

Good practice example of transboundary environmental impact assessment for the extension of Karavanke tunel project between Slovenia and Austria

Vesna Kolar Planinšič, Msc.

Espoo Focal point, Dunajska 48, Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Republic of Slovenia, 1000 Ljubljana, vesna.kolar.planinsic@gov.si

A transboundary impact assessment was carried out for a national spatial plan and a project for the extension of a long distance motorway A 2, in existence since 1991. The extension was needed because of the traffic development and safety problems in the tunnel of Karavanke between Austria and Slovenia.

The extension of a long distance motorway represents an activity under Appendix I of the Espoo Convention (item 7 “Construction of motorways and express roads”.) The strategic environmental assessment and the environmental assessment were carried out and in each of their phases the transboundary cooperation was active between the Austrian and Slovenian authorities. The cooperation via the focal points for administrative matters under the Espoo Convention was established at the beginning of the processes.

Slovenia sent a notification and Austria promptly confirmed its participation and cooperation within the transboundary procedure. Consultations were organised between the ministries and organisations on both sides of the border within a two month period, as well as public consultation on both sides of the borders within one month. Comments and observations were to Slovenia for it to take them into account in its final decision in line with article 6 of Espoo Convention.

The possible impacts on underground water were addressed in detail and interdisciplinary teams were organised in both countries, which consisted of experts for planning, assessments, water, geology, hydrology and monitoring. The geological structure of Karavanke Alps presented an important challenge and all the knowledgeable scientists were involved in the cooperation to properly address the related impact, mitigation measures and monitoring. At the end of the SEA process, the SEA acceptability decision was sent to Austria, but during the project phase and EIA process, additional technical consultations were needed to improve the monitoring and to make it equal on both sides of the borders. There was a need to take into account the hydrological situation and common researches done on underground water of Karavanke in a very detailed manner. Specifically, there were some important concession agreements in Austria.

Draft proposal for a monitoring programme was sent to Austria and following the discussion in technical consultation between experts, monitoring was improved in frequency, timing and regarding the chemical parameters. On such agreement a reasoned EIA conclusion was drafted and sent to Austria. After both sides agreed on the reasoned EIA conclusion, the final decision was accepted.

The transboundary SEA/EIA in such case shows that good cooperation between focal points is needed to manage the process and to find the solution. Development of interdisciplinary teams on both sides of the borders helps to address the critical points in detail and represent an important step in the technical consultation phase. Agreement on each step was essential as well as agreement on monitoring programme during the building phase in EIA.

The case shows that transboundary consultation could improve the quality and helps in establishing good cooperation between the authorities and experts.

Keywords: *Espoo Convention, Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Water, Monitoring*