

Ohrid – Peshtani expressway project, Macedonia

For more information

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Introduction

The project involves the construction of a new section between Ohrid and Pestani on the A3 express 'Kosel' to the Albanian border crossing at Ljubanishta. The new 12.5 kilometre section is at a higher elevation than the existing coastal road and towns and will pass through the Galicica National Park. This projects is part of a sovereign guaranteed loan of up to EUR 160 million.

The project location is in conflict with the law on nature protection and the current zoning of the Galicica national park

The Galicica National Park is a rare and important natural site with abundant biodiversity, listed as an emerald site (a future Natura 2000 site), an Important Plant Area and a Prime Butterfly Site. In 2014, the Galicica was designated part of UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Under the current Management Plan, the Galicica National Park is divided into four zones, and the expressway is planned to pass through two of these – the Zone of Active Management and the Zone of Sustainable Use. Over 95 per cent (310 ha) of the total area of the project is located in the park and would require rezoning and the destruction of over 75 hectares. According to the law on nature protection and the management plan for the park, construction activities including for roads, highways and expressways are NOT allowed in the zone of active management.

At its 38th session in Doha in 2014, the World Heritage Committee adopted a decision (38 COM 7B.58) expressing concern over several major infrastructure projects planned within the property, including the the Ohrid–Peshtani road and requested that technical details, including Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessments (EIAs/HIAs) be submitted for review prior before to any decisions that would be difficult to reverse, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines.

The Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessments for the project Ohrid –Pestani road have NOT yet been submitted to the World Heritage center for review. The Strategic Impact Assessment (SEA) for the proposed changes to the zoning of Galicica national park zoning are under review and thus have not been sent to UNESCO.

Degradation of the natural values of the Galicica national park in order to enable the project implementation

The Public Institution National Park Galicica initiated a revision of the Management Plan 2011 – 2020 and the zoning of the park in order to enable the implementation of the project. The proposed changes in the management plan and the zoning are not in accordance with the law on nature protection, since re-zoning of the park can be approved only after a study of the natural values of the park finds that the area subject to a zoning change has lost its natural values. There are no legal provisions that enable the change of zoning in the park.

The draft report on the SEIA for the proposed changes to the Management plan stress the negative impacts of the proposed changes. The report concludes that in the long-term, the proposed changes might lead to the loss of category II status as a national park and UNESCO World Heritage site. Also the SEIA report notes that the construction of the expressway will lead to significant fragmentation of the natural values, especially on the forests habitat “Quercus trojana” included in Annex I of the Habitat Directive, which is the only functional habitat of its kind on the west side of the park.

In a similar case (the Mavrovo national park) deliberate re-zoning was done to accommodate infrastructure projects in direct breach of the law on nature protection. This is unacceptable and should not be sanctioned and supported by EBRD.

For these reasons, we believe that the bank should not approve this loan.