:05</i> <small>5)</small>	16:10	Golenti	12:45	<i>12:50</i> <small>4)</small>	18:00	<i>18:03</i> <small>8)</small>
11:00	<i>12:02</i> <small>2)</small>	16:30	<i>17:25</i> <small>6)</small>	Vidin	<i>11:37</i> <small>3)</small>	12:25	<i>16:44</i> <small>7)</small>	17:40

¹⁾ Arrival of train R 9133 from Craiova (CFR)

²⁾ Departure of train R 7623 to Sofia (BDZ)

³⁾ Arrival of train R 7620 from Sofia (BDZ)

⁴⁾ Departure of train R 9136 to Craiova (CFR)

⁵⁾ Arrival of train R 10013 from Craiova (CFR)

⁶⁾ Departure of train R 7625 to Sofia (BDZ)

⁷⁾ Arrival of train R 7622 from Sofia (BDZ)

⁸⁾ Departure of train R 10014 to Craiova (CFR)

Traveling with both pairs of trains on the way to/from Central Europe initially will not be convenient, due to the long travel time. For example on the way from Budapest to Sofia passengers will change trains 4 times (with trains IC 79 – D 1696 – R 9133 – R 10011 – R 7623) and the total travel time will be 25 hours 16 minutes. It is worth to be mentioned, that the operation of these two pairs of trains is part of a project to launch a direct train connection between Budapest and Sofia across New Europe Bridge. MAV, CFR Călători and BDZ collaborate on this project.

Train services Thessaloniki – Sofia and Thessaloniki – Skopje – Belgrade

On the route Thessaloniki – Sofia TRAINOSE and BDZ will provide one pair of trains in each direction daily. Train Nr.360 will depart from Thessaloniki at

6:55 and will arrive in Sofia at 14:00. In the opposite direction the train from Sofia Nr.361 will depart at 15:20 and arrive in Thessaloniki at 22:20, where passengers will make transfer to Athens, with train departing at 23:00. International train will consist of two seating cars – one of each operator. In Bulgaria and Greece, the train will stop at several stations, which will allow attracting more passengers. Price of train tickets will be significantly cheaper than those for bus – single trip ticket will cost 17.80 EUR, while return ticket – 34.60 EUR. Return tickets, purchased 15 days before travel will cost 25 EUR. The intent of both the railway operators is to promote tourism, such as providing special packages for summer tourism in Greece and winter tourism in Bulgaria, including journeys with steam trains.

The route Thessaloniki – Skopje – Belgrade will be also operated by one pair of trains daily. The train will contain one seating car of Greek railways and two couchette cars of Serbian and Macedonian railways respectively. The train will depart from Thessaloniki at 16:00, and will arrive in Skopje at 19:55 (local time). In 15 min the train will depart towards Belgrade, where will arrive at 5:30 on the next day. In the opposite direction the train will depart from Belgrade at 19:45 and arrive in Skopje at 05:00 in the morning. From Skopje will depart at 5:15 and will arrive in Thessaloniki at 11:17 h (local time). The price of one-way ticket for Thessaloniki – Skopje route will be around 12 EUR, of the return – around 20 EUR. Between Thessaloniki and Belgrade one-way ticket will cost around 32 EUR and return – 52 EUR. Railway operators report that in the summer months the train will include also one wagon for carriage of passenger cars.