

CONSTRUCTING
BALKAN EUROPE

*The Modern Greek Pursuit of an
“Iron Egnatia”*

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The charm, or, if you prefer, the “charm” of the Balkans, comes from the ever changing complex of ideas and ideologies, peoples, borders, values, customs, languages, and neighbor nations . . . When we scratch the sign of a railway station, we frequently find underneath two or three names written in foreign languages, which reminds us of other epochs, of different borders.

Association of Greek Railway Friends, 1999¹

On October 20th 2003, the Greek transportation and communications minister Christos Verelis gave a press conference in Ioannina, the capital of the Northwestern Greek province Epirus, one of the poorest regions in the European Union (E.U.). Here he announced the E.U. decision to sponsor several new railway lines in Greece. These new lines would not only open up the Epirus province, but also connect its Ionian Sea port of Igoumenitsa to Greece's main North-South rail artery on the Eastern, Aegean Sea side of the Balkan peninsula (for a basic geography see Figures 1 and 2). Until now, the Eastern-Aegean line had been Athens' only railway connection to the rest of Europe; however, northbound traffic had to cross either the Former