
IV. Development Will Replace War

‘Ulysses Corridor’ Launched in Albania

by Claudio Celani

Dec. 28—“Ulysses Corridor” refers to the proposal to span the Adriatic Sea with a combination of bridges and tunnels, to make the connection between Italy, and Albania and Greece, in the geographic area travelled by Homer’s hero in the Odyssey. The intriguing name for this great infrastructure project comes from Italian engineer and architect Enzo Siviero, who proposes it as a critical link in an intercontinental corridor, which

Europe, and from there to Asia.”

Professor Siviero has been a teacher of bridge building at the University of Venice and is now Chairman of the eCampus University in Italy; he is also Vice President of the Reseau Mediterranean School of Engineers. This fall, broad discussion of the “Ulysses Corridor” was initiated by Siviero and colleagues at two policy events. On December 9, a public conference was held in Tirana, Albania, titled, “Italy and Albania: A Door to the Balkans,” jointly sponsored by the eCampus University, and the Albanian Ministry for the Diaspora. A month earlier, Siviero presented the concept in Germany, at an international Schiller Institute conference, Nov. 16-17, in Bad Soden, titled, “The Future of Humanity as a Creative Species in the Universe.” This gathering brought together representation from 30 nations, including delegations from the Mediterranean Basin from Spain, France and Greece, as well as from Italy and Albania.



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Attendees at the “Italy and Albania, an Open Door to the Balkans” conference sponsored by the eCampus University in Italy and the Albanian Ministry of the Diaspora, on December 9, 2019 in Tirana Albania. Front row (l. to r.): Dr. Nino Merola, Director, Italian Cooperation Agency in Tirana; Dr. Lucia Cucciarelli, Head of Desk, Education Cooperation, Italian Embassy in Tirana; Eng. Pandeli Majko, Albanian Minister for the Diaspora; and Prof. Enzo Siviero, Chairman of eCampus University in Italy.

should proceed west- and southward across Italy to Africa, via the proposed Messina Bridge, and thence a tunnel or bridge connecting Sicily to Tunisia. It should also proceed north- and eastward across Eurasia, by means of high-speed rail corridors. After all, Siviero points out, “the Mediterranean Sea is, in a way, a big lake,” but it can be traversed in a way “to link Africa to

Another conference on the Ulysses Corridor is now being planned for 2020 in Albania, considered in the largest context of constructing cross-Mediterranean Basin connectivity, for intercontinental benefit of all nations involved. This perspective coheres with the “World Land-Bridge” approach advocated for years by the late statesman Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., and his wife Helga Zepp-LaRouche, President of the Schiller Institute, who has commissioned recent books on the theme, [*The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge*](#). The Chinese “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), first an-



The Ulysses Corridor: Albania-Italy-Tunisia.

nounced in 2013, is proceeding in this vision with nations in Africa and Eurasia, and also with key initiatives in Central and South America.

It is no happenstance that Albania was the venue for recent public discussion of this strategic corridor concept, and that the co-sponsors of this December’s conference, came together on the matter of crossing the Adriatic. The head of the Albanian Ministry of the Diaspora, Pandeli Majko, has spoken out on this before. In 2005, when Mr. Majko was Defense Minister, he arranged with his Italian counterpart to initiate a pre-feasibility study for a bridge that would connect Albania and Italy. Majko gave the welcome speech to the December Tirana audience, recalling that,

At that time, everybody laughed at it, thinking that I was crazy. But today, the idea no longer seems to be so crazy.

Moreover, Albania and Italy, as well as neighboring Greece, North Macedonia and other nearby nations, share an urgent interest in forcing a change in European fiscal and monetary policy, away from grinding austerity for the populations and bail-out for bankrupt mega-

banks, to instead, favoring credit for productivity-building development programs. This was addressed during the proceedings, in particular in the summation by this author, at the convenors’ request, and in informal discussion afterward.

The Two Sea Spans

Enzo Siviero opened the Tirana conference with a presentation on the Ulysses Corridor, whose most challenging parts, of course, are the two sea connections: GRALBeIT refers to the Greece-Albania-Italy link (Greece, ALBania, and ITaly); and TUNeIT refers to the Tunisia connection to Italy, as shown on the map. Whereas the Tunisia-Italy span is 150 km and the GRALBeIT is “only” 85 km, the latter is very deep. It has a maximum

depth of 895 meters.

Regarding TUNeIT, Italy’s national research center, ENEA, has already drafted a plan for an underwater tunnel to cross the Channel of Sicily, to consist of five sections connected by four artificial islands built with the excavated soil. Siviero, however, is in favor of a bridge connection (including for psychological reasons) which could be built in modules, using the proposed design for the Messina Bridge as a model.

Regarding GRALBeIT, the challenge is technically greater, given the depth of the sea—the Channel of Otranto, the southern edge of the Adriatic Sea. About this difficulty, Siviero said, “But in the year of Leonardo [da Vinci], we honor him exactly because he accepted the challenge of thinking the unthinkable.”

Siviero’s Ulysses Corridor also includes inland railway connections which, going eastward from the Adriatic, proceed through what is known in the European Union as Corridor 8—crossing Albania, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and crossing Greece—to the port of Piraeus. And on the Italian side of the Adriatic, the rail route crosses Southern Italy and the Strait of Messina, to reach the western shores of Sicily, thence to Tunisia. Thus, in Siviero’s view, the Ulysses Corridor is a cru-

cial arc in the global Land-Bridge network, by which one can travel from Cape Town to Beijing.

Following Siviero’s overview of the entire concept, the proceedings in Tirana continued with presentations by Italian and Albanian institutional representatives, including former Albanian Finance Minister and Tirana eCampus Pro-Chairman Arben Malaj, and Kujtim Hashorva, engineer and head of the Transport Department of the Albanian Chamber of Commerce. Hashorva is former Chairman of the South East Europe Transport Observatory of the European Union.

Prof. Malaj raised the issue of the Belt and Road Initiative. He made the point that it offers opportunities as well as risks. Malaj expressed his concern that the BRI should be supported by international consensus, and not by imposed choices.

Mr. Hashorva addressed rail corridor questions. He said that, for a minor financial effort, certain priority inland rail routes could be completed, while the mobilization for the Ulysses Corridor is underway. Hashorva delineated the railway connection of Corridor 8, from Vlore, Albania to Varna, Bulgaria, connecting the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea, and intersecting the Orient/East-Med Corridor going from Hamburg, Germany, to Athens, Greece through Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries.

The railway connection along Corridor 8—the ancient Via Ignatia—is almost completed, with the exception of two short sections in North Macedonia at its borders with Bulgaria and Albania. This stretch can be completed in a short period of time with an investment of less than one billion euros, to form a rail line with a commercial speed of 120 km/h. Such a line would fill a gap by accommodating the transport of goods in smaller sizes, and at a faster travel time than if the goods were sent on ships. In addition, the rail transport will foster local trades.



European rail transportation corridors as of 2003.

Courtesy of Enzo Siviero

A World Land-Bridge

EIR Strategic Alert editor Claudio Celani, who had been invited together with Feride Gillesberg as representatives of the Schiller Institute, was asked to conclude the conference with a short presentation on the Schiller Institute’s vision and its November Bad Soden, Germany conference. Celani picked up on Prof. Malaj’s reference to the BRI, endorsing his proposition that there should be a global consensus. That is what the Schiller Institute is working for. However, the current scepticism and opposition to the BRI in Europe is mostly due to lack of knowledge of both the BRI and of the Chinese mentality.

Celani described the campaign launched by Helga and Lyndon LaRouche to build development corridors to integrate Western and Eastern Europe back in 1989—referred to as the “Productive Triangle” [approach](#), radiating outward from Paris, Berlin and Vienna, which eventually evolved to become the “Eurasian Land-Bridge” proposal, the “New Silk Road,” and the “World Land-Bridge” concepts. If you put China aside for a moment, and think about the two corridors going from Southern Italy to Berlin, and from Athens to Hamburg, the Ulysses Corridor is put into proper context. A large infrastructure project such as the GRALBeIT is no longer utopian, or just a local connection, but acquires a regional and global strategic importance. This reflects

the global interest in proposing this as part of the BRI.

Celani announced that the Schiller Institute intends to organize an international conference on this issue next year in Tirana.

Schiller Institute representative Feride Gillesberg was interviewed by the popular “Dite e mbare” television program on RTSH, the Albanian public broadcasting channel, by the well-known journalist Suzana Zyrakja, who had participated in the conference.

After the formal closing of the conference, discussions continued privately between the Schiller Institute delegation and representatives of Albanian institutions and civil society. Albania is at a crossroads, the representative of a prominent think-tank told us. For years, the country has submitted to harsh fiscal policy (austerity) conditions in the hope that the European Union would fulfill its promise of starting an admission process for Albania. These hopes were swept away last October, when France vetoed the negotiations. Now, the push for a “Plan B” or “Plan C” is growing stronger, which means forgetting the EU and looking toward China and/or Russia.

If cooperation with China/Russia, however, means breaking with EU member Italy, this would be a painful proposition for Albania, whose ties with Italy are geographically, economically and historically very deep. Albanian communities in Italy have existed since the 15th century, when many Albanians escaped from the Ottoman Empire invasion. Since the fall of the communist regime in Albania in 1991, more than half a million Albanians have newly emigrated and settled in Italy, many acquiring Italian citizenship. This was part of a larger emigration wave, creating a European diaspora as large as the 2.8 million people presently still living in Albania.

Italy has responded to Albania in time of need. When the severe earthquake hit the coastal region around Durres last November 26, Italy sent the crucial help of hundreds of Civil Protection Corps specialists, who brought in equipment, tents and other supplies. Within only a few hours after the quake, Italy sent and deployed specially trained dogs to help locate and rescue survivors under the rubble. The Italian government has promised reconstruction help and support for an international donors’ conference.



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Attendees at the Italy and Albania conference. Author Claudio Celani is in the front row, right.

Prosper with the BRI

This brings us to the core of the matter: Albania is a poor country, whose potential for development has been crippled by a self-imposed fiscal austerity policy. Even for earthquake emergency aid, the government was compelled to ensure that the money allocated (about euro 50 million so far, in the face of a required euro 1 billion) does not produce new indebtedness, meaning budget deficit.

But Italy is crippled by the very same policy. Fiscal austerity has so far prevented the Southern Italy region—the Mezzogiorno—from being developed, in terms of building out the EU TEN-T infrastructure corridors. What is involved, is upgrading the railway connections south of Salerno, the Sicily grid, the Messina Bridge, and the ports—not to mention the TUNeIT and the GRALBeIT connections. And yet, Italy is an industrial nation—the second largest manufacturing economy in Europe after Germany. Italy has a large capital potential and productive credit potential to finance all of these infrastructure projects.

So it is that Italy and Albania, as well as Greece, North Macedonia, and other nations of the region, all share a common interest in forcing a shift in European policy, both in economic policy, and in foreign relations with China. The alternative is between joining the Belt and Road-driven recovery, or accepting an inevitable decline.