

Public

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name:	GAS INTERCONNECTOR GREECE-NORTH MACEDONIA GRPART
Project Number:	2019-0190
Country:	GREECE
Project Description:	Construction of the Greek section of the Greece – North Macedonia gas interconnector.
EIA required:	yes
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise ¹ :	no

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

The Project (entirely in Greece) comprises the construction of a 750 mm in diameter, 55 km long underground high-pressure gas transmission pipeline and running between Nea Messimvria in Greece to Greece/North Macedonia border 4km east of Evzonoï. Starting from Nea Messimvria, the routing crosses Thessaloniki and Kilkis Prefectures in a north-northwest direction.

The Project includes, on top of the gas transmission pipeline, the implementation of a border metering station which will be erected on Greek territory as well as scraper stations, cut-off valves and facilities required during construction and operation of the Project. The Promoter is experienced in implementing and operating gas transmission pipelines.

The EIA procedures have been processed separately for the Greek section and the North Macedonia section of the interconnector, taking into consideration the requirements of the national legislation in each country, as well as of a special plan at regional level in Greece and potential transboundary impacts.

Based on their technical characteristics and the criteria and thresholds defined in the EU legislation, both Greek and North Macedonia 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. For the Greek section, the Promoter submitted the EIA on 19 December 2018, the

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.

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public consultation lasted until June 2019 and a public hearing took place at the Regional Council of Central Macedonia in Thessaloniki. No objections, by any legal entity or individual, have been recorded during this phase. The Competent Authority (CA) issued their positive decision on the EIA on 6 February 2020.

The Project is in compliance with the Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development of the Region of Central Macedonia (RCM) through which the pipeline passes,

The pipeline routing on the Greek side will not cross any NATURA 2000 areas or protected areas², the layout has been designed to avoid such areas. The minimal distance to the closest NATURA 2000 site is 278 m. The impact on the Natura 2000 site has been assessed and the competent authority concluded that the effects on the types of natural habitats in terms of their species are negligible and therefore no mitigation measures are proposed.

The Project falls under decision from National Commission of Water Flood Risk Management Plans including Risk Maps and Flood Risk Maps for the above Water District which ensures the management, evaluation and mitigation of the risk of flood according to the requirements of EU Directive 2007/60 / EC.

The Project crosses areas under the forest legislation (L. 998/1979 as amended and in force) and the construction of the project is a permitted activity in areas under the forest legislation since the impact is minor. The construction of a pipeline is a linear activity, the project area will be affected only locally and temporarily due to earth movement in its different sections. For this reason, no linear section will be affected for the entire duration of the construction period, which significantly reduces the negative impacts of this phase. The pipeline will be buried at a depth of 1 meter or deeper, except for its ancillary surface infrastructure.

On the North Macedonia side, on 13 December 2019, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP) has issued a Screening Decision that the Project is subject to full EIA³. The final scoping document for the North Macedonia section was completed in February 2020.

In Greece, the pipeline route will be implemented primarily within a rural landscape and at a legally required distance from residential areas, avoidance and minimisation measures have been integrated into the project design to minimise the project impact on these and on other sensitive areas. These measures include: (i) selection of the most optimal routing for the pipeline based on identified options and on the integration of comments received from public participation and different municipalities influenced by the Project; (ii) by-passing or keeping a minimum distance from protected areas, Natura 2000 areas, villages and cultural heritage sites; (iii) time constraints for the implementation of construction work outside the breeding season to avoid disturbance including restriction of night lighting and minimize light along the work zone; (iv) take all necessary steps for water removal that may be sprawling in the area of the project and remain above the etching surface of the project; (v) stop of works during the breeding periods of endemic species; (vi) construction work on parts of the project passing through potential flood areas should be performed taking any additional flood protection measures to reduce the negative impact on the project infrastructure; (vii) and minimization of noise and vibration during site activities.

² The area is Lake Pkrolimni - Xylokeratea code GR1230004, this partially overlap with the Special Protection Zone Wildlife Shelter Pkrolimni both were considered including Anthofito area code GR 1230006. .

³ As per scoping document the procedures for the Project in North Macedonia section will be carried out in compliance with national regulations and in line with requirements of the EU EIA Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU

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Concerning ancillary surface infrastructure, noise levels are required to comply with the national requirements.

The EIA documentation on the Greek side concluded that there is no potential to cause significant effects on the environment of Northern Macedonia, both during construction and during the operation of the project and therefore the information disclosure is not required in the neighbouring state, under the Espoo Convention, according to par. 1 of Article 8 of CMD 1649/45/2014 (B 45).

The EIA is under revision due to technical parameter modification and the revised documentation will be submitted to the competent authority.

On the North Macedonia side, the transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure was launched in 2019, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning officially submitted the request to Ministry of Environment and Energy of Republic of Greece for Letter of Intent for development of the Project on 5 September 2019. The Ministry of Environment and Energy in the reply concluded that no significant environmental impacts are expected and therefore no need for the Greek environmental authorities and the public to participate in the environmental impact assessment procedure of the project. The overall ESIA for the North Macedonia section is planned to be completed by May 2020 including public consultation that is a requirement of North Macedonia.

In summary, the pipeline section in Greece has been assessed to generate temporary and reversible impacts during construction works (clearing of rights of way, noise, dust, increased traffic, temporary access restrictions, construction camps and lay-down areas, waste disposal, water management, crossing of highways, rails and water ways). These impacts can usually be effectively managed by appropriate mitigation measures in order to avoid unacceptable nuisance to other parties and the public. The impacts were also assessed to be limited or negligible during the subsequent operational phases as the natural habitats will be restored as per the set of conditions attached to the EIA development consent decisions. If the proposed mitigation and reinstatement measures are fully implemented no residual impacts are expected.

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.

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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. On the Greek side several institutions, including but not limited to Regional Council of the Region of Central Macedonia, the Planning Directorate, Forest protection, Natural environment and Biodiversity, Hydrocarbons and Metropolitan Planning Urban & suburban areas of Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Infrastructure Directorate of Ministry of National Defense, the Department of Planning and Environmental protection of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, the Directorates of Prehistoric and Classical and Byzantine Antiquities of the Ministry of Culture and Sports and stakeholders were consulted, comments collected and the less impacting pipeline route was identified by integrating the comments raised during these consultations.

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. An archaeological supervisor will also be present on site during the implementation of the pipelines.

The Promoter has process control and protection systems in place to manage potential emergencies, such as explosions or fires. To further ensure safety of the pipeline, the Project will include passive and active corrosion protection of the steel pipes and will be located at safe distances to avoid any interference with power transmission lines in the pipeline area. Regular monitoring of methane leakage is also carried out by the Promoter to detect gas leakage through walking inspections.

The pipeline will also be designed to guarantee a safe physical access to the implementation and to allow the O&M personnel to operate in conditions compliant with safety requirements.

The Promoter is committed to continuously improve protection of health and safety at work, as well as his business impacts on the environment, applying these principles down to any entities involved in the Promoter's operations. The Promoter also has well-established risk management, accident prevention and emergency procedures in place and actively involves its employees in enforcing these policies.

The Promoter has a health and safety management system based on ISO 45001, focusing on health and safety and improving employee safety, reducing workplace risks and creating better, safer working conditions.

The Promoter has implemented an environmental management system based on ISO 14001 that support the Promoter to sets out the requirements for an environmental management system and helps to improve environmental performance through more efficient use of resources and reduction of waste.

The environmental procedures employed by the Promoter are considered to be appropriate to ensure compliance with the requirements of the relevant EU and national legislation.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

For the component on Greek 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.

For the Greek section, given the fact that the final environmental impact report is under revision, the Bank has included disbursement conditions in the contract requiring the Promoter to provide with all necessary environmental impact assessment outcomes and decisions, for the Bank's review and acceptance. 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, the Promoter environmental capability and the relatively low impact the Project is acceptable for EIB financing in E&S terms.