

MANAGING THE STRATEGIC LOGISTICS POSITION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA IN REGIONAL AND EUROPEAN SUPPLY CHAINS

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the strategic logistics position of the Republic of Serbia in regional and European supply chains. Serbia's geographic location, transport corridors, access to the Danube, and links with neighbouring markets create a basis for stronger logistics development and supply chain integration. However, these advantages require adequate management, since logistics potential depends on strategic planning, investment decisions, institutional coordination, digital support, and cooperation between public and private actors. The paper analyses Serbia's logistics position through road, rail, river, port, and intermodal connections, with attention to the importance of the Rhine-Danube transport area and regional freight flows. It also discusses management factors that influence the use of logistics resources and the development of logistics centres, digital systems, and coordinated transport operations. Special attention is given to challenges such as uneven infrastructure development, border procedures, limited intermodal capacity, and the need for stronger digital coordination. The paper points to strategic directions that can support Serbia's integration into regional and European supply chains and strengthen its position as a logistics hub in Southeast Europe.

Key words: strategic logistics management, supply chain, integration, transport corridors, logistics potential.

INTRODUCTION

The logistics position of a country is an important factor of economic competitiveness, trade connectivity, and supply chain integration. The Republic of Serbia has a favourable geographic position between Central Europe, Southeast Europe, and wider European markets. This position creates opportunities for stronger participation in regional and European supply chains, especially through road, rail, river, and intermodal transport connections (Aćimović, Mijušković, & Bugarčić, 2022).

However, geographic position alone is not sufficient for stronger logistics performance. The value of logistics potential depends on the quality of management, strategic planning, investment decisions, institutional coordination, and cooperation between public and private actors (Aćimović, Mijušković, Marković, et al., 2022). In this context, Serbia's logistics potential should be observed as a management issue, not only as an infrastructural or geographic advantage (Bugarčić et al., 2024).

The subject of this paper is the strategic logistics position of the Republic of Serbia in regional and European supply chains (Bugarčić et al., 2024). The aim of the paper is to examine how this position can support stronger supply chain integration through adequate management of logistics resources, transport infrastructure, logistics centres, and institutional support. The paper also considers the main challenges that limit the use of Serbia's logistics potential and points to strategic directions for its further development.

STRATEGIC LOGISTICS POSITION OF SERBIA

Serbia's strategic logistics position is based on its geographic location, transport corridors, and potential connection with regional and European markets. The country is located between Central Europe, Southeast Europe, and the wider European transport area. This position creates conditions for the movement of goods between the European Union, the Western Balkans, and markets toward the East and South. Serbia is not a coastal country, but its road, rail, river, and intermodal links provide a basis for stronger participation in international logistics flows(Stanojevic et al., 2017).

The Danube has special importance for Serbia's logistics position. It connects Serbia with the Rhine-Danube transport area and creates opportunities for inland waterway transport, port development, and multimodal logistics(J. Milanković et al., 2018). The Rhine-Danube Corridor is one of the main west-east transport axes in Europe, and Serbia is included among the neighbouring countries connected with this corridor. This connection gives Serbia an opportunity to develop stronger links with European freight flows, especially through better use of river transport and port infrastructure(M. Maksin et al., 2017).

Road and railway corridors also have high importance for the logistics position of Serbia. Corridor X connects Serbia with Hungary, Croatia, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Greece. This gives Serbia a transit function in Southeast Europe and supports links between the Western Balkans and the European Union. The modernisation of the Belgrade-Niš railway section shows the strategic importance of this corridor for freight transport, trade, and integration with EU railway networks. EU-supported investment in this section aims to improve railway capacity and support faster movement of goods and services(Biljana Stojanović-Višić et al., 2023).

The logistics position of Serbia also depends on the development of logistics centres, intermodal terminals, and port connections. Belgrade has a significant position because it is located at the intersection of the Rhine-Danube Corridor and road and railway Corridor X. The planned development of the new Port of Belgrade and its connection with railway infrastructure can support stronger transshipment results and better multimodal integration. This shows that Serbia's logistics potential is closely related to the ability to connect different transport modes into one coordinated system(D. Dimitrijević, 2017).

Strategic logistics position of Serbia should not be observed only through geography and infrastructure. Its value depends on management capacity, investment priorities, institutional coordination, and cooperation between public and private actors. Efficient logistics development requires clear planning of transport infrastructure, better border procedures, stronger digital support, and development of logistics services. Without coordinated management, geographic advantages may remain underused and may not lead to stronger competitiveness.

Serbia has the potential to strengthen its position as a regional logistics hub, especially if transport corridors, inland waterways, logistics centres, and intermodal systems are managed as connected elements. This requires a strategic approach that links national logistics development with regional and European supply chain needs. In that sense, Serbia's logistics position represents both an opportunity and a management challenge. Its future value will depend on the ability to transform geographic and infrastructural advantages into reliable, efficient, and well-coordinated logistics performance(Pajić et al., 2024).

MANAGEMENT OF SERBIA'S LOGISTICS POTENTIAL

Serbia's logistics potential depends on the way in which transport infrastructure, logistics services, institutional support, and market needs are managed as part of one coordinated system. Geographic position and transport corridors create a basis for logistics development, but management decisions determine the level of their practical use. This includes investment planning, coordination between transport modes, development of logistics centres, support for digital systems, and alignment between national priorities and supply chain requirements.

Strategic management of logistics potential should connect public policy with the needs of companies, transport operators, and logistics service providers. Public institutions define infrastructure priorities, regulatory conditions, customs procedures, and investment frameworks. Private actors use these conditions through transport services, warehousing, distribution, freight forwarding, and supply chain coordination. A stronger connection between these actors can support better use of road, rail, river, and intermodal capacities in Serbia (Dašić et al., 2022).

Investment management is one of the main factors in the development of Serbia's logistics potential. Investments should not be directed only toward individual infrastructure projects. They should also support the connection between transport corridors, industrial zones, logistics centres, ports, and border crossings. Such an approach can reduce fragmentation and create better conditions for freight movement across regional and European supply chains. The development of intermodal terminals and logistics centres is especially important because it connects different transport modes and supports more efficient distribution flows (Ilić & Tesić, 2016).

Digital management also has high relevance for Serbia's logistics potential. Digital systems can support transport planning, shipment tracking, customs procedures, warehouse operations, and information exchange between supply chain actors (Rejman Petrović et al., 2024). In this context, digitalisation should be observed as a management tool that can improve coordination and reduce delays in logistics processes. Better use of data can also support decision-making in transport planning, risk assessment, and capacity allocation (Todorović et al., 2022).

The management of Serbia's logistics potential should therefore be based on coordinated planning, investment logic, digital support, intermodal development, and cooperation between public and private actors. Such an approach can help Serbia use its geographic and infrastructural advantages in a more effective way. It can also support stronger integration into regional and European supply chains, where reliability, connectivity, and coordination are increasingly important factors of logistics competitiveness.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Serbia's integration into regional and European supply chains depends on the ability to address several logistics and management challenges. The first challenge refers to uneven development of transport infrastructure. Road transport has a dominant position, while railway and inland waterway transport still require stronger operational use. This creates pressure on road networks and limits the wider application of intermodal logistics. A better balance between transport modes is needed in order to support more reliable and cost-efficient freight flows (Mešić et al., 2022).

Border procedures and administrative processes also affect supply chain integration. Delays at border crossings can reduce the predictability of transport operations and increase logistics costs. This issue is especially important for companies that participate in time-sensitive supply chains. Greater coordination between customs authorities, transport operators, inspection services, and logistics companies can support smoother movement of goods. Digital documentation, electronic data exchange, and simplified procedures can also reduce delays and increase the reliability of cross-border logistics (Lidija Barjaktarović & Danko Kalkan, 2023).

Another challenge refers to the limited development of logistics centres and intermodal terminals. Serbia has a favourable position for logistics activities, but this potential requires stronger spatial planning and better connection between industrial zones, ports, railways, highways, and distribution centres. Logistics centres should not be observed only as storage facilities. They should function as points of coordination between transport, warehousing, customs services, distribution, and information flows.

Strategic directions for supply chain integration should include the development of intermodal transport, stronger use of the Danube, modernisation of railway infrastructure, and better connection between logistics centres and industrial areas. These directions can reduce dependence on road transport and support more sustainable logistics flows. The development of port infrastructure and river transport can also improve Serbia's position in regional freight movements, especially when combined with railway and road connections.

Digital transformation should also be part of the strategic direction for logistics development. Digital systems can support shipment visibility, transport planning, customs procedures, warehouse operations, and coordination between supply chain actors. Better data exchange can improve decision-making and reduce uncertainty in logistics processes. For this reason, digital tools should be connected with broader management practices, rather than treated as isolated technical solutions (Dušan Puhar, 2022).

Supply chain integration also requires stronger cooperation between public institutions, private companies, logistics providers, transport operators, and international partners. Serbia's logistics position can support regional and European supply chains only if infrastructure development is matched with clear management priorities. The main direction should be the creation of a coordinated logistics system that connects transport corridors, logistics centres, border procedures, digital systems, and market needs. This approach can support stronger competitiveness and a more stable position of Serbia within regional and European supply chains (Stojanović & Veličković, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Serbia has a favourable logistics position due to its geographic location, transport corridors, access to the Danube, and links with regional and European markets. These advantages create a basis for stronger participation in supply chain flows across Southeast Europe and the wider European transport area. However, the value of this position depends on the quality of logistics management and the ability to connect infrastructure, institutions, companies, and transport modes into a coordinated system.

The paper shows that Serbia's logistics potential should not be observed only through physical infrastructure. Strategic planning, investment management, digital support, risk management, and public-private cooperation are also important factors. These elements can improve the use of road, rail, river, port, and intermodal capacities, while also supporting more reliable logistics performance.

Future development should be directed toward stronger intermodal transport, better use of the Danube, railway modernisation, efficient border procedures, logistics centre development, and digital coordination. Such directions can support Serbia's integration into regional and European supply chains. They can also strengthen its position as a logistics hub in Southeast Europe, provided that logistics development remains connected with clear management priorities.

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