

Public

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name:	GAS INTERCONNECTOR GREECE-NORTH MACEDONIA NMPART
Project Number:	2018-0836
Country:	NORTH MACEDONIA
Project Description:	Construction in North Macedonia of a gas interconnection with Greece, identified as a Project of Mutual Interest by the Energy Community. The Greek side is covered by the project GAS INTERCONNECTOR GREECE-NORTH MACEDONIA GRPART.
EIA required:	yes
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise ¹ :	no

(details for projects included are provided in section: "EIB Carbon Footprint Exercise")

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

The Project (entirely in North Macedonia) comprises the construction of a 700 mm gas pipeline 68 km long from Stojakovo (at the end of the Greek section) in direction north-northwest till Stip – Negotino (Block Station BS7).

The Project includes, on top of the gas transmission pipeline, all relevant infrastructures such as ventilation valves, cathodic protection, pig launcher and pig receivers plus all necessary items required during construction and operation of the pipeline.

The EIA procedures have been processed separately for the North Macedonia section and the Greek section of the interconnector, taking into consideration the requirements of the national legislation in each country.

Based on their technical characteristics and the criteria and thresholds defined in the EU legislation, both North Macedonia and Greek sections of the interconnector project would fall under Annex II of the EIA Directive and resulted in the requirements for full EIA in both countries.

¹ Only projects that meet the scope of the Carbon Footprint Exercise, as defined in the EIB Carbon Footprint Methodologies, are included, provided estimated emissions exceed the methodology thresholds: 20 000 tonnes CO₂e/year absolute (gross) or 20 000 tonnes CO₂e/year relative (net) – both increases and savings.

Luxembourg, 25/06/2021

In the context of transboundary communication, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP), via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, liaised with Greek national authorities regarding the assessment of the Project and received from the Ministry of Environment and Energy of the Republic of Greece confirmation that there was no need for the Greek environmental authorities and public to participate in the environmental impact assessment of the Project as no significant environmental impacts are present.

The gas pipeline route is in line with the spatial planning, the selected option was optimised to avoid other protected areas and to avoid impacts on the rare species of birds of prey, as well as on rare and endemic plant avoiding protected areas. Comprehensive studies within the EIA to evaluate the environmental and biodiversity aspects of the project have been undertaken. Measures to prevent or minimize potential impacts have been identified.

The selected alternative however enters in an area proposed as a protected area such as Studena Glava and three Important Bird Areas (South Vardar, Demir Kapija Canyon and Tikves Region). Therefore in addition to general mitigation measures which pertain to the entire corridor are present certain specific measures are recommended in terms of these areas.

Main impacts are temporary during construction works, mitigated according to established practices in the sector. Given that the conditions attached to the EIA decision are appropriately followed-up by the Promoter and its contractors, the residual project risks shall be acceptable. During the construction works along the entire gas pipeline corridor a series of measures will be taken such as avoiding temporary invasion and destruction of the surrounding areas, appropriate handling and storage for hazardous materials and permanent presence of a fire engine in the event of fires and accidents.

Certain specific measures will be implemented in terms of important habitats, such as there should be no access roads crossing through any sensitive habitat. A permanent supervision by an expert ecologist during the activities performed in riparian habitats and rivers and streams. For the proposed protected area of Studena Glava it is recommended a constant supervision by an expert botanist during the activities along the area boundaries.

As regards the Important Bird Areas (Demir Kapija Canyon and the Tikves Region) the impact during construction has been estimated as moderate, whereas in terms of the other Bird Area South Vardar the impact has been estimated as low. The impact range in these regions has been analysed in terms of a strip with a width of 500 meters around the route, in these areas the removal of shrubs and trees should be performed during the winter, outside of the bird nesting period, which is between 1st March and 30th September, especially in hilly areas. Blasting should also be performed outside of the bird nesting period. It is also recommended a constant supervision by an expert ornithologist during the activities along the area boundaries.

The EIA Study has been submitted to MOEPP in June 2020, following a series of public consultation the positive decision was taken on 26th January 2021 and the documentation was made available in their website and published on the Nova Makedonija newspaper.

The relatively low environmental impact the Project, due to the fact that it is buried. The environmental procedures developed by the Promoter, supported by a TA Consultant, are considered to be appropriate to ensure compliance with the requirements of the relevant EU and national legislation.

Luxembourg, 25/06/2021

EIB Carbon Footprint Exercise

The estimated annual absolute emissions of the Project in a standard year of operation are 0 kt CO₂eq since compression will be provided from the station on the Greek side and its emissions were accounted for in the EIB project for the Greek part of the interconnector. Relative emissions were conservatively assumed to be zero since the current alternative supply of gas via an older pipeline system in Bulgaria has higher emissions.

Social Assessment, where applicable

The main social impacts relate to the losses incurred by the set easements and protection area of the pipeline, including loss of crops and rural land. All potential parties affected, by the Project were identified and compensated according to the national law and the international requirements.

Legal actions in respect of right of way settlements or disputed pipeline crossings through some community areas considered as environmentally sensitive cannot be excluded, however, provided that appeals do not concern any sites of nature conservation importance, the competent authority holds the appropriate rights for easement, given the legal status of the Project in both countries.

The Project is expected to provide short-term positive socio-economic impacts in the form of temporary employment opportunities.

Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

Public consultation and publication of the authorities' decisions and EIA reports are mandatory under the Greek and North Macedonia legislations for environmental impact assessments. Public consultation and participation in the EIA procedure is regulated in North Macedonia by the Law on Environment, Article 90 on access to environmental documents and information, and Article 91 on public hearing.

On the North Macedonia side several institutions, including but not limited to the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, Regional Protection Unit in Negotino, Elektrodistribucija Dooel, Skopje, Public Enterprise for State Roads, Ministry of Culture, Civil Aviation Agency, Municipality of Gevgelija, Division for Urban Planning, Municipal and Environmental Matters, Makedonski Telekom AD; Authority for Technological–Industrial Development Zones, Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments and the Strumica Museum, were consulted in addition to meetings and consultations with representatives from the municipalities: Bogdanci, Demir Kapija, Gevgelija and Negotino. The process was necessary to collect comments and the less impacting pipeline route was identified by integrating the comments raised during these consultations.

On 19th and 20th November 2020, a public hearing was held regarding the Environmental Impact Assessment Study for the Project: "Gas interconnection North Macedonia - Greece" in the Municipalities of Negotino, Demir Kapija, Gevgelija and Bogdanci in accordance with the laws and bylaws in North Macedonia.

In addition Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) were contacted in several Municipalities as follow: Citizens Association "EKOVIDA", Ecologists Association "ZRAK", Association for development, education and ecological ethics "POLIMAT 13 Association "EKO-KOCKA", Citizens Association "EKOLOSHKO DRUSHTVO EKO CHIFLIK" and Citizens Association "CENTAR ZA KLIMATSKI PROMENI".

Luxembourg, 25/06/2021

The Promoter supported by a Consultant financed by WBIF prepared a Stakeholder Engagement Plan, such stakeholder engagement activities will be ongoing through the course of the Project's phases: pre-construction, construction, operation and decommissioning.

Other Environmental and Social Aspects

The Project will further potentially allow for indirect environmental benefits, through the future substitution of more polluting fuel sources by gas by supplying the regions connected to the pipelines.

Mitigation and monitoring measures as set-up in the environmental documentation will be supervised by the competent authorities and complied with by the construction contractors through a plan agreed with the Promoter and the competent authority.

In the case of any archaeological discoveries, the relevant authorities will be notified.

To further ensure safety of the pipeline, the Project will include passive and active corrosion protection. the pipeline designed will be certified by a third party to guarantee appropriate soundness, in accordance with the Law on Construction and the Law on Safety and Health at Work in North Macedonia, the Contractor is obliged to submit a Plan for safety and health at work before starting construction activities.

The mitigation measures for the negative impacts on the population and on human health will be undertaken in the course of the construction phase to reduce the likelihood of any possible injuries at the workplace, implement protection from traffic accidents caused by the frequency of transport vehicles, protection from exhaust emissions, as well as protection from increased noise from the construction machinery and from the vehicles used for transporting the equipment and the materials.

The measures will be presented and implemented according to a duly developed Community Health, Safety and Security Plan which applies for the duration of the construction and the work on the project, including also emergency prevention, preparedness and response. The Promoter's environmental capability is considered to be rather limited and need to be supported during implementation as it was done during preparation. The Promoter during project implementation will be supported by PIU and a consultant founded by an EU Grant that includes in E&S scope of activities.

Luxembourg, 25/06/2021

Conclusions and Recommendations

For the component on North Macedonian side of the Greece - North Macedonia Interconnection project, the results of the available assessments and authorisations do not highlight issues that form an obstacle to the acceptance of the Project by the Bank.

Given the fact that the final environmental impact report is yet to be approved by the Competent Authorities, the Bank has included disbursement conditions in the contract requiring the Promoter to provide all necessary environmental impact assessment outcomes and decisions, for the Bank's review and acceptance and a presence of competent technical and E&S advisors during implementation. The Bank has also included undertakings, in particular with regard to the fulfilment of the mitigation measures set in the environmental decision documents.

Based on the environmental and social information provided by the Promoter, is acceptable for EIB financing in E&S terms.