The Oder-Dnieper waterway, established at the end of the 18th century, has existed until the World War II.

Following the renovation of hydraulic structures and the construction of a blind dam in Brest, the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder water transport connection was divided into two sections – the first in Belarus, the second – in Poland.

The waterway in Belarus running from Brest to the river Dnieper is in a satisfactory technical condition and is a class IV inland waterway of international importance. In Poland, waterways on the river Bug are of limited suitability for navigation.

Despite the division of Belarussian and Polish waterways by the blind dam, in 1996 on the river Bug in Brest area, for the purpose of allowing the passage of 11 vessels’ convoy, the temporary earth hydraulic structures were constructed for locking on the river Western Bug.

East-West trade development means that the restoration of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway connection is becoming increasingly necessary. This system attracts a range of transport flows of export-import goods from the Republic of Belarus, Poland, the Ukraine and other European countries (coal, ores, metals, potash fertilizers, table salt, sugar, crushed stone, peat, forest products, sapropels, etc.), as well as goods from Scandinavian countries. The cargo capacity of the waterway connection between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea (the Dnieper-Bug connection) is estimated at 3 million tones of cargo per year. Besides,
the waterways forming this connection could also be used for tourist journeys on boats.

The restoration of this water transport connection is in common interest of the Republic of Belarus and the Ukraine. The Republic of Belarus is interested in outlet through this waterway to the Baltic ports and in inclusion of Belarussian waterways in network of inland waterways of Western Europe. This connection is likely to be of interest of Poland, Germany and other European countries in respect to switching there, first of all, bulk goods (coal, ores, metals, etc.), since the distance on the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway connection in the direction of Germany from the Ukraine is approximately 1,000 km shorter than the distance on the Danube-Main connection.

It would be in the common interest of Western and Eastern European states to pursue research and decide on the question of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder connection.

In 2003 the Government of the Republic of Belarus adopted the inland water transport and sea transport development programme, which provides for the rebuilding of Dnieper-Bug canal shipping locks to meet the standards of a class Va European waterway of international importance. Since that time, four sluice dams and one shipping lock have been reconstructed, thus allowing the passage of convoys of vessels 110 m long, 12 m wide and with a draught of 2.2 m. Reconstruction of the canal will continue over the next few years.

In order to pursue economic and ecological research on the restoration of this connection, the Republic of Belarus submitted the issue to the forty-eighth session of Working Party on Inland Water Transport of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, held on 19-21 October 2004, Geneva. The Working Party expressed readiness to study this project provided the consent of states, directly interested in its implementation (the Republic of Belarus, Poland, the Ukraine).

At present the Ministries of Transport of the mentioned countries decided to submit the issue of pursuing economic and ecological research on the establishment of the Dnieper- Vistula – Oder water transport connection to the Working Party on Inland Water Transport of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and to apply to the concerned countries for support of this proposal.

In July 2005 the Ministry of Transport and Communication of the Republic of Belarus applied to the Ministries of Transport of the Russian Federation, Germany and the Netherlands for support of the project.