

# Never, Never, Never take Italian trains! German ones too.

(this does not apply to football fans)

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## 1 Initial Conditions

Milan	--	Chiasso	22:30--23:40
Chiasso	--	Cologne	00:00--08:30

29.05.1999

Once I was in Italy, 1 hour of driving to the south-east of Naples visiting my girlfriend. I needed to go by train from Naples to Juelich (40 km from Cologne, Germany) where I work. I went to the closest small station (Benevento) to ask for the schedule. I wanted to start on 30.05.1999 (Sunday) to be at work on Monday. The computer to check connections wasn't working and the officer had to browse in a very heavy book for 10..20 min, after what he found 2 possibilities for me:

Naples	--	Rome	13:48--16:30
Rome	--	Milan	17:00--21:xx
Milan	--	Cologne	22:xx--06:xx

and

Naples	--	Milan	15:30--22:00
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He could not print the schedule because ...didn't know how to handle with printer. For Germany I had so-called Bahncard, which allows to pay only 50% of the ticket. The computer didn't know what Bahncard is and could not apply this discount to the German part of the route. So, finally we agreed that he gives to me the ticket up to the German border. In fact, there were no train stops at the border, so we have to figure out what is the first German station on my route. After 10 min of investigation we still did not find an answer so I just took a ticket up to Karlsruhe, because I knew that it is on the very South-West of Germany, more or less close to Switzerland and France. I took a night train from the north of Italy to Germany via Switzerland. This means that I had to reserve the couchettes. The officer told that unfortunately it is not possible today, because

it is exactly the day when the railroad schedule changes. The route also includes an EuroStar (the high speed train) where U have to have a sit. Sits were not available, but the man at ticket office told that he will give to me a special paper. By showing it to the conductor I should have been admitted into the train and conductor would have put me into a free sit, even if it is available only in the 1st class. Without extra charge. (I guess it is kind of over-selling). Okay. Grazie. :-)

Among the 2 connections I choose the first one. The point was the following. I, as a Russian citizen, need a visa to pass by train through Switzerland, even during night. I did not have one. So, my idea was to try to pass Switzerland without visa. If they will discover this on the border or somewhere, they will probably put me out of the train. Most probably it will be possible to agree with them paying something like 60 DM for transit visa in a office on the order. If all this will take 1 or 2 hours, I will be in time to get to the next train (second connection). Alternatively, I could go to Germany via Austria. In this case I do not need visa. Austria, Germany, Italy and some other countries in Europe signed the so-called Shengen agreement which means that only one visa is required for all of them. The point was that going via Switzerland will take about 14 hours, while via Austria – 24 hours :-( Therefore I chose to go via Switzerland having a risk to be trapped by border police. :-)

## 2 Naples 30.05.1999

13:30 (20 min before the departure). We arrived to Naples central station. We went to the ticket office hoping to book the couchettes. We kindly ask people, to let us get couchettes without queue, since our train will depart soon. The officer looks at all our papers, even not related ones, typed something on computer (guys, they have PC there!) and walked away. Then he came, typed something and disappeared again. This scene repeated for three times. After that he brought some "specialist". The problem, as I told before, was that I choose to travel in the most difficult day of the year, when there is change of timetable, and everything is messed up. People in the queue were nervous, starting a little scandal. We also felt uncomfortable, since we did not suspect that it will take so long. 10 min before departure. Still no progress. When

it was 5 minutes before departure, we left the counter and went to the indicator board to see from which platform my train starts. It was not trivial to find our train in the list since there were no train numbers. Just something like this:

" IC — 13:48 — 20 min later"

Okay. It was 20 min late. The funny thing is that in Naples they use sometimes metro station (built under the main station) for intercity trains. I wonder who has got such a "brilliant" idea. On the top there are about 20 tracks and half of them were free. Our IC was starting from "Piazza Garibaldi" – the subway station. We went down there, but were stopped on the way. There were a lot of people and lot of police. What's up? The train with Italian football fans is going to arrive from Sicily. Police decided to postpone the arrival and departure of all trains until football fans, called "tifosi", will exit from their train and take another one. During those days everybody in Italy were afraid that football fans can do something crazy. Just 2 weeks before my departure, there was an explosion of the train with football fans of "Salernitana", most probably organized by football fans of another team. Obviously, administration of the Italian railroads decided for security to empty the station from "civilians" and to let the fans pass. Well, football hooligans have higher priority than civilians :-( We were waiting 20 min, 30 min, 40 min ... Our connection in Rome is lost. No progress. Hooligans had not arrived yet. Their train from Sicily was late, and therefore our IC was delayed more and more.

We went to the ticket counter to complain and ask what do they think about all this. Nothing. Typical hand motion which means: "But what do you want from me?" The only "valuable" suggestions which we received was: "If you don't like it, go by plain to your Germany!"

We finally decided to take next connection. We changed tickets, tried to book couchettes. Still there was no way to book couchettes. Something wasn't working in computer system. Of course there were no free places in ES. We have got again the same paper to show to conductor. Near to the counter and on the station in general there were a lot of people who use drugs, hardly standing and asking for money. We went to the platform to wait for our train which should start at 15:30 from Naples.

15:23 – the train arrived. oh... people started to climb in it like crazy...in spite to

everybody it is assigned its own seat. Well, almost to everybody. . . 'cause I had a thicket but not seat. So, we went to conductor to ask for seat. He tells that nothing is guaranteed and if he puts us in the 1st class, we have to pay the difference in the price of the ticket which doubles the price. So, I decided not to wait, entered the train and found a sit in the 2nd class wagon.

15:30 – we should depart. 15:35 – hey, we should depart! 15:45 – the doors had been closed. 15:50 – Hell, when this f\*cking train will start? I will lose connection in Milan, if it won't start now! 15:54 – Doors open, then close, and train, FINALLY, starts. . . and stops after 2 meters. 15:55 – finally it departs and goes. I heard later that the train had problems in the system of locking the doors :-)

### 3 Direction — North!

Approaching Rome we stop for 15 min. Now for sure I will be late in Milan. Merda! Scheisse! Shit! I want to go out of this country forever! Train starts to go slowly for 1 min, then stops for 5 min. In 50 min we finally arrived to Rome at 18:45.

19:18 – departure from Rome Termini. Only God knows what, the hell, were we doing in Rome for 33 min. After departure they brought small snack. . . kind of cookie. This care looks really ridiculous. They would better drive us in time. By the way, still, nobody checked my ticket!

20:55 — arrived to Florence. 21:07 — departed from Florence. 22:02 — arrived to Bologna. 22:06 — departed from Bologna. So, we were standing only 4 min. I feel that we are getting closer to the North, to the old kind and organized Germany. 22:29 — Modena, stopping for less than 1 min. 22:52 — Parma (1 min).

00:03 — arrived in Milan. By schedule I had to be there at 22:00. My idea was to go to the information office and ask for the closest connection to Germany. On the way from the train to the information office I looked at the schedule. The next train to Chiasso was at 0:30, so I've got 25 min. 00:10 — I'd found that information office is closed like all other offices at this time of the night. Shit! I called to my girlfriend, explained my situation and asked her to call to the automatic system which gives a connection by phone. The idea was to find a shortest connection from Milan to Cologne at this time.

00:15 — I looked at the schedule of departures. The next train in the direction of Germany is in the morning. It arrives to Stuttgart at 14:00. Rather late. 0:22 — I called again to my girlfriend. She told that this number does not work after 21:00. I wonder, what does work in this country? Okay. 0:30 — I take a train to Chiasso. There were few people in the train. In the train I ask the conductor about connection from Chiasso to Germany at this time. He told that only in the morning. I started to sleep. . . Suddenly I woke up. The train is standing. Everybody exit. It must be Chiasso. I take my bags and jump out of the train. I take an under rail junction from my platform to the station hall and look at the schedule. Hmmm. . . Strange. . . There are some trains which go from here to Chiasso. And where am I then? I run back to the platform. The station name is written quite far from me, so I need glasses to see it. In big hurry, I take glasses from my bag and wear them. The name of the station is "CoCo". Shit. But my train is still standing on the 2nd track. I run directly over the rails and jump in. It departs immediately. Oh. In few minutes, at 1:42, I arrived to Chiasso.

Several guys and girls (must be students) are sleeping just on the sits for passengers, on the open air, under the roof which is above the platform. I look at the schedule. The first train towards Germany (actually Basel SBB) is at 5:03. Sigh. I've got 3 hours to sleep here just like these guys. I laid embracing my bags. It was rather warm, although around I could see quite big mountains, some of them with white peak. In few minutes I started dreaming. . . I heard that locomotive drives back and forth. . . Dreaming deeper. . . Some train stopped just next to me. I heard the steps of many people. . . I opened my eyes and stood up. There was a train, night express, Rome Termini – Zurich. All guys were jumping in it. What time is it? 3:00. There should be no train at 3:00 here! I asked the conductor of this train who was nearby:

— Where this train goes?

— To Zurich

— And when?

— In 5 min

— I actually need to go to Cologne or, at least, in that direction.

— Well, then you would better go to the last 2 wagons. They go to Basel. There you will find a good connection to Cologne. — oh, thanks! And I run to the last wagons.

## 4 Crossing Switzerland illegally during night

I went in and the train started. I sat in the corridor and decided not to bother people sleeping in the compartments. Still interesting, where this train appeared from? It is not in the schedule. The only explanation which I'd found was that this train had to pass Chiasso much earlier, say at 0:30, but due to delays (even my ES was 2 hours later) it passes Chiasso only now. Okay. We must enter Switzerland now. I was afraid that Swiss frontier guards will come and I had to negotiate with them about my visa. In the window there were beautiful night views. Mountains and lakes with a lot of illumination. We passed the station "Lugano". I was thinking that I have to visit this beautiful place someday. Then landscape became more boring. I found a map on the wall of the wagon. Lugano was already in Switzerland. May be the frontier guards are already in the train and will come soon :( I have to relax, at least I am going in the right direction and even earlier than I suspected. In principle I had to sleep in Chiasso up to 5 o'clock. I decided to sleep a bit in the next wagon which goes up to Zurich, I saw an empty compartment there. According to the map, most probably the wagons to Basel will go via Zurich anyway. But it was not sure. The conductor came, looked at my tickets. I had to pay extra 13 Swiss francs (in liras) because I took a bit longer route than I was supposed to take (via Basel instead of via Singen). In 1 hour I woke up and, just in case, went to the wagon which was up to Basel. Finally, we did not pass Zurich. The train was split somewhere in between Zurich and Basel.

7:40 — I am in Basel. Basel is situated just on the border of Germany, Switzerland and France but mainly on Swiss side. According to the schedule the next Intercity express to Cologne departs at 8:12. Excellent. I walked a bit around. People speak some mixture of German and French. I took the train. 8:25 — we are already on German territory. German frontier guards enter the wagon. In my wagon they check only my passport. I still wonder how do they select people. May be on my face it is writ-

ten that I am a foreigner? Anyway, there were 2 of them: one was older and experienced and the second one was much younger. While they were looking at my German visa, the young guard told to the old one: "Look, he has no visa for Switzerland". The old one replied: "First, it is not our business. Second, it is too late." :-)

## 5 Germany

I bought the ticket just in the train using my Bahncard. I was in good mood after entering Germany. Here everything works exact as a watch. Train was going quite fast. Freiburg, Karlsruhe, . . . , Mainz, . . . At 11:35 train stopped in the middle of the way by unknown reason. At 11:43 we started again. I was thinking that due to this delay I risk to loose my connection in Cologne. It seems that German railroad is also not perfect.

13:20 — I arrived in Cologne with 10 min of delay. From Cologne I had to go to Düren and then to Juelich. Usually it takes 50 min. They announced that express Cologne-Düren- . . . -Ostende (departs at 13:14) will not wait for our IC. Pity. The next train was a slow local train at 13:17. It didn't wait either. I think it was not a big deal to wait for 5 min. The next train in the schedule was an interregional (IR) train up to Aachen at 13:45. The operator was messing up with platforms:  $9 \rightarrow 7$ ,  $8 \rightarrow 9$ ,  $9 \rightarrow 7$ , . . . The local train to Düren at 13:47 had arrived already but our IR of 13:34 still didn't. The local train of 13:47 departed and **only then** they announced that our IR is late for 15 min and will arrive to the other platform. Almost like in Italy. Finally it arrived and departed at 14:02. I arrived to Düren at 14:28 instead of 14:11. As a result I missed a train to Juelich which was at 14:18. Well, I had to wait almost for 1 hour for the train at 15:18. Scheisse!

15:50. Finally I am at home. Instead of 14 hours it took about 25 hours. German railroad appeared to be not much better than Italian one. But at least I crossed Switzerland without problems. :-) It could be worse.

Jülich, 8.02.2000