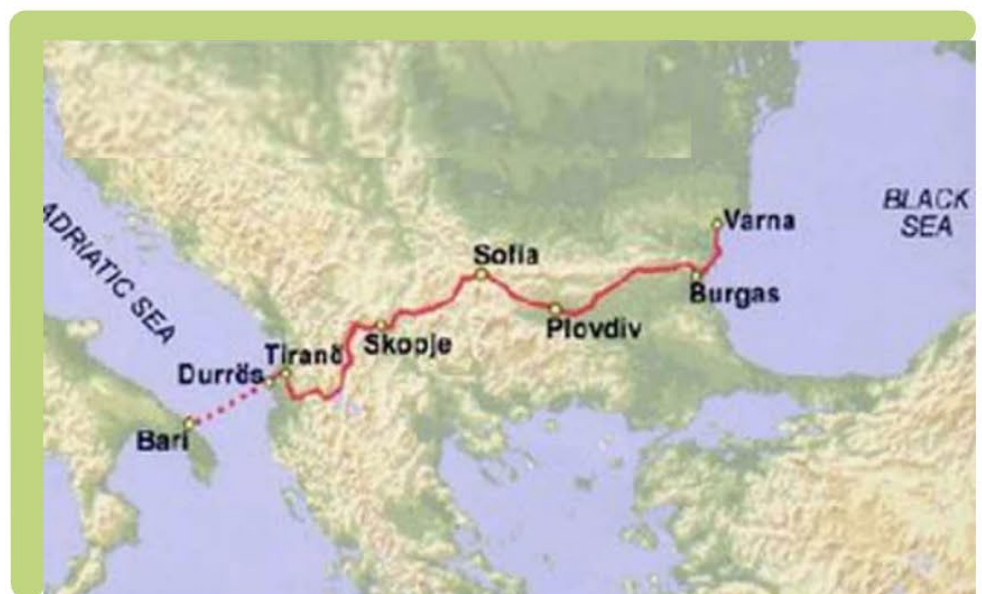


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THE NEW TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORK AND THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

*Corridor VIII in the Western Balkans
European Corridor*

Policy Paper



Prepared by: *Ardian Hackaj
Yasen Georgiev*

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Corridor VIII in the Western Balkans European Corridor

Authors:

Ardian Hackaj, Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI), Tirana

Yasen Georgiev, Economic Policy Institute (EPI), Sofia

Edited by:

Inva Nela, Cooperation and Development Institute, Tirana

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Cooperation and Development Institute
“Dervish Hima” Street, Building No. 5, Entry 14,
1001, Tirana, Albania

E-mail: info@cdinstitute.eu

Website: www.cdinstitute.eu

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIC	Adriatic-Ionian Corridor
CDI	Cooperation and Development Institute
CNC	Core Network Corridors
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CVIII	Corridor VIII
DPA	Durres Port Authority
EIP	Economic and Investment Plan
EPI	Economic Policy Institute
ERTMS	European Rail Traffic Management System
ETC	European Transport Corridors
HSF	Hanns Seidel Foundation
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IPA	Instrument of Pre-Accession
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North-Atlantic Treaty Organization
RFC	Rail Freight Corridors
RIA	Road Infrastructure Agency
SAA	South Adriatic Area
SEE6	South East Europe Six
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
WB ETC	Western Balkans European Transport Corridors
WB	Western Balkans
WB6	Western Balkans Six
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework
ZES	Special Economic Zones

Preface

The European Corridor VIII is one of the Pan-European Corridors identified and defined already in the Pan-European Conference on Transportation held in Prague (1991). Since then, “Corridor VIII” has been conceived as a multi-modal transport system that connects South of Italy and Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea Coast of Bulgaria. Designed to function as land bridge between East and West, Corridor VIII closes the southern part of the European transport network.

In respect to that ambitious inter-regional approach, the amendment on guidelines for the “Trans-European transport network” (TEN-T), published in December 2021 by the EU Commission, provides an excellent opportunity for the SEE6 countries to adapt, update and upgrade their transport networks in line with European Union.

The policy paper, elaborated by “Cooperation and Development Institute” (CDI), Tirana, and “Economic Policy Institute” (EPI), Sofia, in cooperation with the branch-offices of “Hanns-Seidel-Foundation” (HSF) in Albania and Bulgaria, builds up on of the previous common Policy-Paper [*“Corridor VIII East Gate - promoting Flagship 1: Connecting East to West”*](#), and complements it with analytical specifications.

The paper focusses on the challenges and opportunities that the new TEN-T offers to for SEE6, detailing the extent to which the new TEN-T-regulations and their respective methodology can lead among the Western Balkans to efficient “multi-stakeholder cooperation”. In that optic, pan-European Corridor VIII is not only an infrastructure project, but a mechanism for stronger regional cooperation as well as a key element of the new European security architecture in the NATO southern flank. But Corridor VIII does not figure in the EU Commission new proposed map of core corridors.

In the current context the geo-political and security dimension of Corridor VIII logically requires an updated TEN-T approach. Only two of four Corridor VIII participating countries, Bulgaria and Italy, are already EU-members, but all of them (including Albania and North-Macedonia too) are NATO-members.

On the background of the current situation of Russia’s war against Ukraine with all its multi-faceted consequences and aftermaths for Europe, the EU security and NATO relevance of Corridor VIII must also be taken into account.

The European Transport Corridors, such as Corridor VIII, are a visible expression of international, EU and regional connectivity. They are the tangible EU contribution to growth and social cohesion in the Balkan Peninsula. Infrastructural alignments create common living spaces. Transport corridors help creating regional linkages and rapprochement between communities and peoples. The investment in the transport corridors in this respect are not only aimed at the EU internal market, but have also a direct impact in the relations of

EU with its neighboring countries. In the case of WB6 they directly impact also their accession dynamics to full EU membership.

Corridor VIII is very visible in the historical maps. In the Roman Empire, the "Via Egnatia" was the eastern extension of the "Via Appia" and formed the connecting axis between the Adriatic and the Bosphorus.

Today the European Transport Corridor VIII links via sea Bari/Brindisi in Italy with the Adriatic east coast and continues via land to the Bulgarian Black Sea ports. But while the western segment that connects North Macedonian capital Skopje to Bulgarian capital Sofia, ending in Burgas and Varna at the Black Sea, is well advanced, the works in east segment connecting Skopje with the Adriatic port of Durres in Albania and then with Bari / Italy are lagging behind.

The delays in the construction of the Eastern segment directly impact the efficient, secure and multi-modal access from Adriatic Sea to South Balkans hinterland. But those investments can be prioritized if Corridor VIII is part of the TEN-T core network.

South-East axis of Corridor VIII must not only be viewed from an economic point of view, but also as a socio-political "added value" for the EU member states. The South-Eastern European neighbors should be given the chance to function as a complementary regional stability factor and thus an "added value" in the EU peace and security architecture.

The excellent cooperation between Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania on this project is a major push to the EU Enlargement in the region.

With the participation of all relevant state-, economic- and civil society-forces, "Corridor VIII" can become a joint project in a united Europe that is sustainable in terms of transformation policy and directly contributes to the membership drive of the SEE6 countries.

CDI, EPI and HSF in their common CSO-function as "think-tank" and "platform of dialogue" are concrete examples of this multi-stakeholder cooperation providing concrete results.

Dr. Klaus Fiesinger

*Regional Director of Hanns-Seidel-Foundation (HSF) for South Eastern Europe
Manager of HSF-projects in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia*

Background

In December 2021, the EU Commission published the regulation on Union guidelines for the developments of the trans-European transport networks (TEN-T) and the respective planning methodology reviewing and updating (and repealing) the previous regulations¹. It aims to improve sustainability by reducing congestion, transport emissions and impact on climate change; boost cohesion by connecting EU cities and regions, including rural areas and remote regions; increase efficiency by removing bottlenecks and gaps on the transport network; and enhance user benefits through better transport services to citizens and freight customers.

Albanian government has identified the Pan European Corridor VIII that connects Bari, Durres, Tirana, Skopje, Sofia and Varna - as a core network potential candidate.

In January 2021, North Macedonia Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani addressed a letter to the Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria Zaharieva, and of Albania, Xhaçka.² He proposed a new multidisciplinary initiative based on an upgrade of Corridor VIII. Calling it "Initiative 8", Mr. Osmani proposes to intensify tri-lateral cooperation so as to *"...speed up infrastructure, energy, and communication investment projects along the route of Corridor VIII. This would serve as the foundation for a political platform that will provide an additional forum to promote mutual cooperation, the intensification of political, economic, security, cultural and social exchange, that will undoubtedly result in increasing trust between the peoples"*.

The Corridor has received un-wavering political backing as certified by the 19 October 2021 MoU between Ministers of Transport of Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania.³

Moreover, different steps have been undertaken to advance project maturity from North Macedonian and Albanian governments. On the East side, the close collaboration between North Macedonia and Bulgaria in transport connectivity is progressing rapidly as witnessed by the advancement of the rail segment between Skopje and Sofia (*as project of EIP Flagship 1 "Connecting East – to West"*), and the recent establishment of regular flights between Sofia and Skopje. On the West side, the intensification of cross-Adriatic links such as trade, blue economy, infrastructure, etc. has been among the objectives of the Joint Permanent Socio-

¹ Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1153 and Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 and repealing Regulation (EU) 1315/2013, Strasbourg 14.12.2021, COM (2021) 812 final, 2021/0420(COD).

² <https://www.mfa.gov.mk/en/page/27/post/2462/%E2%80%9Cinitiative-8%E2%80%9D-draftplatform-for-trilateral-cooperation-between-north-macedonia-bulgaria-and-albania>

³ <https://www.infrastruktura.gov.al/nenshkruset-ne-sofje-memorandumi-midis-shqiperise-bullgarise-dhe-maqedonise/>

Economic Committee Italy – Albania, discussed in the First Technical Meeting of 26 July 2021.

In the current geopolitical context, the security specifics make the Corridor VII axis quite strategic for the southern flank of NATO. During the press conference of the EU High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borell and Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama on 15 March 2022,⁴ the PM Rama referred to Corridor VIII as a key security project and corridor, to which EU should give a particular focus and support its advancement.

We believe that the role and engagement of civil society to SEE6 growth, institutional reforms and convergence of the region with the EU is systemic. CSO contribution to the good governance of the connectivity policies and of structures in charge is essential. Specialized think tanks and NGOs in SEE6 can be the connective tissue through which the infrastructure projects are better identified, financed and implemented. Based on that approach, on 15 September, a group of likeminded CSO and think tanks sent an [Open Letter](#) to the European Union requesting that Western Balkans Six - WB6 Civil Society Organizations participate formally in the new Western Balkans Investment Framework's good governance mechanism. The follow up of this request will be one of the topics of the Tirana Connectivity Forum 2022, from 26 to 28 September 2022.

⁴ <https://kryeministria.al/newsroom/konference-per-shtyp-e-kryeministrit-edi-rama-dhe-perfaqesuesit-te-larte-per-punet-e-jashtme-dhe-politikat-e-sigurise-dhe-zv-president-i-ke-josep-borrell/>

I. What is New in the new Ten-T proposal, and what it means for WB6?

The new TEN-T regulation aims the further modernization of the current legal framework. It also steps up the efforts in aligning TEN-T with the new priorities of the European Green Deal and with the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. The proposal: i) introduces an updated trans-European transport network (TEN-T) structure composed by the core, extended core and comprehensive network; ii) re-defines the European Transport Corridors (ETC) through the integration of Core Network Corridors (CNC) and Rail Freight Corridors (RFC). ETC are) composed of most strategic parts of core network *and* of the extended core network; iii) introduces a new intermediary deadline: i.e., the 2040; iv) includes the territorial accessibility as an objective for the whole network; and, v) provides a more inclusive definition of urban nodes.

With regard to the **railway** transport, the Commission aims to create a highly competitive and fully interoperable rail freight network, and to develop a high-performance rail passenger network across Europe. To this end the rail network should see the: i) introduction of new / reinforced standards; ii) deployment of ERTMS by 2040 at the latest for extended core and comprehensive network, and introduction of legally binding deadline for decommissioning national (class B) systems by 2040; and, iii) the adoption of operational performance targets for rail freight services along the rail freight lines of the European Transport Corridors by 2030.

For the **waterborne** transport the main novelty is the increased importance of modal shifts for both inland and maritime nodes. For inland waterways, new dispositions add to the minimum requirements for good navigability, while the need for hinterland connection of inland ports by rail and/or inland waterway to respect the TEN-T standards for rail and/or inland waterways is reinforced. It also introduces the European Maritime Space and the promotion of Short Sea Shipping through removal of eligibility rules for former Motorways of the Seas projects, and opens up for domestic Short Sea Shipping connections, for comprehensive-comprehensive port connections and for connections with third countries. Here it is very important to underline the focus on hinterland connectivity with important leverage effect on modal shift (e.g., maritime ports to be connected to road and rail).

Road transport requirements underline the quality of the road focused on road safety; the availability of rest areas and of safe and secure parking for commercial vehicles; the weigh in motion systems installed at certain distances, etc.

Air transport stipulates for the comprehensive network Airports to be connected with long-distance railway network. Also, any airport shall offer at least one terminal which is open to all operators and users.

Multimodal freight terminals should increase the number of multimodal transshipment hubs for freight; include terminals in inland/maritime ports and in urban nodes and respect the obligation to have at least one multimodal freight terminal per urban node. Terminals should be equipped with at least one alternative fuel recharging station to serve heavy-duty vehicles.

Finally, **urban nodes** should establish their Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan by 2025. They should report on urban mobility data; have at least one multimodal freight terminal per urban node and to develop multimodal passenger hubs (with at least one recharging station for busses).

Finally, the new regulation also updates the **TEN-T governance** by reinforcing the role of the European Coordinators. Existing TEN-T monitoring and governance tools are to be harmonized and streamlined through adoption of the coordinators' work plans every four years, and production of annual status reports.

Based on interoperability and multi-modality, the EU Commission proposal provides a new network structure composed by core (*to be completed by 2030*), extended core (*to be completed by 2040*) and comprehensive (*to be completed by 2050*) networks. The core network is a selection of the comprehensive one, and contains the most strategically important nodes and links. It is multimodal (includes all transport modes and their connections as well as relevant ICT systems), and based on inter-operability.

This new structure is composed by European Transport Corridors (ETC) that integrate core network corridors and rail freight corridors and contains the most strategic parts of core network and of the extended core network. Its novelty is the introduction of the new 2040 intermediary deadline for parts of ETC that fall into the extended ETC.

From the Western Balkans perspective, the main novelty is the re-organization of the Indicative Extension in the Neighboring countries as decided by the EU in 2016,⁵ into a new Western Balkans Corridor⁶ (WB ETC). Differing from the EU corridors, the WB ETC nodes are not defined as yet.

⁵ COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) 2016/758 of 4 February 2016, amending Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards adapting Annex III.

⁶ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/efficient-and-green-mobility-2021-12-14_en

II. Western Balkans ETC, its governance and practical implications during 2022

The new Western Balkans Corridor doubles the eastern coast of the Adriatic by following the geographical orientation of the Dinaric Alps. Its southern point it overlaps with the Orient-East Med corridor in Greece and Sofia and Burgas in Bulgaria. Starting at Greek ports of Patra and Piraeus and going through Thessaloniki it bifurcates in Skopje towards Pristina and Nis. Its Western leg starts in the South Adriatic ports of Durres and in Bar which join in Podgorica, to then continue north-east towards Belgrade joined on the way by the Eastern leg (that goes from Sofia through Nish). In Belgrade it connects with Rhine – Danube corridor (inland waterways) and continues towards Zagreb to connect with the Mediterranean Corridor. When entering Croatia, it connects with Route Vc that transverses throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina until the Croatian port of Dubrovnik.

Fig 1. The newly proposed European Transport Corridors, December 2021

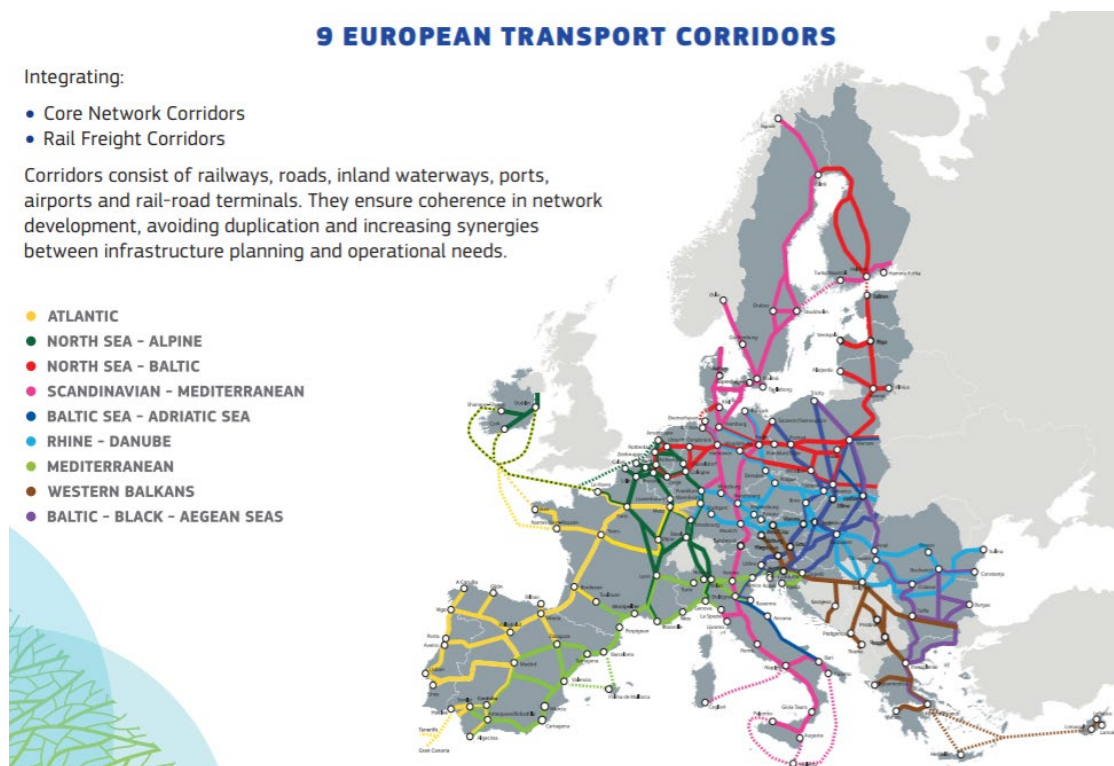


Image copyright: European Commission

Most of the existing extended network identified in the 2016 delegated regulation is in the new Map comprehensive network. However, as mentioned previously, the core nodes are not specified yet in the proposed new Methodology and WB6

ETC map. Strangely in the TEN-T interactive Map Viewer even the google toponyms disappear when WB ETC is selected.⁷

The parts of the map pertaining to corridor alignment in third countries are indicative as they will be decided during the 2022. During this process, the following steps will be observed:

- i) identification of the main nodes of the Core Networks. No Main Node has been proposed as such in the SEE6 yet. Here the so-called primary nodes will define the overall starting and ending points;
- ii) identification of the links between the primary Nodes, including the links of those primary nodes with the European Maritime Space. In this angle the status of Durres Port and of Bar port as Primary Nodes of the WB ETC becomes paramount. On the other side, for Inland waterways the core network is identical to the comprehensive one, which automatically puts WB ETC links in Danube, Tisa and Sava rivers in the core network.

During the year 2022, the EU Commission through DG MOVE and DG NEAR will conduct bilateral negotiations with the SEE6 countries on adjustments impacting the classification of WB ETC links and nodes, and any eventual upgrade in order to arrive at a final draft of the maps to be submitted to the EU Council of Ministers. The Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community has a systemic role in facilitating this whole endeavor, providing assistance where needed and increasing outreach and communication.

In conclusion, the inclusion of WB Corridor is a big step forward in a harmonized approach of joint planning of transport infrastructure of WB6 together with that of EU, and not only as an extension. The next step will be the successful bilateral negotiations of each country with the EU Commission to adjust and upgrade wherever possible nodes and links into the core or extended core parts of the corridor. Here the biggest challenge is the upgrade to core of the only horizontal link that connects the Adriatic Sea with the Black, or the so-called Corridor VIII.

⁷ Try selecting Layers / Commission Proposal 2021 (COM (2021)812) / Corridors (Annex 3) / Western Balkans, at EC Mobility and Transport, TENtec Interactive map Viewer: <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/infrastructure/tentec/tentec-portal/map/maps.html>

III. State of Affairs on Corridor VIII

Corridor VIII belongs to Pan-European Corridors identified and defined in the Pan-European Conferences on Transportation held in Prague (1991), Crete (1994) and Helsinki (1997) since the beginning conceived as a multi-modal transport system that connects South of Italy with the Black Sea. It comprises sea and river ports, airports, multi-modal ports, roads and railways, with a total of 1,270 km of railways and 960 km of roads. It runs from the southern Italian ports of Bari and Brindisi to the Albanian ports of Durrës and Vlora, then through the capital cities of Tirana, Skopje, Sofia, through Plovdiv to end into the Bulgarian ports of Burgas and Varna in the Black Sea.

An additional feature of Corridor VIII are its endpoints, both being maritime ports allowing for seamless connection with the EU and world maritime transport network. The last, and currently its most important feature, is that it is the fact that it goes through NATO member countries throughout its whole length. In the current geopolitical context, this security specifics makes this axis quite strategic for the southern flank of NATO.

However, Corridor VIII that links Durrës port to Skopje has not been included in the newly proposed WB ETC map. Neither the much-hyped Adriatic Ionian Corridor which links the whole Eastern coast of Adriatic throughout Croatia, Montenegro, Albania and Greece. Instead thanks to the much-contested Bar – Boljare Chinese-built highway and the EU-financed repair of the rail connection Bar – Podgorica – Pozhega - Serbia that goes up to 1,400m in altitude, the key Adriatic ports of Durers and Bar ports are connected to Balkan's hinterland and WB ETC in Belgrade.

The authors have argued the strategic importance of Corridor VIII for the South Balkans connectivity in their previous publication⁸ of June 2021. CDI has also brought forward many times the low economic value of AIC connecting Port of Bar with Tirana / Durres Port unless Bar becomes also a tributary of Corridor VIII⁹ together with DPA.

III.1. North Macedonia

About Corridor VIII, it is in the interest of not only the three Balkan countries, but to the EU as a whole to have an alternative and shorter corridor that will provide a faster flow of people in goods from the ball Black Sea to the Union and further

⁸ "Corridor VIII East Gate – promoting Flagship 1" Connecting East to West", Policy paper, Yasen Georgiev, Economic Policy Institute (EPI), Sofia and Ardian Hackaj, Cooperation and Development Institute, Tirana June 2021.

⁹ See infrastructure prioritization and logic of design, pp. 22 at, "The Berlin Process: Implementation of Connectivity and Institutional Governance", CDI 2019.

to Adriatic Sea. In October 2020 the Rail Corridor VIII between Skopje and the Bulgarian border was mentioned as a main project of the Flagship 1 Connecting East to West, in the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans.¹⁰ In October 19th 2021, Bulgarian caretaker Minister of Transport, IT and Communications Hristo Aleksiev, the Albanian Minister of Infrastructure and Energy Belinda Balluku and the North Macedonian Minister of Transport and Communications Blagoj Bochvarski signed a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation in promoting a sustainable infrastructure on Corridor VIII.

Currently, on the western part of Corridor VIII, the construction of the final stretch of the rail corridor between Kumanovo and Bulgarian is underway including the electrification systems which will also be installed on the entire railway line. That part is separated in three segments: i) from Kumanovo to Biljakovce, ii) Biljakovce to Kriva Palanka, and iii) Kriva Palanka to the Bulgarian border. By mid-2022, the North Macedonian government will launch the tender for the 3rd section of the Eastern section which is very expensive (around 400 MiO) and complicated. An amount of EUR 60 MiO has been made available from IPA funds and negotiations are advanced to secure the rest of the amount. On road the portion Kriva Palanka to Nankove expressway is in an advanced phase as well as the part from Kriva Palanka to the Bulgarian Border.

But there will not be a functional Corridor VIII without the Western part. Here, North Macedonia has the main design for rail connection from Kicevo to Lin (Albanian border) financed by the EU and done by the EU experts indicating an estimated cost of circa EUR 500 MiO. Following this development, the Government adopted a decision allowing the Ministry of Infrastructure to start with the securing of the funds through negotiation with IFI. The Parliament adopted a law on the road segment of Western part allowing for the government to negotiate the contract details with Bechtel & Enka the contract details Tetovo – Gostivar – Kicevo and then Struga -Trebenishte. The target is to sign the contract by the end of 2022.

III.2. Albania

The Rail Corridor VIII in Albania was qualified as comprehensive in 2015 based on the findings of the World Bank REBIS Update.¹¹ The main arguments brought by

¹⁰ An economic and investment plan for the Western Balkans, communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions, European commission, (2020) 223 final, Brussels, 6.10.2020 COM (2020) 641 final.

¹¹ The Regional Balkans Infrastructure Study Update: Enhancing Regional Connectivity, Identifying Impediments and Priority Remedies, Sept. 2015, World Bank Group Open Knowledge Repository, at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28413>

the WB team of consultants for this classification were the physical absence of the rail line connecting Lin in Albania with Ohrid and then Kicevo in North Macedonia, and the lack of coordination and of matured project(s) in the Corridor VIII among the neighboring countries of Albania and North Macedonia.

In 2022 those obstacles do not exist anymore (even if the TEN-T classification benchmarks have evolved as well). The feasibility Study for the rehabilitation for Corridor VIII rail portions Durrës – Rrogozhinë – Elbasan – Progradec has been done – the study supports the economic rationale of such connection in line with the EU standards. As mentioned above, the North Macedonian side is very well advanced with the maturation of the dossiers, and the political will and coordination has been showed through the tri-lateral MoU.

On 8 November 2021, Albanian Prime Minister sent a letter to EU Delegation to Albania requesting the EU Commission to upgrade Corridor VIII into Core Network. Its absence from this priority classification deprives Albanian authorities from the possibility to raise relevant funding from WBIF. The Albanian Prime Minister underlined the progress made in the political will quoting the trilateral MoU signed by the Ministers in charge of transport of Bulgaria – North Macedonia – Albania on 19.10.2021. He also informed the Commission about the progress made by Albanian authorities in maturing the technical dossier of the rail corridor.

The Commission replied by outlining the procedure, clarifying the upcoming steps for such a request to be brought to full conclusion, as well as stressing the different levels where the dossier needs to be treated. On 14 December 2021, DG Move published the new draft TEN-T and the map where Corridor VIII does not figure at all, neither in Albania nor in the eastern part of Skopje.

Meanwhile in Albania the Master Plan of the new deep port Durrës / Porto Romano Port areas has been drafted, and Durrës Port Authority has initiated the procurement procedure for the design of the project: “Drafting of the Detailed Technical Design (Detailed Design) of the new Integrated Commercial Port of Durres in Porto Romano”.

III.3. Italy

The institutional cooperation for the construction of Corridor VIII can be pinpointed to the “Fiera del Levante” (Bari, Italy in 2002), where the representatives of Italy and South-Balkan countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia and Turkey) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the development of Corridor VIII.

Since its inception, Italy has taken a leading role in the Corridor VIII project. It is configured as a geopolitical area that is nerve center for national interests and whose development involves important Italian public enterprises and, more

generally, the economy of the South. The construction of the Corridor has a significant strategic value: i) as a real transport axis that connects the ports of the Southern Adriatic (Bari, Brindisi and Taranto) with the Balkan area and therefore the Southern Regions; ii) as an instrument of economic integration between these geographical areas favoring the development of the economic-commercial and productive activities of the countries concerned.

Corridor VIII is a unique opportunity for the Puglia Region to connect its Special Economic Zones (ZES) to the theme of internationalization, Italy being the biggest partner of Albania in trade, as well as it's the biggest partner in foreign direct investment. Puglia (and Italy) are aware that the increasing connection between both economies requires the creation of the new links and nodal infrastructures to make the logistics chain efficient and competitive on a global scale.

In Puglia, Corridor VIII includes parts of the Italian territory in particularly the nodes of Port of Bari and the Port of Brindisi. The geographic position of the Puglia Region allows it to be the European gateway for other Mediterranean countries and Balkans with its transport infrastructure is the main node connecting Italy and the Europe European Union with southeast Balkans and Black Sea Region. The tri-lateral cooperation at the service of better connectivity in the South Adriatic Area has been illustrated by the Memorandum of Understanding of April 2020 among Ministry of Infrastructure in the Energy of Albania, Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs in Montenegro and Puglia Region for a more efficient governing system between the South Adriatic Area (SAA) territories.¹² Acknowledging the importance of Corridor VIII, Regione Puglia has set up in early 2022 a Task Force to specifically deal with this project.

Lastly, the new TEN-T regulation has upgraded the connection Ancona – Bari into a full ETC effectively connecting it with the Baltic – Adriatic corridor.

III.4. Bulgaria

Finally, the new Bulgarian government, in power since mid-December 2021, declared its firm ambition to push connectivity with its eastern neighbor, and in that regard, Corridor VIII is a key element. After adopting a more pragmatic approach of decoupling politics from economy at the highest political level, different ministries began revising country connectivity plans and assessing the needs for reinforcement and speeding up of Corridor VIII implementation plans.

¹² See Memorandum of Cooperation on South Adriatic Connectivity Governance – SAGOV, April 2020, at: [https://sagov.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/sites/sagov.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/files/2020-05/2020-04-27 Trilateral-MoU-Signed SAGOV 0.pdf](https://sagov.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/sites/sagov.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/files/2020-05/2020-04-27%20Trilateral-MoU-Signed%20SAGOV%200.pdf)

IV. Conclusions

The new TEN-T regulation and the respective methodology aims to bring the EU transport corridor into the 21st century. This development provides an excellent opportunity for SEE6 countries to update, upgrade and adapt their transport networks in line with the EU.

To be successful, this joint endeavor requires a strong institutional capacity in SEE6 and perfect local knowledge of EU bodies in charge. Different challenges such as limited borrowing capacity, capacity of national institutions to prepare mature dossier, very strict requirements in terms of maintaining high standards of environments and social requirements, make this work quite challenging. On the positive side, SEE6 countries have shown a positive example of regional cooperation at its best, have mobilized multi stakeholder cooperation. HSS, CDI and EPI are concrete examples of this multi-stakeholder cooperation providing concrete results.

The Corridor VIII should be seen not only as an infrastructure project, but as a **mechanism of stronger regional cooperation**.

Additionally, CDI strongly recommends prioritizing the **geo-political and security dimension** when assessing the classification of Corridor VIII in the new TEN-T ETC. In the current situation, the following arguments should be very seriously be taken under consideration:

- Corridor VIII is crucial for securing quick access of military from South Adriatic / Port Romano to Balkans hinterland, and further deployment towards Skopje, Sofia and Black Sea (the latest military exercise by NATO “Defender 21” revealed important inter-operability challenges affecting the Albanian ports and hinterland connections);
- Corridor VIII offers an alternative transport corridor connecting Adriatic and Black Sea that satisfies the security factor of going through WB6 NATO member states.

Finally, as a work-in-progress the new WB ETC and Corridor VIII will be further discussed and debated at the upcoming [Tirana Connectivity Forum 2022](#) from 26 to 28 September 2022.



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Cooperation and Development Institute
Dervish Hima, Ada Tower / Nd. 5, Ap. 14 1001, Tirana, Albania
E-mail: info@cdinstitute.eu
Website: www.cdinstitute.eu

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