

Corridor Vc in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Environmental and social impacts can no longer be ignored



Construction of the Kvanj tunnel.

The EU's flagship infrastructure project in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the 330-kilometre Corridor Vc motorway – now stands at a critical crossroads. To date, only one-third of the corridor has been completed, financed through more than EUR 3 billion in loans and grants from the EU, the European Investment Bank (EIB), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

In 2018, the EIB approved a EUR 100 million loan for the Mostar South–Tunnel Kvanj section. Today, this section remains in deadlock, while the most technically and environmentally challenging section still lies ahead – the construction of a tunnel through Mount Prenj. Long proposed for inclusion in the future Čvrsnica–Čabulja–Vran National Park, the mountain area currently lacks formal protection status despite the government recently increasing efforts to establish it as a protected area.

For more information

Alma Midžić

Human rights and community
support coordinator

CEE Bankwatch Network

alma.midzic@bankwatch.org

Learn more: bankwatch.org



Following the presentation of an EBRD-commissioned report on the route's environmental and social sensitivity mapping in December 2024,¹ 20 families (residing between 3 and 250 metres from the planned motorway) submitted new complaints to the EBRD's Independent Project and Accountability Mechanism (IPAM). Officially registered on 1 April 2025, the complaints concern the failure to ensure a transparent route selection that minimises harm to local people and the environment.

These outstanding issues are expected to delay the already ambitious construction timeline. According to public statements from JP Autoceste – the state-owned company responsible for managing the motorway – the entire section of the corridor in Bosnia and Herzegovina is set to be completed by 2030.

Public participation gaps and local concerns

In the early 2000s, the original route for the southern section of the corridor was due to pass through residential and agricultural zones in the Neretva valley near Blagaj – a site added to the UNESCO Tentative list in 2007 – and across the Buna and Bunica rivers. Following public protests in 2011, an alternative alignment via the Podveležje plateau was proposed. Despite gaining broader local acceptance, this proposal was later blocked by a group of political representatives for reasons that remain unclear.

In 2016, a new route was once again proposed through the valley, affecting residential and agricultural land and crossing both rivers in an area of growing tourism. Despite renewed public opposition, the planning document for this route was adopted the following year with no public consultation, in violation of EU principles of transparency and participatory decision-making.

Local communities have repeatedly stated that key decisions, particularly regarding the Mostar South–Tunnel Kvanj section, were made behind closed doors and that their access to project information was restricted. In its January 2021 compliance review of a complaint filed by local residents in October 2020, IPAM noted that the local population had not been consulted on the final chosen route.² Consequently, IPAM recommended that the route south of Mostar be reconsidered.

The first time residents received detailed route projections and information on access roads was much later, on 29 October 2024, during an event at Blagaj's cultural centre, following IPAM's recommendations from its 2021 review. While consultation on the project details was appreciated, the event came too late and felt more like an informational presentation of a fait accompli.

¹ Arup, [Route Environmental and Social Sensitivity Mapping \(RESSM\) - Corridor Vc Part 3 Mostar South–Tunnel | RESSM Report – Final](#), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 11 December 2024.

² Independent Project Accountability Mechanism, [Corridor Vc in FBH - Part 3 - Compliance Review Final Report](#), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 11 January 2024.

Impacts on water resources

Residents are concerned about the project's potential impact on local water sources. To address these concerns, Bankwatch has lent its support to the development of a study examining the impact of the motorway's construction on the springs.

Preliminary data indicate that there are approximately 50 individual groundwater structures – such as wells and boreholes – that residents rely on for drinking, agriculture, and bathing. These sources provide high-quality water. In addition, over 300 pools within the broader area surrounding Kosor, Malo Polje, Hodbina, and other settlements near the planned route are used by residents, often for commercial purposes. These pools are a significant source of income and tourism potential for both the local population and the Herzegovina–Neretva canton.

However, the route's environmental and social sensitivity mapping report, despite highlighting a significant risk of groundwater contamination during construction, identifies just seven springs located in the settlements of Kosor and Malo Polje, while the official environmental and social impact assessment mentions just two springs. Clearly, the abundance of sources was not fully considered during the project planning process.

Loss of land and livelihoods

Many residents south of Mostar have serious concerns about losing their land, which they view as far more than just property – they see it as their home, livelihood, and heritage. The mapping report implies that the area under consideration is mostly abandoned, and contends that that homes in the areas are primarily weekend residences or owned by members of the diaspora. However, our observations reveal a different reality: in recent years, there has been significant growth in development and local investments in these settlements.

There is also a significant disparity in how the national law treats landowners directly along the route, all of whom face expropriation, compared to those living just a few metres or even hundreds of metres away. This difference should not be exploited to mislead residents. According to EU standards and EIB policies all affected individuals – not just those whose land is taken, but also those whose homes, livelihoods, and well-being are impacted – have recognised rights that must be upheld.

Prenj tunnel

Both the EBRD and the EIB are considering financing the construction of the 10-kilometre Prenj tunnel and its associated sections. Regrettably, the same shortcomings in public consultation that beset the route south of Mostar have also been repeated on the Konjic–Prenj tunnel. Prior to the approval of a project-level spatial plan in 2017, the route through Mount Prenj was altered without any public consultation. Subsequently, in 2023, during public consultations on the federal government's environmental impact

assessment, participants were informed that the route had already been decided and was therefore not subject to further discussion.

These developments stand in stark contrast to the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism's move, in late 2024, to begin the process of designating Mount Prenj a protected area. In their report, experts tasked with assessing the proposed area highlight the mountain's exceptionally diverse ecosystem, identifying between 12 and 15 per cent of endemic plant species and 24 distinct habitat types – features that support its potential status as a national park, with certain zones qualifying as nature reserves.³

The planned alignment threatens the Bijela valley, nominated as an Emerald site, and overlaps with the protected area of Zlatar. The environmental impact assessment does not properly evaluate the potential impacts on these locations, nor does it recognise Mount Prenj as a potential Natura 2000 site. Additionally, the assessment contains a section which purports to be an 'appropriate assessment' as required under the EU Habitats Directive and the EIB's Environmental and Social Policy. However, it fails to fulfil the function of an appropriate assessment and requires urgent revision.

Local environmental groups, such as Zeleni Neretva, have expressed concerns about the insufficient hydrological assessment of underground water flows, which undermines informed decision-making. Further, at a 2023 professional conference on the Corridor Vc tunnel construction organised by JP Autoceste and Bosnia and Herzegovina's association of engineers and geotechnicians, experts concluded that the Prenj tunnel remains a significant unknown. The geotechnical and hydrological risks, particularly regarding water inflows during excavation, present the greatest challenges.⁴

State property and legal issues

The management of state property in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a highly sensitive political issue, complicated by poor communication between different levels of government. However, one point is clear: the disposal of state property is prohibited under the High Representative's 2005 decision, pending the adoption of the state property law, as well as through a series of rulings by the constitutional court.

Recently, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina refused to grant permission for the use of two plots of land totalling 400 square metres along the Mostar South–Kvanj Tunnel subsection – one located near Ortiješ Airport and the other at an armed forces barracks.⁵ They cited these areas as strategic military locations. The High Representative's decision explicitly prohibits any disposal or transfer of such property.

³ Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, [Generacijski projekt: Prezentacija o zaštiti Prenja i razvoju turizma](#), Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 25 September 2025.

⁴ BIHAMK Magazin, [Stručni skup: Tunel Prenj je velika nepoznanica](#), BIHAMK Magazin, 20 March 2023.

⁵ Bljesak.info, [Koridor 5C koče dva sporna zemljišta kod Mostara](#), Bljesak.info, 18 September 2025.

Paradoxically, the director of JP Autoceste recently revealed that they are now searching for an alternative solution for this subsection, having failed to receive support from the Presidency.⁶ If JP Autoceste are determined to find an alternative routing around the airport, surely they can also find an alternative routing that is properly consulted with the local population and with minimum impacts on biodiversity.

Legal procedures and developments related to Corridor Vc are ongoing. In February 2025, a complaint was filed with the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee over unlawful spatial plan changes for the Mostar South–Tunnel Kvanj route. In April, the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism was requested to clarify the status of the updated environmental impact assessment for the Tarčin–Konjic–Ivan section, which had not been published as required by law.

The Federal Ministry of Spatial Planning later confirmed that no construction or urban permits had been issued for the Tarčin–Konjic–Ovčari–Prenj Tunnel–Mostar North section. In August, the attorney general’s office confirmed the renewal of proceedings regarding unlawful decisions made by the City of Mostar on state-owned land, while a separate complaint was submitted to the Bern Convention Committee concerning the environmental and social impacts of the motorway.

Recommendations for the EIB

- Insist on ensuring a revision of the route south of Mostar.
- Require a robust appropriate assessment process for the Prenj tunnel.
- Ensure meaningful, inclusive, and non-discriminatory public participation in line with the EIB’s Environmental and Social Standards.

⁶ Federalna.ba, [Firma koja me prijavila nije bila na tenderu, povezana je s bivšim rukovodstvom](#), *Federalna.ba*, 9 October 2025.