

I am an Albanian-American attorney by profession. I have studied, consulted and written on legal and other developments on Southeastern Europe in many occasions.

I understand that recently the Van Miert Report [Report] has identified criteria and priority projects regarding the Trans-European Transport Network.

I am aware that the Report has ignored a major trans/pan-European artery such as the so-called Corridor 8, which will connect Bari (Italy) with Istanbul (Turkey) through Durrës (Albania), Skopje (Macedonia), and Sofia, (Bulgaria).

Needless to say that Corridor 8 is a project of major importance to the EU and to Southeastern Europe.

I can only articulate that, historically, the famous VIA EGNATIA connecting ancient Rome to Constantinople, passed through Egnatia (Italy), Durrachium and Aulon (present day Durrës and Vlore, Albania), Salonika, Greece, and ended up in Constantinople.

The Van Miert Report makes an incredible mistake in ignoring such an historical artery that connected the two most important capitals of the antiquity.

Even in present day Europe, VIA EGNATIA's deviation into Macedonia and Bulgaria would significantly enhance economic and commercial exchanges in Southeastern Europe, thus providing a significant contribution to peace, stability and cohesion of this neglected part of Europe.

A quick skimming of the Van Miert Report immediately reveals that this Corridor, which I shall call the VIA EGNATIA/EIGHTH CORRIDOR, fulfills all the criteria that the same Report has established, and which apparently are used to sabotage this artery. That also includes the "internal market" criterion, because the VIA EGNATIA/EIGHTH CORRIDOR will connect also Southern Italy with Bulgaria, a country which will gain EU membership in the near future.

Another clear indication of Van Miert Report's bias and lack of professional objectivity is the sub/chapter on "Western Balkans", whereby the VIA EGNATIA/EIGHTH CORRIDOR is not even mentioned!

As lateral comments, I would like to highlight the lack of transparency that has encircled the work of the Van Miert Commission, and the fact that details about it were made known only in June 2003.

Finally, I would like to stress that it is unfair and unjust that the Report, and possibly the Commission, have adopted the term VIA EGNATIA for the internal Greek motorway Gumenica - Alexandropuli.

Adopting such a term for another different route when the Commission is fighting legal battles even in the WTO level on trademarks and names of food products, and bowing to pressures from nationalistic circles in Greece, who claim that they own European history, is simply un-European.

I urge the Commission do amend the report as far as the VIA EGNATIA/EIGHTH CORRIDOR is concerned, and quickly include this important trans/pan European transport artery as one of its priority projects for the Trans-European Transport Network.

I would be pleased to write to you a more detailed memo on the subject matter in due course. Indeed, the pending deadline of September 10, 2003 for the submission of comments made it impossible for me to provide a comprehensive and thorough analysis on the matter. Please, let me know if you welcome even at a later date such an analysis.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Agron Alibali, LL.M.