

From: [Redacted]
Sent: 25 September 2017 17:17
To: [Redacted]
Subject: Flash briefing on meeting between Commissioners Cretu and Vella and BG Ministers of Transport, Regional Development, Environment and Tourism

Dear all,

Please find hereunder a quick debrief of the above mentioned meeting today:

Four BG Ministers, namely Moskovski (transport), Nankov (Regional Development), Dimov (Environment) and Angelkova (tourism) met Commissioner Cretu and Commissioner Vella in Brussels today. The one hour meeting reiterated Bulgaria's political commitment to completing the Struma motorway after the same three Ministers (all of the above except Moskovski) had already visited the two Commissioners three months ago on the same topic. The Ministers announced that the public consultations were finalised and that they have collected +15,000 signatures supporting the new Eastern alternative [that the government is putting forward as the preferred option]. They also pointed out that some NGOs and citizens are against. The Ministers expect the EIA Decision to be issued by end October 2017 after analysing all the reactions to the consultation. Following this, the construction permits should be issued by the end of 2017 and the submission of the Major Project application to the Commission is expected for January 2018 according to Minister Nankov.

Commissioner Vella underlined the importance of thoroughly assessing all options from an environmental perspective in order to be ready to respond to any public criticism that may follow. DG ENV also added that the project would be an opportunity to enforce improved mitigation measures such as green bridges for the fauna, which go beyond the minimal requirements. Commissioner Cretu added that there is an important funding gap of about 230m Euros [about 50% of the project cost], which the BG authorities would need to commit to covering before the project can be accepted by the Commission.

The Ministers responded that they commit to covering the funding gap from the State budget and invited the Commissioners to visit Bulgaria on behalf of Prime Minister Borissov. Commissioner Cretu responded that this would happen anyway on 4-5th January 2018 when the entire College will be in Bulgaria in the framework of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council and that she is also looking forward to the 2018 Danube Forum in Bulgaria. The Commissioners also responded that they might plan a visit before 2018 with no specific commitment. The Bulgarian authorities were also informed that the revised Major Project application for lots 3.1 and 3.3, recently submitted didn't raise any more observations from the Commission and would be put for Commission approval.

Best regards,

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