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## THE ROAD NETWORK IN EAST RUMELIA – NEW DATA

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<https://doi.org/10.52603/rec.2024.36.18>**Rezumat****Rețeaua de drumuri din Rumelia de Est – date noi**

Pentru scurta sa existență – mai puțin de un deceniu, Rumelia de Est a lăsat istoricilor o mulțime de întrebări nerezolvate, căutând răspunsuri de mai bine de un secol. Până acum, principalul accent al cercetării a fost pe rețeaua de căi ferate din provincie, fiind cel mai modern mod de transport de persoane și mărfuri în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Totuși, în ciuda acestui interes pentru transportul feroviar, informațiile despre rețeaua de drumuri din Rumelia sunt extrem de limitate. Studiul de față își propune să abordeze această lacună prin analiza documentelor disponibile care descriu rețeaua de drumuri din regiune, completând tabloul infrastructurii din Rumelia de Est. Principalele documente care oferă informații despre dezvoltarea obiectelor de infrastructură din regiunea autonomă au fost păstrate datorită faptului că au fost tipărite în colecții speciale din orașul Plovdiv. Supraviețuirea acestor documente în timpul Primului și, mai ales, al celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial, în ciuda bombardamentului asupra orașului Sofia, este esențială pentru realizarea acestui studiu. Aceste documente s-au păstrat datorită eforturilor angajaților Bibliotecii Naționale din Sofia. Deși este posibil ca informații suplimentare, de natură periferică, să existe și în arhivele Imperiului Otoman, accentul cercetării se îndreaptă către analiza bazei normative și a viziunii domnitorilor din Rumelia de Est asupra construcției viitoarei rețele de drumuri. În ciuda faptului că rețeaua de drumuri nu a avut un impact economic major pe parcursul unei lungi perioade de timp, aceasta a rămas un element vital pentru populația locală.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** drumuri, Rumelia de Est, date noi, economie, Bulgaria.

**Резюме****Дорожная сеть Восточной Румелии – новые данные**

За свое короткое существование – менее десяти лет, Восточная Румелия оставила историкам множество нерешенных вопросов, ответы на которые ищут уже более века. До сих пор основное внимание в исследованиях уделялось изучению железнодорожной сети провинции, так как это был самый современный способ перевозки людей и товаров во второй половине XIX века. Однако, несмотря на интерес к железным дорогам, информация о дорожной сети Восточной Румелии крайне ограничена. Настоящее исследование ставит своей целью восполнить этот пробел посредством анализа доступных документов, описывающих дорожную сеть региона, дополняя общую картину инфраструктуры Восточной Румелии. Основные

документы, содержащие сведения о развитии инфраструктурных объектов автономного региона, сохранились благодаря тому, что были напечатаны в специальных сборниках в городе Пловдив. Их сохранность во время Первой и особенно Второй мировых войн, несмотря на бомбардировку Софии, имеет ключевое значение для данного исследования. Эти документы сохранились благодаря усилиям сотрудников Национальной библиотеки в Софии. Возможно, дополнительные данные, имеющие периферийный характер, также можно найти в архивах Османской империи, однако основное внимание исследования направлено на нормативную базу и видение правителей Восточной Румелии на строительство будущей дорожной сети. Несмотря на то что дорожная сеть в течение долгого времени не играла ключевой роли в экономике, она оставалась жизненно важным элементом для местного населения.

**Ключевые слова:** дороги, Восточная Румелия, новые данные, экономика, Болгария.

**Summary****The Road Network in East Rumelia – New Data**

For its brief existence – less than a decade, Eastern Rumelia left historians with numerous unresolved questions, with answers being sought for more than a century. Until now, the primary focus of research has been on the province's railway network, as it was the most modern means of transporting people and goods in the second half of the 19th century. However, despite this interest in railways, information about Eastern Rumelia's road network is extremely limited. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the available documents that describe the road network in the region, completing the overall picture of Eastern Rumelia's infrastructure. The main documents providing information about the development of infrastructure in the autonomous region have been preserved because they were printed in special collections in the city of Plovdiv. The survival of these documents during World War I, and especially World War II, despite the bombing of Sofia, is essential for this study. These documents have been preserved thanks to the efforts of the staff at the National Library in Sofia. While peripheral data might also be found in the Ottoman Empire's archives, the research focuses on the normative framework and how the rulers of Eastern Rumelia envisioned the future construction of the road network. Although the road network would not be essential for the economy for many years, it remained a vital element for the local population.

**Key words:** roads, Eastern Rumelia, new data, economy, Bulgaria.

Road networks are a fundamental and integral part of human history. Since Antiquity, roads have been a fundamental factor in the development of a civilization and a major mark of its achievements.

As an only way of connection between individual settlements, they have existed since the time when man decided to leave his birthplace and look for opportunities for development beyond the limits of what he knew. The two main types of roads until the beginning of the twentieth century were sea and land.

Infrastructure has been important since the time of the Roman Empire, and probably even before that, because good roads provide an opportunity for the development of trade, production, and therefore, for the accumulation of funds. On the other hand, in military operations, they are decisive for the supply of the army and its rapid redeployment, or in other words, roads provide greater opportunities for defense and expansion.

The autonomous region within the Ottoman Empire – Eastern Rumelia, came into being after the signing of the Treaty of Berlin in 1879. It inherited the Ottoman Empire's infrastructural capabilities in the area, which included several sections of state-of-the-art rail transport for the time, small Black Sea ports and a road network, in need of modernization.

Logically, in the basic studies concerning Eastern Rumelia, attention is mainly paid to railway transport and the problems surrounding its development. It does not cover by far the territory of the Region, and this is a major problem for the economy and its positive future development. A railway line in Rumelia starts from its border with the Ottoman Empire, at Tarnovoseymen<sup>1</sup> station there is a branch, significantly shorter than the main railroad, which reaches Yambol (Стателова 1983: 141). The terminus of the main route is Sarnbey<sup>2</sup>. The problem of the Rumelian economy with this transport does not end with linear length. The railway was built and operated by companies directly connected to Baron Hirsch before the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878)

The organic statute only confirms the status of the railway line, which remains the property of the Eastern Railways (Беров 1959: 85). Something logical, given the fact that it is located on the territory of an autonomous region within the limits of the Ottoman Empire. Elena Statelova defines this line as harmful for the economy of Eastern Rumelia, because it diverts Bulgaria's trade from the ports along Bulgaria's Black Sea coast to Istanbul and Dedeagach (Стателова 1983: 141). Here it is appropriate to ask ourselves the question, is it relevant to compare the above-mentioned ports? The answer is very sim-

ple – the two main ports – Varna and Burgas, were developed and modernized after 1885, which led to the enlargement and development of the two cities at the expense of those along the Danube River. But the more important thing here is that we are talking about the trade of an autonomous region within the limits of the Ottoman Empire, and it is unlikely that the empire would deliberately hinder its income. And more – it is normal for the state to prioritize its interests. The patriotic statements against the railway company are a fact (Стателова 1983: 141), inside and outside the Regional Assembly. On the other hand, no attention is paid to the fact that at this stage there is no Bulgarian option for construction and any other foreign company would take advantage to exploit the opportunities provided. However, this happened months before the Unification, in June 1885, when, after an agreement between Austria-Hungary, the Kingdom of Serbia, the Principality of Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, it was decided to undertake the construction of the Belovo – Vakarel railway line, as an attempt to limit to a minimum the missing elements of the main railroad: Vienna – Istanbul. In the period 1879–1885, there were several initiatives by the regional government in Eastern Rumelia to build the Burgas-Yambol railway section, but they all failed (Стателова 1983: 144-145).

The truth is that the fragile economy of the Region is not able to carry out an infrastructure project of this magnitude on its own at this stage, but it is precisely the economy that is in dire need of modernization and infrastructural development of the road network. Indeed, construction companies make a profit, but who builds without thinking about it?<sup>3</sup>

In the records, the focus remains on the railways, while the issue of road development, which of course Eastern Rumelia faces, remains a little on the sidelines. Their presence does not mean that they meet the modern requirements of the time. This part of the infrastructure is poorly considered in the records, but it is undoubtedly the most used by those living and passing through the District. This fact, although it has eluded research so far, is not so underestimated by the authorities in Rumelia. In this regard, we should note that well-preserved systematized official documents issued in special collections concerning the expansion, maintenance and development of roads have reached us. Through them, we will try to shed more light on the construction of a modern road network and the real potential of Eastern Rumelia in this direction.

The District Collection of Laws in Eastern Rumelia issued in 1881 gives us clarity on the matter. It contains Public-Administrative Regulations for

the construction, repair and maintenance of regional roads in Eastern Rumelia (Областенъ 1881: 27).

Issuing public-administrative regulations is the duty of the Governor-General of the Region (Областенъ 1881: 27). Their discussion and adoption by the Standing Committee of the Regional Assembly is mandatory according to Article 55 of the Organic Statute. Another important detail is that the adopted regulations have the force of laws (Областенъ 1881: 27). From what has been said so far, it is appropriate to note that this regulation is one of the first (1881) Bulgarian legal acts related to the construction, development and maintenance of roads on our soil. Of course, with the proviso that the autonomous region within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, from the very beginning of its development, has a Bulgarian character.

The public-administrative regulations for "Construction, reconstruction and maintenance of regional roads in Eastern Rumelia" were published on June 4, 1881, in the city of Plovdiv (Областенъ 1881: 36). The document consists of four chapters and forty-four articles. Its first part is devoted to the construction of roads. Given that this is the first attempt to create this type of rule, we can take for granted the fact that this chapter contains twenty-nine out of a total of forty-four articles. The regional government has yet to decide which are the main points through which the new roads will pass (Областенъ 1881: 28), but it is still clear that the main road from Europe to Asia will be followed, and everything else will be build extra. In the first part of the chapter, it is specified that new roads must be identical in height with old roads crossed by them and especially railway lines; and in the second case, the new road must comply with the height of the railway (Областенъ 1881: 28). A maximum of five percent longitudinal slope is allowed, and only for roads in mountainous terrain – up to ten percent, but this is the absolute maximum. Mandatory construction of bridges at crossings with other roads and rivers is provided for and, of course, the least possible contact with private property is recommended – Inserted probably for the purpose of economy, this article turns out to be very difficult to implement.

Articles thirteen to eighteen are extremely important as they present a detailed picture of the future roads in Eastern Rumelia. The two main parts of the road, according to the law, are logically a stone section, six meters wide, and a shoulder. The maximum permissible width of the road with the bank cannot be more than ten meters. It is also allowed to make a ditch next to the road, for water drainage, with a depth and width of fifty centimeters

(Областенъ 1881: 29). If the road is in a mountainous area, a ditch is provided only from the height. In case of danger of landslides, etc. terracing is planned. The law stipulates for trees to be planted along all roads "at a distance of six meters from each other, and a minimum of one meter from the road" (Областенъ 1881: 29).

Another more important point is related to giving a slight artificial slope to the lanes of the road. According to the law, the center of the road must be raised by 1/40 compared to the periphery, so that unnecessary water can drain of itself (Областенъ 1881: 31).

In the final part of the first chapter, another important point for the future construction is included – the necessary preliminary preparation. The seven points of Article twenty-eight indicate as mandatory: the drawing up of the route, longitudinal and transverse profile, list of earthworks, plans for each bridge, acquisition conditions and plan of expropriated lands. The last article states that the builders of the future projects can be entrepreneurs who have won a public competition, but in the absence of such, the activity can be carried out by the government (Областенъ 1881: 31).

The second chapter of the law reveals the methods by which existing old roads in Eastern Rumelia will be rebuilt. This part is composed of one article, but still gives us a detailed description that includes six steps, tracing the process from removing the old material to using a "roller" after laying the new one and "getting it so hard that the wheels of vehicles should leave no trace of their passing" (Областенъ 1881: 31-32).

The next chapter is a kind of continuation of the previous one. Short in volume, it deals with road maintenance in the District. Road maintenance includes standard non-delayed maintenance, supply of materials for this and emergency repairs. The last two activities are planned to be carried out by private entrepreneurs after a tender, but in the absence of such, the government is obliged to carry out the necessary maintenance without conducting a second tender (Областенъ 1881: 32)

The final chapter is composed of twelve articles that detail road maintenance work at its lowest level – the duties of the average maintenance worker. The roads are divided into sections for which a specific group of workers will be responsible – they are managed by their colleague, who must necessarily be literate and in order to communicate with the higher-ranking officials and engineers responsible for the road (Областенъ 1881: 33). The latter, for their part, are obliged at least once a week to monitor the section entrusted to them and its maintenance. The

working groups are obliged to keep the road clear of mud, snow, ice and any unevenness (Областенъ 1881: 34). It is also their responsibility to see to the good condition of all signposts and trees on and around the road. Their working hours from March 1 to September 1 are from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m., with a two-hour break that can be extended to three in high daytime temperatures (Областенъ 1881: 35). If necessary, the teams can leave their section and go to another, but only after orders from the engineer in charge. Each worker must receive upon starting work: a wheelbarrow, a wooden and iron shovel, a pickaxe, an iron and wooden rake, pliers, a hammer and a rope twenty meters long (Областенъ 1881: 35-36). Another “perk” is the notebook, in which they must note down the tasks received, and the work done. The book is important, as it is part of the report on work presented to the responsible engineers and officials (Областенъ 1881: 36). Workers are required to carry the book with them and present it at inspection. The fine for not carrying the book is one wage, and for losing it – three.

During harvest time, every worker is entitled to fifteen days’ leave. Every year, according to the report of the engineers in charge, an award of more than one salary is given to the most deserving workers.

For not showing up for work without serious reasons, a fine in the amount of one wage is provided and in case of repeated violation – three wages, and when a third absence is registered – dismissal from service. A similar punishment is provided for proven non-fulfilment of assigned tasks, despite regular attendance at work. The overall implementation of the road law is placed in the hands of the Director of Agriculture, Trade and Public Buildings (Областенъ 1881: 36).

The evidence of the efforts of the regional authorities to develop and modernize the roads does not stop there. “The public administrative regulations for the district roads of the Plovdiv district” is the next step in this direction (Областенъ 1881: 247). It is possible that similar regulations were drawn up for the other counties of Rumelia, but at this stage they are not known. The regulations were issued on May 10, 1882 in the city of Plovdiv and are composed of three chapters with a total of sixteen articles. In a comparative analysis, it turns out that this law is practically an abbreviated version of the main regulation, broadly presented above. The only significant difference is contained in article six of the first chapter, from where we get detailed information about the extractions related to the strata from which the road itself is built. The law obliges 2/3 of the entire thickness of the road to be composed of coarse

stone material and correspondingly 1/3 of fine surface pavement (Областенъ 1881: 248).

The third act, indicative of the desire and efforts of the authorities in Plovdiv to modernize and use the road as the main alternative to railway transport, was published on June 30, 1881. “Public-administrative regulations for the road police in Eastern Rumelia” supplements the basic law, introducing strict rules for the exploitation of the roads in Rumelia. The document consists of 24 articles and represents a set of bans and punishments to be used by law enforcement in certain situations (Областенъ 1881: 41).

From 10 to 300 groshes plus compensation for the damage caused is the penalty for obstructing traffic, damage to roadways, curbs and ditches (Областенъ 1881: 41). Temporary suspension of traffic is allowed only on roads passing through neighborhoods of populated areas and only after special permission of the mayor (Областенъ 1881: 43). Relatively much attention is paid to roadside landowners, who are generally required to maintain in good condition road ditches and roadside trees bordering their lands. In addition to understandable prohibitions, such as the one not to graze cattle near the road, there are also more interesting ones – such as the ban on moving on the roads of the Region with a sledge if there is no snow and ice, and fines vary from 10 to 500 groshes depending on the damage done along the route (Областенъ 1881: 42). Bans are also imposed on the distance of newly constructed buildings and property fences, and the maximum fine does not exceed the above (Областенъ 1881: 44). Article 23 defines the services that will ensure the observance of this law – the gendarmerie, the urban and rural police units, and field-keepers (Областенъ 1881: 45).

With their detail, the presented historical documents prove that the authorities in Eastern Rumelia are far from relying only on the underdeveloped railway transport. On the contrary, since the very beginning of its existence, the Region has taken the necessary steps to modernize and expand the road network with a single goal in mind – to have its own infrastructure, albeit inferior in some respects to the possibilities offered by railway transport. The presented evidence in this direction aims to expand the cited, basic studies and pose questions through which, in the future, the topic will be further developed.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Now Simeonovgrad.

<sup>2</sup> Now Septemvri.

<sup>3</sup> For specific revenue data, see: Kolarov M. Eastern Railways in Bulgaria. Plovdiv, 1893, 68 (Коларов 1893:

68); Piperov N. Financial and trade issues between Bulgaria and Turkey. Sofia, 1909, 109-110 (Пиперов 1909: 109-110); Karakashev T. A few words about the tariffs of the former eastern railways. In: Journal of the Bulgarian Economic Society, 1908, 79-80 (Каракашев 1908: 79-80).

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