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IMPORTANCE OF VENEZUELAN-COLOMBIAN NAVIGATION PROJECT VIEWED

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[Article by Miguel Angel Burelli Rivas, Paul Georgescu Pipera and Constantino Georgescu Pipera]

[Text] The so-called "Orinoco-Meta Project" (POM) seeks to develop navigation on these two rivers in order to materialize the interoceanic Delta Amacuro to the Atlantic and with Buenaventura (in Colombia) to the Pacific.

Long used in the past, that river route is of even greater importance today due to the facility it provides for economic trade between Colombia and Venezuela. The waterway can be used to transport steel and aluminum products made in Puerto Ordaz (Venezuela) over a distance of nearly 1,600 kilometers to Puerto Lopez (Colombia) and from there, overland only 200 kilometers to Bogota. In the opposite direction, boats can return to Venezuela loaded with agricultural products, lumber, coal for coke, and so on.

Studies and actual tests have shown that if this activity were implemented, in the case of steel and aluminum products, transport costs are reduced by \$40 to \$50 a ton, compared with maritime transport. Likewise, one must consider the great socioeconomic benefits to people in the area resulting from the establishment of a continuous flow of river traffic that could greatly improve transportation in this flatlands area.

In addition, considering existing communications (roads and railroad) between Bogota and Puerto Buenaventura on the Pacific, if one would use the Orinoco-Meta route, one would obtain a new Atlantic-Pacific interoceanic communication from the Delta Amacuro to Buenaventura that would be only 2,668 kilometers long and of great importance to the economy and geopolitics of the region and the continent.

Background

The discovery of the Orinoco in the 16th century meant the beginning of the penetration of the flatlands and the first demonstration of the indissoluble physical ties between the valley and its tributary, the Rio Meta. The Spaniards, first of all, those who came from Coro or down the Orinoco and later, those who came from the Andes from Santa Fe de Bogota toward the ocean, used its waters to sail toward Trinidad and Europe.

But since these regions concealed neither gold nor precious stones, the conquistadores gradually withdrew and in their place came the missionaries and the clergy, who managed, through faith and patience, to partially pacify the indomitable inhabitants of the flatlands. The decree of Carlos III of 1767, following the expulsion of the Jesuits, resulted in everything returning to oblivion and barbarity.

In 1811, canon Cortes de Madariaga, apologist for the idea of the fluvial integration of our two countries, a "Chilean by birth but Venezuelan by feeling," managed, through great personal efforts and facing the greatest dangers, to go from Santa Fe de Bogota to Calabozo, Venezuela, in something under a month. At the time of his trip, commercial trade between Venezuela and Santa Fe only occurred through Maracaibo, and Madariaga emphasized the serious harm this fact represented for regional commerce. As a good analyst, he made a comparison between this route and that of Cartagena, where one would take the waters of the Rio Magdalena, and concluded that of the two possibilities, the Meta route was preferable in order to link Venezuela's trade with the provinces of Cundinamarca, Popayan, Quito and its neighboring cantons.

Shortly thereafter, a group of scientists headed by Peruvian naturalist Mariano Eduardo Rivero completed 3 years of studies and explorations of the Orinoco and Meta rivers, publishing their conclusions in Lima in 1825, entitled "Natural Sciences Memorial." Simon Bolivar, who was informed of the work, approved of and supported the ideas expressed, convinced of their importance to the future of the countries and the joint development of navigation of the two rivers.

However, efforts made to implement communications between the Orinoco and the Meta were dealt a mortal blow in 1830 with the secession of the territory of Greater Colombia, created by Bolivar. Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties and the opposition of some circles, a number of decrees and treaties on trade and navigation were signed during the remaining years of the century, seeking a legal way to restore these logical, necessary and indispensable ties so vital to the harmonious development of such extensive and rich common zones.

In this century, several attempts have been made to develop river transport on the Orinoco and Meta rivers, but only in recent years have any real possibilities of implementing this important project in the near future been glimpsed. This opportunity is due to the economic development of the region of the Venezuelan Guayana and the Cundinamarca in Colombia and to the interest both countries would have in increasing commercial trade between the two regions. It is of the greatest importance that the project would contribute to the physical integration of the continent.

#### Orinoco-Meta Project

The guiding idea of the Orinoco-Meta project resides in the accomplishment of useful river navigation between Venezuela and Colombia, utilizing the waters of those rivers. This can practically be done now over a distance of nearly 1,900 kilometers between Boca Grande (Amacuro-Orinoco Delta) and Puerto Lopez (Meta).

The following situation prevails on the Orinoco River along the 1,026 kilometers between its delta and Puerto Paez:

Practice confirms that for 8 months of the year, between April and November, the rivers can be navigated by vessels having from 4 to 5 feet of draft and convoys carrying up to 2,500 tons can be used. The authors of this article verified this fact on the trip made with the "Niculina," with a draft of 3 feet, going on the Meta from Puerto Lopez to Puerto Carreno in December 1981 with practically no problem at all.

Naturally, it is necessary to maintain and improve the channel of navigation.

Orinoco River: The maintenance which the Venezuelan National Institute of Canalization is practicing on the Boca Grande-Puerto Ordaz section must be continued.

Concerning the project involving the working of the Pijiguaos bauxite, work of cleaning out the Orinoco channel and the reparation of dangerous sections such as the Cariven rapids, and so on, will make it possible for navigational conditions to be improved as far as Ventana and from there, at little cost, to Puerto Paez.

Meta River: On the international waters common to Colombia and Venezuela, the main work involves the areas of Trapichote (a section 2 kilometers long), Buenavista (1 kilometer), Trapichito (under 1 kilometer) and three or four sections measuring under 1 kilometer. In Colombian waters, a total of some 6 kilometers of the channel must be fixed in the areas of San Jorge, Voragina, Guachiria, Macucuana and 7 or 8 other sections.

In addition, it is necessary to improve existing port facilities and the proper customs must be set up in Puerto Paez (Venezuela) and Puerto Carreno (Colombia). Arrangements and flexible rules must be established for navigation, documents, insurance, and so on.

Future development of this waterway and its integration into highway and communications systems existing in the two countries will decide what other ports must be developed.

The economic advantages of implementing this river artery are obvious and include the following:

the opening of a new cheap and direct means of transportation for trading of iron and steel products, aluminum, from Venezuela to Colombia and, in the opposite direction, of agricultural products, coal for coke, lumber, and so on, from Colombia to Venezuela;

relieving the congestion of roads in both countries, with the resulting reduction in environmental pollution, which action is helped by the integral development of the Orinoco and Meta valleys; and

help in solving border problems of the two countries.

## Navigation on the Orinoco River

<u>Section</u>	<u>Length (km)</u>	<u>Possibility of Navigation</u>
Boca Grande-Puerto Ordaz	303	Oceanic navigation; channel with good maintenance; draft 10-12 meters; no buoys
Puerto Ordaz-Ciudad Bolivar	83	All year round; average draft of 2.5 meters; inadequate buoys
Ciudad Bolivar-Puerto Paez	640	Year round; draft of 2.5 to 1.5 meters; no buoys

In general, there is an important element of physical-regional integration of these two countries belonging to the Andean Pact that must be put to the best use immediately.

As an eloquent example to illustrate the mentioned economic advantages, one might point out that in the transport of iron and steel products on the Orinoco to Bogota using the Orinoco-Meta, there is a reduction of some \$40 to \$50 a ton compared with the price of maritime transport.

## Amacuro Delta-Puerto Buenaventura

In order to go from the ports of the Atlantic or the Caribbean to the Pacific and vice versa, vessels of any nationality must make long maritime detours of thousands of kilometers and go through the Panama Canal, with the added problem that, in addition to being very costly, any difficulty in the operation of the canal interrupts communications.

Another obvious, more suitable and perfectly safe solution is presented if one considers extension of the Orinoco-Meta waterway to Puerto Buenaventura on the Pacific, using overland transport (roads and railroad) already in existence between Puerto Lopez-Bogota-Puerto Buenaventura.

In this way, there is a multimodal means of transportation from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

A brief technical analysis shows that the length of this interoceanic route, 2,668 kilometers, is distributed as follows:

- a) river: 1,889 kilometers, as shown in the preceding paragraph;
- b) by road: 779 kilometers as follows: Puerto Lopez-Bogota, 230 kilometers; Bogota-Ibague-Armenia-Buga-Buenaventura, 549 kilometers;
- c) railroad: overland alternative that can be used between Bogota and Buenaventura using the existing Bogota-Medellin-Cali-Buenaventura road. This alternative can be greatly shortened if Ibague and Armenia were connected.

The economic advantages resulting from the implementation of this interoceanic route would benefit the entire South American community. It is the shortest

route in the northern region of the continent. Naturally, for the countries using it: Colombia and Venezuela, the advantages will be even greater.

#### Atlantic-Pacific Connections

<u>Name</u>	<u>Length (km)/River</u>	<u>Highway</u>	<u>Rail</u>	<u>Total</u>
Orinoco Delta, Venezuela	1,889	779		
Puerto Buenaventura, Col.	Orinoco and Meta	230	549	2,668
Belem do Para, Brazil	4,535	477	373	5,385
San Lorenzo, Ecuador	Putumayo and Amazon			
Belem do Para, Brazil	4,796	700		5,496
Chiclayo, Peru	Maranon and Amazon			
Santos, Brazil		350	2,550	2,900
Mollendo, Peru				
Buenos Aires, Argentina		180	1,050	1,230
Valparaiso, Chile				

#### Navigation on the Meta River

On the Meta River, from Puerto Ordaz to the terminal port, Puerto Lopez, 863 kilometers, the situation is as follows:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Navigational Possibility</u>
Puerto Paez-Nueva Antioquia	296	Year round; minimum draft, 1.5 meters; no buoys
Nueva Antioquia	300	Year round; minimum draft 1 meter; no buoys
Orocue-Puerto Lopez	267	Year round; minimum draft approx. .70 meter; no buoys

We deem it to be of prime importance that distances would be reduced and there would be much greater geopolitical guarantees, since it would no longer be necessary to depend on the Panama Canal and it would be possible to trade products from the Pacific Coast with those from the Atlantic. For their part, Venezuela and Colombia would develop and improve existing facilities and would benefit from all the resulting transit. Satisfactory settlement of the Esequibo dispute would be of great importance to the development of this joint Colombian-Venezuelan project, insofar as the proper restitution of territories arbitrarily taken away from the Amacuro Delta would completely open up the Orinoco Basin to navigation.

On the whole, the physical integration of the continent would take a huge step forward.

To gain an appreciation of the continental importance of the Amacuro Delta-Puerto Buenaventura interoceanic connection, the map [not reproduced] and the tables present the proposals and basic characteristics of other interoceanic paths of communication that can be implemented on the continent. An analysis of the figures shows the advantages of the Amacuro-Buenaventura Interoceanic Connection (VIAB).

#### Conclusions

The project for the useful navigation of the Orinoco and Meta rivers is feasible in the near future at a relatively small cost, using navigable waterways and without requiring major dredging and maintenance work. At the same time, it is possible to use existing facilities, that will be gradually improved and expanded, insofar as the startup of the project yields its benefits.

The Amacuro Delta-Buenaventura Interoceanic Connection represents a logical and immediate extension of the Orinoco-Meta waterway, integrating that river artery into already existing means of overland transportation between Puerto Lopez and Puerto Buenaventura.

In addition to easing trade between Colombia and Venezuela, the completion of these projects would help improve the flow of goods throughout the continent, essentially contributing to the physical integration of South America.

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