The Council has repeatedly stressed to Turkey, and will continue to do so, the need for Turkey's positive contribution to the solution of the Cyprus problem. The Council expects countries with a European vocation to cooperate with it over its major priorities, one of them being the accession of Cyprus to the EU and a solution to the Cyprus question. Unfortunately Turkey has been blocking the political dialogue with the Union on some sensitive questions, including Cyprus, since the European Council in Luxembourg. However, following the earthquakes in Turkey and Greece and improving bilateral Greek-Turkish relations the atmosphere in EU-Turkey relations has improved, hopefully paving the way for dialogue also on Cyprus.

The Council does not share the view expressed by the Honourable Member that an international conference on the Middle East could be beneficial in the case of Cyprus.

(2000/C 170 E/023)

**WRITTEN QUESTION P-1494/99**

by Olivier Dupuis (TDI) to the Commission

(1 September 1999)

**Subject:** Albania — corridors 8 and 10

Information from Albania seems to confirm a plan giving preference to the completion of 'corridor 10', a road link between Greece and Montenegro via Albania, at the expense of the completion of what has until now been regarded as a priority, namely 'corridor 8', a link between southern Italy, Durres, Pristina, Skopje and Sofia, i.e. between Albania and Kosovo and between Albania and Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Has the Commission any further information on this matter? Is it aware of the grave risks which the carrying through of such a plan would entail for the stability of the entire region, the internal stability of Albania and the comprehensive development of relations between, one the one hand, the European Union and, on the other, Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo?

Can the Commission also provide information concerning the stage reached (including any delays and the reasons for them) in the completion of corridors 8 and 10 and the Union's contribution thereto?

**Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission**

(15 October 1999)

Pan-European transport corridors VIII and X are two of six corridors, which cross the Balkan region and connect to the Trans-European networks (TENs) and the South-East Europe area.

Corridor VII runs from East to West in the Balkan area. It links the south of Italy and the Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea. It runs via the ports of Durres/Flores, Tirana (Albania) and Skopje (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)), further to Sofia (Bulgaria) and to the Bulgarian ports of Burgas and Varna of the Black Sea.

Corridor X runs from North-West to South-East. It connects Salzburg (Austria) via Ljubljana (Slovenia), Zagreb (Croatia), Belgrade (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)), Skopje (FYROM), with Thessaloniki (Greece). Besides this main link, there are four additional branches: (1) a branch from Graz (Austria) via Maribor (Slovenia) to Zagreb (Croatia); (2) a branch from Budapest (Hungary) to Belgrade (FRY), both connecting to Corridor V; (3) a branch from Nis (FRY) to Sofia (Bulgaria) and further on corridor IV to Istanbul; (4) a branch from Veles (FYrom) via Florina (Greece) to the Via Egnatia.

Connections between Albania and Romania are thus ensured through the links of corridor IV to corridor VIII. In a similar way, Albania is also connected to the FRY through the links of corridor VIII to corridor X. Albania is not therefore affected negatively by the development of corridor X.

The development of these corridors is organised through memoranda of understanding (MoU) between the countries crossed and the Commission. Concrete improvements on each corridor remain in the hands of
participants of the MoU. A draft MoU for corridor VIII is near completion and will be signed in autumn 1999. Preparatory work for a MoU for corridor X has been held up for several months, due to the politically difficult situation prevailing in the region and because of the Kosovo crisis. The Commission has no information which might confirm any attempt to foster the development of corridor X to the detriment of corridor VIII.

In the very near future the corridors' development in the Balkan area, including also corridors VIII and X is likely to be implemented in the framework of the stability pact for South eastern Europe endorsed on 10 June 1999, to which the Commission will also actively contribute.

Developing corridors serving to integrate the countries concerned into the enlarged TENs is part of the current Community strategy for the stabilisation and association process in the area. So far, financial support from the Community for the promotion of corridors VII and X has been granted under the PHARE programme, for which however Croatia and the FRY are not at present eligible in the Balkan region.

In Albania on road corridor VIII, between 1994 and 1997, PHARE has supported (for an amount of € 60.6 million) the upgrading of a number of sections, including the widening of roads, the provision of new bridges and the laying of new pavements. At the same time, the PHARE contribution to the rehabilitation of the port of Durrës amounted to € 3.6 million.

In Bulgaria, various sections of the national road network were rehabilitated, including some stretches along corridor VIII, for a total PHARE contribution amounting to € 40 million.

In FYROM on road corridor X, the 1996 and 1997 PHARE programmes funded the Bogorodica and Medzitlija border station projects with a contribution of € 6 million. In addition, the modernisation of the Demir Kapija-Greek border road segment was supported under PHARE with a grant of € 11 million. An European Investment Bank (EIB) loan of € 70 million with Community interest rate subsidy of € 12 million has also been made available to improve road sectors on corridors VIII and X.

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(2000/C 170 E/024)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1498/99

by Hans Kronberger (NI) to the Commission

(1 September 1999)

Subject: Groups hiring out mercenaries

There have recently been increasingly frequent reports of groups hiring out mercenaries, usually from Europe and mainly to Africa, but also to other theatres of war.

1. Is the Commission aware of these activities?

2. Does the Commission see action to combat such groups as a task to be performed at Union level?

3. Has the Commission already taken steps to prevent such machinations? If so, what steps? If not, why not?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(7 October 1999)

The Commission is aware of reports of groups hiring out mercenaries to countries in Africa and to other theatres of war and is concerned about these developments. The Commission is of the view that the international community should consider effective measures in response to this phenomenon and notes with interest the work undertaken by the United Nations in this field.

The Commission considers that where such groups are established in Member States or hire nationals of Member States, responsibility for policy vis-à-vis their actions, which might include combating them, lies primarily with the authorities of the Member States concerned.

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