



VIA EGNATIA FOUNDATION A WAY TO CONNECT

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Dear participants and friends of VEF,

First of all we wish all of you a happy and fruitful New Year, in which there will be many ways to connect to each other, and especially One Way to revive, inspire, find and restore !

The year 2009 has been a very busy and important year for the VEF: we had the starting-up Conference in Molika, with 70 scientists and participants from many countries, who came there in spite of the snow and heavy weather. This has been important for the contents of the project and for our network. We were happy with the financial and moral stimulation from the Dutch embassy in Skopje. Then we had the Caravan journey in May, through Albania and Macedonia, which was a great success, for contact, fact finding, information, network and publicity. And not to forget: for our health and fun! We can recommend the next Caravan

journey to everybody: 300 kilometres of walking is most inspiring and rejuvenating, for us screen watchers. Also less kilometres will do. After that Tom Sawford (England) started up the Via Egnatia Blog, which worked very well as a contact tool for the Caravan walkers. The VEF board has been busy applying for funding, on which you will read more later on. Then we have done a lot of publicity for the project these last months, especially in Holland. We are hoping that you will follow our example in your own country! It is most important that we are outreaching, keep informing people outside about the existence and the goals of VEF: inspiring this road with new life, using it as a way to connect people and countries, by scientific, cultural and educational exchange. As a practical counterpart we are trying to get it function as a cross-border hiking trail, to stimulate local economies, social contacts, ecological awareness, sustainable tourism, and in the end: friendship and reconciliation.

Keep in mind that this is not a short-term project. We aim the project to last for at least 10 years, or as long as it takes to function for itself. We are starting up a process, that we intend to be self- sustainable in the end. A process like this needs a long breath. At the moment we are still in the starting phase.

We are proud to announce the following sub projects for 2010/2011:

1. As a concrete **pilot-project** VEF will focus – as soon as we have the money for it – on the building up of a **certain part of the Road**, i.e. the part between Miraka (near Elbasan, Albania) and Ohrid. There are good reasons for this choice: technically speaking it is the best preserved part of VE. Socially it is one of the poorest parts, that can do with some stimulation and help. VEF will work on all of its goals here, together with local organizations: necessary restoration of the path, informing locals about possibilities of small B & B's, necessary training, special attention will be given to schools along this part of the road, where educational activities (history of the road, cultural exchange, ecological awareness, peace-education, etc.) will be developed, as much as possible with international VEF participation. The idea is to get this part of the road functioning as a usable trail, with international allure and economical possibilities for the local inhabitants. A road to be proud of, part of a bigger region and history: *a way to connect*.
For the rest of us, in other countries, this pilot-part will help enormously to give a boost to the rest: we will have something concrete to show, an example of how it can be, a motivation. We will make film/video of the process, to use elsewhere along the road.
So we will call upon some of you to invest your expertise in this part of the road, to start with.
2. **The Dardhe school:** This school is directly on the part of the road mentioned above. VEF has chosen to support this school, first in a financial way – because of its deplorable building conditions, and then in a cooperative educational way, as described above. So this is at first a charitable part of VEF. Participants of the Caravan journey 2009 will join efforts to raise money for this purpose. Franz Hazelzet has just sold his donkey-painting and put 100 Euro in the pot. Musicians will give concerts for this purpose. Other schools in Holland and England are approached for participation. More news on this will follow on the blog and on our website.
3. **New Conference:** The University of Thessaloniki (by Fotini Tsibiridou) is organising together with us a Conference with the title: “ **Myths about the Other in the Balkans**”. How ideas, prejudices, fears about others – ethnic, national or gender – are constructed, narrated, conserved and challenged in the Balkans, past and present. A very acute and courageous theme nowadays, and very important in the light of VEF'S main goals. A Conference especially for scientists in the field of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, but also for those interested. An announcement with a call for papers will be published soon on our website. Those who work in the field will get a personal invitation. The Conference is planned for February 2011 in Thessaloniki.
4. **VEF at Euroclio Conference:** Via Egnatia Foundation will be present at the annual conference of Euroclio, the European Association of History Educators. The conference will take place in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 22th – 28th march 2010. Workshops and informative sessions are going to take place about the theme “A bridge too far? **Teaching Common European History**, Themes, Perspectives and Levels”. Via Egnatia Foundation will contribute a workshop about the common history in the Egnatia

region. The goal of this workshop is to investigate the possibility of starting a project group of history teachers in order to make a series of lessons about the history of the Via Egnatia from Roman until present times. We call upon history teachers from Albania, FYROMacedonia, Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey to attend to the conference. More information about the conference: www.euroclio.eu

5. **Book on Molika Conference:** A book with the proceedings of Molika, extended with contributions from those who could not be there, including the Bulgarians, is in preparation. It will become a nice introduction to Via Egnatia, stressing archaeology and history, by scientists from all the countries along VE. News will follow on the website.

6. **Caravan walk 2010:** The Bridging the Balkans Caravan Walk along Via Egnatia will pass this year through Greece and Turkey, to reach the Golden Gate of Istanbul on July the 10th. The walk is divided in two parts: one part in the first 2 weeks of May in Western Greece, and a second part in June, beginning with a lecture and gathering in Thessaloniki, on Friday the 18th of June. An exact place-time-schedule is on the website. Enthusiastic walkers can participate one week or more. In all of the cities there will be events, receptions, painting, music, etc. We have tried to make it as lively and varied as possible.

We especially call on the people from FYROMacedonia to join in, either in Florina on the 8th of May, or later on after Thessaloniki (see website).

One of the problems in Northern Greece is that there is very little left of the Via Egnatia. So you need a lot of fantasy, creativity and historical knowledge. That is what we try to provide, by including lectures, music and all kind of happenings. But that is also what we expect you to bring in, as far as possible. We make this Journey together!

The special attraction of the Caravan walk is of course meeting all these interesting international people and enjoying/enduring all joys and hardships together. We hope that many of you and your students, friends, colleagues, children and dogs will participate! **A poster is included in the appendix.** Please use it, post it on the information board or at the wall of your office or university, and forward it to friends and colleagues! We want to make the groups as international as possible! So please: subscribe via the website, and do it soon!

7. **Working group Migration:** Hans Vermeulen is working together with Martin Baldwin-Edwards as co-editor and a group of international contributors on a **special issue** of a scientific journal on migrations intra the Via Egnatia regions. The articles in this special issue will focus on the movement of people, on borders and border issues and the positive or negative role that migration plays in the integration of the region and the improvement of mutual relations between Balkan States.

Riki van Boeschoten has conducted with her students from Volos-University a series of interviews in Korce, Albania, as part of the **life-histories** project.

8. Ivan Vasilev, our Bulgarian archaeologist of the **Balkan Heritage Field School** has initiated some interesting projects in which international enthusiasts can participate: a communal **dig on the Heracleia-site** in Bitola. This must be a fantastic experience to join in, on such a beautiful and interesting place! So: professional and amateur

archaeologists, do join this enterprise! Go to: www.bhfieldschool.org/bh2007.hlexc.html

Icon-hunt in Bulgaria: For those of us interested in Byzantine Icons: the Field School is conducting a photographic icon-hunt in Bulgaria, and is working together with VEF to expand the hunt to Korce and the region of Boskopoia in Albania. VEF cooperates with these initiatives because they contribute enormously to international cooperation. More news will follow on our and their website. You can express your interest to cooperate already.

9. Cultural exchange.

The children's painting along Via Egnatia will be continued during the Caravan Journey 2010. We are thinking of 'ways to connect' the children in the different countries to the exhibition in Istanbul, possibly through tv, possibly by taking children to Istanbul. The schools will hear from us.

A traveling exhibition about the archaeology and history of Via Egnatia is planned for 2011 onwards. Different musea have expressed their interest. Schools along Via Egnatia -from Durrës to Istanbul- will be brought in contact with this exhibition.

In the spring of 2011 a **study-journey** will take place along old Caravan roads and some of the best preserved **Caravan-Serails** in Turkey, under the inspiring guidance of prof. Machiel Kiel. This journey will be officially launched on our website after the Caravan journey, in august 2010. From then on subscription will be possible.

10. **Funding:** As you understand, all or most of these activities cost **money**. VEF has worked with volunteers until now. In the beginning phase of a long-term project this is necessary. VEF board has now decided to apply for a larger funding at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs – which is for now the most promising funder. For this so called MATRA-project formalisation of the cooperation with our local partners is obligatory. We will need cv's and letters of recommendation from some of you. It is a very competitive fund, so it is not sure if we will get it. In case we do however, it is most promising and we will be able to support local branches of VEF in the Balkan countries also financially, as we explained at Molika.

Please note that we are entirely dependent on funding and donations and our own investment. So all bits from all sources help. We will have to tap different sources in different countries and you can help with that, at your own place. If you have a good idea for a local fund-raising action or for a subsidy for a special project, please go ahead and inform us!

Downloads of the VEF-flyers (in 3 languages) are available on our website. Print them and use them! Thanks to Toon Pennings the VEF website is getting ever better and multi- lingual. More translations are in preparation. Have a look at www.viaegnatiafoundation.eu

The VEF- board, by mouth of Marietta.

SEE YOU IN 2010 !