

VLÖRE Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name:	Vlöre Bypass
Project Number:	2012-0200
Country:	Albania
Project Description:	Construction of a new 29 km 2 x 1 highway bypass around Vlöre in southern Albania
EIA:	Required
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise:	No

Summary of Environmental and Social Assessment

If the project was located in a Member State it would fall within Annex I of the EU Directive 2011/92/EU. Hence, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure would be required. The promoter has undertaken a full EIA procedure commissioning an EIA report for which the draft was completed in early 2012. The NTS has been disclosed on the EIB's website. The EIA report is to be subject to a final round of disclosure and public consultation prior to approval by the relevant Authorities. Their final approval will be a condition for disbursement.

The project is situated close to/crosses two sites that are proposed for inclusion in the Emerald Network sites and therefore potentially future Natura 2000 sites. Therefore the principles of the Habitats (92/43/EEC) and Birds (2009/147/EC) Directives apply. The EIA report concludes that the project is unlikely to have a significant negative impact on protected areas or species. This opinion is to be confirmed by the Competent Authority for Nature Conservation prior to disbursement (Form A/B equivalent).

The main residual negative impacts of the projects are: (i) conversion of about 76 ha of mostly agricultural land; (ii) visual intrusion, especially due to some required high cuts on the hills behind Vlöre which will be visible from some distance; (iii) an increase in noise and vibration levels for a limited number of receptors; and (iv) economic displacement of farmers. At present, no physical displacement of residential households is foreseen. Various mitigation measures such as landscaping and the installation of noise barriers have been recommended in the EIA and are expected to be prescribed as part of the final Environmental Decision. Mitigation measures for any involuntary resettlement will be carried out in accordance with a resettlement framework and plan to be agreed with the Bank and implemented prior to disbursement.

The project is also expected to have positive environmental impacts within Vlöre, a town with a population of about 80,000, whose residents currently suffer high levels of noise, vibration, severance, local pollution and accident risk from the long distance traffic passing through. The project is expected to remove from the town a significant portion of this traffic.

Overall, subject to certain conditions, the project is acceptable for Bank funding from an environmental and social perspective.

Environmental and Social Assessment

The project concerns the construction, on a new alignment, of 29 km of highway to act as a bypass around the town of Vlöre, thereby improving access to the southern shoreline towns and settlements of Albania. The design is for a 2 x 1 highway with climbing lanes for 18 km and laybys. The operating speed will be between 80-90 km/hr. Junctions will be at grade, either through T junctions or roundabouts. The design may be deemed as an expressway standard as stopping on the carriageway is prohibited, there is no crossing of a railway line or footpath at grade and junctions are controlled. The new section of road will start at the end of the Levan Vlöre motorway in the northern suburbs of Vlöre, will cross the Babica plateau,

Shushica hills and Gambirit mountains, and then follow the Dukati valley before rejoining the S8 highway to the south of Orikum.

While no formal strategic environmental assessment has been undertaken for the road investment program, an Albanian National Transport Plan was prepared in 2005. Amongst other things, this gave some consideration to the strategic environmental issues related to identified sector investments and may be considered as broadly consistent with the philosophy of the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC.

Various alignment alternatives were explored during the planning process, including options that passed through the town and others passing through the hilly terrain inland. The options were assessed on a multi criteria basis (economic, environmental, social, cultural and technical). The preferred alignment now selected for detailed design, though longer than other options and passing through steep and rather geo-technically complex terrain, offered reduced social and environmental impacts overall.

The project will cross the Narta Landscape Protected Area (LPA) for about 2.2 km at its northern end and passes close to the Karaburun/Vlöre Managed Nature Reserve (MNR) at its southern end (IUCN Category V and IV respectively, and both proposed Emerald Network sites and therefore potentially future Natura 2000 sites). Therefore the principles of the Habitats (92/43/EEC) and Birds (2009/147/EC) Directives apply. The EIA report notes that the crossing of the Narta LPA is on its southern fringe in an already degraded and partly developed part of the site, that the road is several km distant from the Karaburun MNR and that no protected or endangered species are likely to be found in the planned corridor. The report therefore concludes that the project is unlikely to have a significant negative impact on protected areas or species. This opinion is to be confirmed by the Competent Authority for Nature Conservation prior to disbursement.

The project passes close to Kaninë, a hilltop settlement and fort with important cultural property value which has been the subject of various progressive historical developments dating back to the Illyrian period over two and a half millennia ago. There are also other known cultural property sites in the vicinity of the project and much of the corridor may reveal archaeological remains. The Albanian Cultural Heritage Law requires that during works for the construction of a road, specialised archaeologists shall be used to minimise potential damage to sites and monuments. Testing of sites of high potential importance is proposed prior to construction commencing. In areas that are not tested in advance of construction, a suitably qualified archaeologist will monitor soil stripping or ground preparation works. In the event of the discovery of archaeological finds or remains, the relevant authority will be notified immediately. The area subsequently will be investigated and amendments made to the design if necessary. The opinion of the Competent Authority for the Protection of Cultural Property as to the potential impact of the project on protected sites is to be obtained prior to disbursement.

The project crosses mostly agricultural land but also olive groves, pastures, urban zones and some forest areas. Expropriation will be performed in accordance with the Albanian Law No 8561, 1999. A baseline census of affected persons has been prepared and entitlements are to be prescribed in a resettlement framework and action plan to be agreed.

Public consultation has been undertaken during the scoping and assessment phases of the EIA procedure. The issues raised included land expropriation, certain specific elements of the alignment, slope stability and impacts on the drainage and irrigation systems in the area. Wherever feasible, concerns raised have been addressed.

As the regulatory procedure is yet to be concluded, a number of requirements are to be met prior to any disbursement of the EIB loan, namely: (i) the Competent Authority for the Environment has issued his positive decision; (ii) the Competent Authority for Nature Conservation has issued his opinion (Form A/B equivalent); (iii) the Competent Authority for the Protection of Cultural Property has issued his opinion; and (iv) land acquisition is complete. The promoter will also be required to implement the project in accordance with an agreed Environmental and Social Management Plan.