

Press bulletin: Environmental impacts oil pipeline through Georgia

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More measures needed to protect Borjomi area along Georgian oil pipeline

In the Borjomi area at the Kodiana pass and in the Sakire area the risks of geohazards (especially risks of landslides) can be further reduced by improving drainage and re-evaluation of the slope stability. In case of capacity extension a new environmental report has to be made in which re-routing of the pipeline becomes a serious option. These are the main findings of the Dutch Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment asked by the Georgian Government (NCEIA) to assess the compliance of the project with the conditions for the environmental license.

Currently the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline through Georgia is under construction by a consortium led by British petroleum (BP). It is intended to transport 1 million barrels of crude oil per day from Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean coast. It runs through the sensitive Borjomi area, an area with high natural and recreational values, and known for the origin of the Borjomi mineral water. In 2002 the Government of Georgia conditionally issued the environmental license for this project. The NCEIA was asked to review the current compliance with the environmental license including the risks of geohazards (landslides and earthquakes) on specific spots along the pipeline, the oil spill response plan and the government capacity for reviewing the monitoring program.

The Government of Georgia and BP have agreed that the risk of oil spills in the Borjomi area should have a risk as close to zero as possible. A zero risk on oil spills is impossible. In the Borjomi area additional measures already have been applied to reduce the risk of oil spills. However at the Kodiana pass and in the Sakire area there is still a significant risk of geohazards that could have a significant impact on the integrity of the oil pipeline. The risks of oil spills should be further reduced by implementation of additional mitigating measures, such as constant monitoring of hazardous circumstances for landslides and drainage of the soil above spots susceptible for landslides.

It is expected that the capacity of the oil pipeline will be increased after a couple of years. The present capacity is likely to be doubled to 2 million barrels per day. In the conditions of the environmental permit no reference is made to the capacity of the oil pipeline and the amount of oil to be transported. For any extension of the present capacity of 1 million barrels per day a new Environmental Impact Assessment report and a new environmental permit will be required. In that case re-routing of the pipeline for

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the most sensitive areas, e.g. to avoid the Borjomi area becomes a serious option that could be considered and assessed.

Furthermore the NCEIA concludes that the envisaged compensation rate for loss of biodiversity (1:1.5) does not comply with current 'best practise standard' (1:5). Additionally improvement of existing qualities of the Borjomi National Park is to be preferred above development of new nature areas.

The program for social compensation and the implementation of the Community Investment Program (CIP) are yet inadequate mainly because of lack of good communication with affected people in the villages. The NCEIA recommends continuation of the community investment program during the operational phase of the pipeline and the establishment of a independent appeal mechanism to assess complaints.

Note

The complete text of this advisory report can be found on the website of the Commission (www.eia.nl).

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