

Albania – as the Bridge of Routes and Transport Corridors between the Adriatic Sea and Black Sea

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Abstract

Republic of Albania is located in the Western Balkans. Its location in the midst of crossroads for major transit corridors in Europe places Albania in a strategic geographic position. Albania links the western Mediterranean countries with the Balkans and Asia. Its biggest valleys situated in Drin, Shkumbin and Vjose rivers, facilitate the connection of the Balkans with the Adriatic Sea. In the Balkan territory are situated some of the most important Pan - European transport corridors, consisting of: Pan - European Corridor IV, V, VII, VIII, IX and X. Main objective of this paper is the analysis of the development of transport routes and corridors in the Balkans in the context of Pan-European corridors; evaluation of national policy, priorities of Transport, directions of Albania's main road and their compatibility with the needs of Pan - European connectivity.

Key words: *Albania, routes and transport corridors, Adriatic Sea, Black Sea.*

Introduction

Albania is located in the center of crossroads of major transit corridors in Europe, placing it into a strategic geographical position. Albania links the western Mediterranean and Balkan countries of Asia. The geostrategic position in the Balkans and Europe is considered as a gate between East and West, between the Black Sea and Adriatic Sea. Albania has four ports: Port of Durres, Vlora, Shengjin and Saranda. Port of Durres is the largest sea port in Albania, as well as the main gate of Pan - European Corridor VIII. The ports have specific importance in the valorization of geostrategic placement of Albania and further integration of Albania because "ports are doors and their organization is the key that opens them to a free exchange of goods in the world". The ports contribute significantly to the expansion of economic activity not only in Albania, but also in the other countries by supporting the economic integration of these countries.

Transport system in Albania

The road network in Albania is far below the standards of other European countries, including most of its neighbours. Only around 20% of the 18,000-km network is paved, and the secondary and tertiary networks are in bad shape, making it hard for villagers to transport agricultural products to urban centres. In recent years, the Albanian government has given a big importance to the completion of national motorway corridors running east-west and north-south.

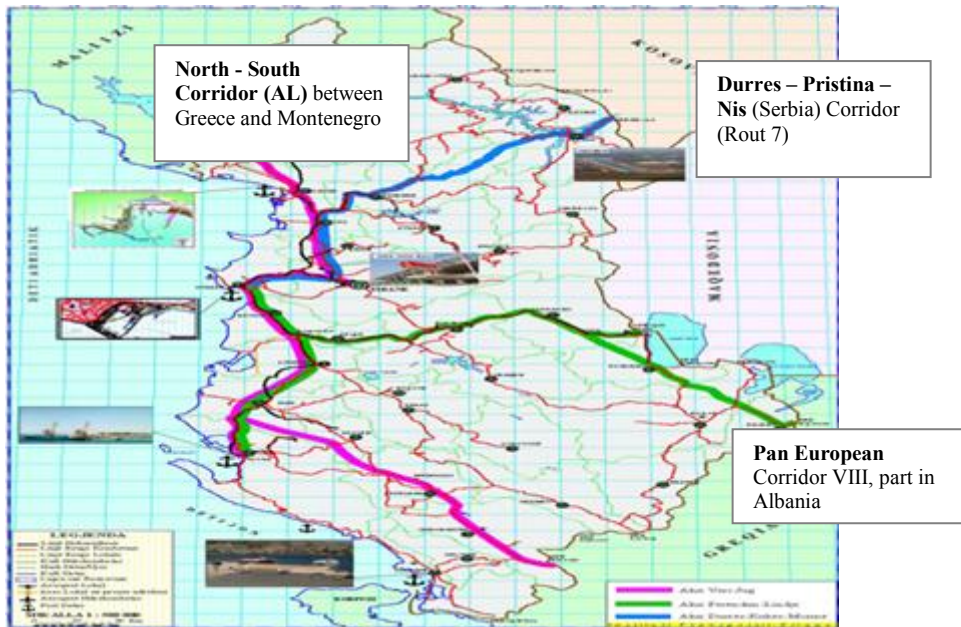


Figure 1. Ports and main international corridors in Albania, Source by Institute of Transport Tirana

The North-South Corridor runs between Greece and Montenegro via Kakavija on the Albanian border and Gjirokaster, Shkoder and Hani i Hotit, whose length is 405 km (Figure 1). Corridor VIII (East - West National Road Corridor): Bari, Brindisi (IT) -Durres, Vlore-Tirane (AL) - Skopje (MK) - Sofje - Burgas, Varna (BG). Corridor VIII is the southernmost among the West-East Pan-European Corridors, linking the Adriatic/Ionian region and Balkans to the Black Sea.



Figure 2. Pan European Corridor VIII, Conexions. Source by Master plan of development of Porto Romano Durres- Albania

Table 11. Potential trade volumes along Corridor VIII (million €)

Country	Actual Export 2003	Potential Export 2009	Potential Export 2013	Potential Volumes 2013/2030
Albania	338.5	466.9	544.3	205.8
FYROM	41.0	225.9	267.6	226.6
Bulgaria	270.0	706.4	827.7	557.7
Total	649.5	1,399.2	1,639.6	990.1

Source: Transport Infrastructure Development in the Balkans

Part of Corridor VIII in the Albanian territory is port of Durres (branch port of Vlora in the south of Albania) and Tirana until the FYR of Macedonia border. The construction of the road Tirana – Elbasan which is 30 km long, (included 2.1 km tunnel) was part of Central - South axis and the main connection to the Corridor VIII. Durres – Kukes – Morine - Kosovo border Corridor: 115 long (included a 5.6 km tunnel). It is seen as having major regional potential impact by providing a better connection to Corridor X and to Serbia through Pristina.



Figure 3. Durres –Kukes –Morine, source by Master plan Porto Romano Bay, Albania

The Durrës – Kukes – Morine (AL) – Pristina (KS) - Nish (SR) corridor or namely arterial 7 in Core Comprehensive Regional Network of the South East Europe Transport has a big importance in improving the trade relations between the countries of the Adriatic and Mediterranean Sea through the Ports of Durrës and Shëngjin as well as influence the increase of their trading activities, especially in Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria and further on. The routes are shown in figure 3.

Rail network: The Albania's Central Railway station is placed near Durrës Port and has a direct connection. Continuing from the Port, the rail reaches Montenegro and from there the European Rail Network. Albania has 447 km of single track railway (and 230 km of secondary tracks) serving Tirana, Durrës and several larger towns. A link to Montenegro was completed in 2004, providing access to the European rail network.

Sea Ports in Albania: Albania has the following major sea ports: Durrës, Vlora, Sarandë and Shëngjin. Investments in sea transport have been concentrated mainly in the ports of Durrës and Vlora as main entrances of Corridor VIII, a strategic road segment linking Albania with Macedonia and Bulgaria. The port of Durrës has the biggest share in the volume of import/export in Albania, nearly 75%.



Figure 4. The Ports in Albania

The ports and terminals are located in Shengjin, Durrës, Vlora and Saranda, (see figure 4), short description of each port will be given below except the port of Durrës which will be described in more detail.

Table 2. Maritime transport (volume of goods by Ports in Albania)

Volume of goods by ports					
Year	Unit	Durres	Vlore	Sarande	Shengjin
2009	ton	3,039,613	634,005	81,314	367,195
2010	ton	3,406,012	408,204	70,903	375,186
2011	ton	3,475,274	281,769	23,772	362,112

Transport connections in Mediterranean, Ionian and Adriatic Seas

Sea transport of the East Mediterranean as a part of the Black Sea region is an essential and integral factor of economic life of the region in terms of trade cooperation with EU and North African region. Share of the Mediterranean in world container traffic is about 5-7% and increasing at rate of 8% a year. Undoubtedly, primarily it concerns transit of energy and realization of relevant projects. As the routes of newly constructed energy pipelines pass through the Mediterranean Sea with subsequent delivery of energy carriers to the European markets, ports of this area included to the pipelines map are undergoing infrastructural changes. Passenger’s traffic is steadily growing especially along with development of touristic infrastructure in the Mediterranean resorts of Greece and Turkey.



Figure 3. Map of Mediterranean, Ionian and Adriatic Seas

Important gateway ports of the East Mediterranean are the ports of Ambarli, Iskenderun,

Mersin, Ceyhan in Turkey and Patras in Greece. Port of Mersin is the largest Mediterranean port of Turkey with a total port area of 786,000 m² and capacity of 3,800 ships per year. Adjacent to the port is Mersin Free Zone established in 1986, the first free zone in Turkey that facilitates a process of attraction of foreign investors. It is the main port for the Eastern Mediterranean Region's industry and agriculture and a gateway for both the Turkish neighboring cities Gaziantep, Adana and for the countries of Iraq and Iran. The port's rail link an easy access to the international highway, as well as its modern infrastructure and equipment, efficient cargo handling, vast storage areas and its proximity to the free trade zone make it an ideal transit port for trade to the Middle East.

In this sense the Albanian port of Durres is the western end of the Pan-European Transport Corridor VIII, which has an essential role to play in the economic development of the country and the Western Balkan region. Durres is considered as one of the important ports in the Adriatic Sea, because it could play a significant transit role in passengers and goods transportation to other European countries. According to official data, the passenger volume of the port was 704,000 during 2005 being increased more than 21,000 passengers year-on-year. There are five ports in Albania open to international traffic: Durres, Vlora, Saranda, Shengjin and Himara -- with a total average of about 5 million tons of cargo annually and Durres handles roughly 90% of the Albanian international maritime trade tonnage, and 65% of the country's total export and import trade. The government is implementing a master plan for the development of the port aiming to improve its capacity and efficiency.

Comparison of Road distances from Black Sea to Adriatic Sea in Western Balkan

Referring to distances of sea ports of Constanta, Varna and Burgas in Black Sea, and ports of Durres, Bar - Montenegro and Igoumenitsa - Greece in the Adriatic Sea, Albania represents the shortest road access:

- From the Port of Constanta to Durres (through route 7) the distance is 150 km shorter in comparison to the Port of Bar (Montenegro), 97 km compared with Port of Igoumenitsa, 36 km compared with Pan European Corridor 8 through Skopje.
- From the port of Varna to Durres (through routes 6 and 7) the distance is 178 km in comparison to the Port of Bar (Montenegro), 61 km compared with Corridor 8 through Skopje, and 122 km shorter in comparison with the Port of Igoumenitsa.
- From the port of Burgas to Durres (through routes 6 and 7) the distance is 157 km in comparison to the port of Bar (Montenegro), 40 km shorter compared to Corridor 8 through Skopje, 101 km shorter in comparison with the port of Igoumenitsa.

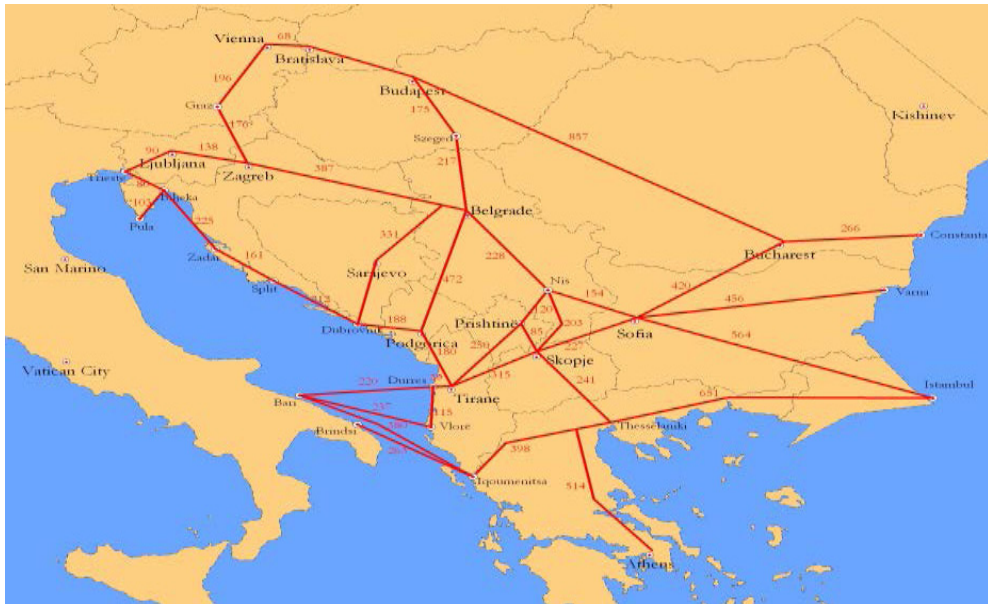


Figure 4. Roads and transport Corridors in the Balkan Region

Source: by author

Table 4. Road and Sea Distances in km between and via major Cities and Ports

1	Constanta –Nis-Pristina-Durres	Road	1215
2	Constanta –Nis-Pristina-Bar	Road	1365
3	(Montenegro)		
4	Constanta-Sofie-Selanik- Igoumenitsa	Road	1312km
1	Constanta-Sofie-Skopje-Durres	Road	1251
	Line	Type	Distance km
1	Varna–Sofie-Nis-Pristina-Durres	Road	960
2	Varna-Sofie-Nis-Pristina-	Road	1138
3	Bar(Montenegro)		
4	Varna-Sofie-Shkopje-Durres	Road	1021
1	Varna-Sofie-Selanik- Igoumenitsa	Road	1082
1	Burgas-Sofie-Nis-Pristina –Durres	Road	910
2	Burgas-Sofie-Nis-Pristina-Bar	Road	1067
3	(Montenegro)		
4	Burgas-Sofie-Shkup-Durres,	Road	950
1	Burgas-Sofie-Selanik-Igoumenitsa	Road	1011
	Line	Type	Distance km
1	Durres-Bari (Italy)	Maritime	220
2	Bar (Montenegro)–Bari (Italy)	Maritime	247
3	Igoumenitsa Bari (Italy)	Maritime	380

Source: by author

Conclusions

The geographical position and the role of ports in maritime transport is the basis for future economic success and social development of Albania, Balkan countries and beyond, by increasing free trade, economic growth sustainability and competition in the globalized world. Moreover, the analyzes and forecasts suggest that transit traffic through Europe-Asia axis extending through the Balkan region will increase in the coming years. Based on the analysis of the distance routes between countries in Southeast Europe, Black Sea ports of Constanta, Varna and Burgas, and ports in the Adriatic Sea (Durrës-Albania, Bari-Montenegro, and Igoumenitsa - Greece), Port of Durrës represents the shortest path. This advantage was not exploited so far, due to lack of roads and other links (rail), but it will be in operation as soon as the construction of road 7 which connects the seaport of Durrës with Nis in Serbia, and will be finished. In this point of view, the shortest distance will be a determining factor for transit, directing the flow of goods because that affects directly the cost of goods (road cuts, reduction of transport costs in relation to origin destination of goods), and other factors.

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