

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name:	SOFIA RING WESTERN ARC CONSTRUCTION
Project Number:	20150333
Country:	Republic of Bulgaria
Project Description:	Modernization and reconstruction of an existing 8.5 km long section and interchanges of the Sofia Ring Road in the western part of the city.
EIA required:	NO
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise ¹ :	NO

Summary of Environmental and Social Assessment, including key issues and overall conclusion and recommendation

The project consists of the enlargement of 8.5 km section of the western part of Sofia Ring Road (SRR) from the current two lane road to a 2x3 urban motorway. The project includes service roads, connections to the urban network and the elimination of all at-level crossings.

The project falls under Annex II of EIA Directive 2011/92/EU. EIA national authority for the project is the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW). On 27 September 2010 the MoEW screened out the project (Decision № 34-ПР/2010) and concluded that there was no need to carry out a full EIA.

The project alignment does not cross any location included in the NATURA 2000 network. The closest Natura 2000 site is *BG0000113 Vitosha*, located 7 km away from the project. Natura 2000 Declaration was issued by the MoEW on 23rd October 2012 stating that the project is not likely to exert a significant negative impact on natural habitats, populations and habitats of species, subject to conservation in protected zones.

Taking into account that the expropriation procedures are not completed, a condition for disbursement of the second allocation for the Phase 2 under the Framework Loan *BULGARIA EU FUNDS COFINANCING 2014-20 (2013-0545)* will be included, stipulating that the land is fully available for construction.

After thorough analysis of the available information received from the Promoter, including the modified Application Form to the EU Commission with Phasing proposal submitted in 2015 and Project Application approved by the Commission earlier in 2014, the project is considered acceptable for the Bank financing from the environmental and social point of view with a condition indicated above.

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

¹ Only projects that meet the scope of the Pilot Exercise, as defined in the EIB draft Carbon Footprint Methodologies, are included, provided estimated emissions exceed the methodology thresholds: above 100,000 tons CO₂e/year absolute (gross) or 20,000 tons CO₂e/year relative (net) – both increases and savings.

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The project is part of the Operational Programme Transport, which was subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) following Bulgarian legislation in accordance with SEA Directive 2001/42/EC. The environmental report was approved in February 2007.

The process of transposition of EU legislation with regards to environmental and social aspects (EIA, Habitats and Birds Directives) into national legislation of Bulgaria can be considered as satisfactory.

The project falls under Annex II of EIA Directive 2011/92/EU. EIA national authority for the project is the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water, which is responsible for assessing the investment proposals related to the development or alteration of projects which are listed in Annex II to art. 93, item 1 of the Bulgarian Environment Protection Act, as well as Annex II 13d of Directive 2011/92/EU/.

The process of public consultation was started in April 2010, when Sofia municipality announced the investment proposal in all affected regions. After the end of the standstill period, Sofia municipality prepared the necessary documents and submitted to the MoEW for approval.

On 27 September 2010 the MoEW screened out the project (Decision № 34-ПР/2010) and concluded that there was no need to carry out a full EIA.

The decision was motivated by various circumstances including that the reconstruction project is located in a densely urbanized area, there are no protected areas which can be affected by the project, there are no protected plants or animal population in the affected area, there are no expectations for generation of wastes and emissions which may have a major negative impact and the type of landscape does not change with the implementation of the investment.

Mitigation measures

With respect to the main environmental impacts the decision of the MoEW to screen out the project indicates:

- noise: it was considered that, despite more traffic, the improvements due to the installing of noise barriers will not worsen the living conditions in the neighbouring areas in terms of noise levels;
- landscape and land use will not be significantly modified;
- protected and sensitive species, including Natura 2000 areas will not be affected, as they are located away from the area of the proposed development.

The closest Natura 2000 sites are - *BG0000113 Vitosha*, located 7 km away from the project and *BG0002114 Chelopechene Fish ponds*, located some 10 km to the East from the project site.

The decision to screen out the project also indicates the absence of significant negative impacts on BG0000113 Vitosha. The corresponding Natura 2000 Declaration was issued by the MoEW on 23rd October 2012 concluding that the project is not likely to exert a significant negative impact on natural habitats, populations and habitats of species, subject to conservation in protected zones.

The measures foreseen in the project to address the prevention, minimization or compensation of the adverse impact on the environment are related to limiting of disturbance of geological base during excavation works, control of dust emission, proper re-cultivation and creation of green areas, transportation and disposal of construction waste, control of spillage of oil and fuels, landscaping and planting of vegetation.

The project is divided into 2 sections. Construction permit for the 1st Section was issued by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works on September 8, 2012. The works were completed in November 2015 and the road was opened to traffic. For a part of the 2nd Section, where land acquisition is not required or is completed, a construction permit has

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been issued on November 16, 2015. For the rest of the section the construction permit will be issued upon the completion of the land expropriation and availability of the site. It is foreseen to complete the expropriation procedures by the second half of 2016.

Positive impacts

The project implementation is expected to overcome current traffic and congestion problems along the Western section of the Sofia Ring road by widening the existing carriageway, providing safe multi-level junctions with the existing street network as well as providing a road link with higher operational standards and safety conditions.

Some environmental benefits will be generated by the project as a result of faster and smoother traffic flow - providing for an overall reduction of emitted exhaust gasses due to the reduced travel time and eliminated congestion as well as potential decrease in the number of traffic accidents along the new alignment. Population from the neighbourhoods situated along the Ring-road will be subject to less noise and air pollution.

Social Assessment, where applicable

The project crosses an industrial land mainly following the existing road alignment and does not require any resettlement. However due to the widening of the carriageway and construction of interchanges, additional land is necessary. The expropriation procedures for the 2nd Section (entirely falling within Phase 2 of the project) have generated a number of legal disputes between landowners and the State regarding the compensation value. Total number of appeals was 91. By the time of appraisal 39 cases have been already settled. The settlement of disputes is still ongoing for the rest of the cases and court decisions are expected during the first half of 2016.

Taking into account that the expropriation procedure is still ongoing at the time of approval of lending, it would be appropriate to introduce a condition to be fulfilled by the promoter before first disbursement from the second allocation (Framework Loan BULGARIA EU FUNDS COFINANCING 2014-20 (2013-0545) is made - the promoter should provide evidence in the form of a construction permit, showing that the land is fully available for construction.

Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

Before submitting the documents for preparing the relevant EIA decision by The Ministry of Environment and Water, Sofia Municipality in April, 2010 announced the investment proposal in all communities situated along the project alignment. According to information provided in the Decision to screen out the project, the mayors of the affected communities (Lyulin, Vrabnitsa and Nadejda regions of Sofia municipality) have been informed about the investment proposal and have provided the information to the affected population. No any other written evidence on how the information was disseminated has been received from the promoter during the appraisal. No opinions, suggestions or objections regarding the investment proposal were received. The general public was informed about the Decisions of the MoEW on the website of the Ministry on 27 September, 2010.