Tbilisi Railway Bypass Project

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According to the EU-Georgia ENP Action Plan regarding the railway transport sector the following measures should be implemented:

• Improve efficiency of freight transport services (including issues of border crossing procedures). Promote multi-modal services, address issues of interoperability;

• Complete Restructuring of the railway sector;
Main Objectives of NIF

On another hand the Neighborhood Investment Facility (NIF), an innovative instrument of the ENP, is supporting those projects that are:

- Supporting the priorities of the ENP action plans or related thematic policy priorities;

- Establishing better energy and transport infrastructure interconnections between the EU and neighboring countries and among the neighboring countries themselves;
The Main aim of the project:

- Improvement efficiency and safety of rail operations within the city of Tbilisi;
- Promotion of urban development of the central part of the city.

The project assumes:

- Construction of a new section of railway track on high embankments (18-20 metres) through densely populated Avchala district bypassing the central part of Tbilisi and near the Tbilisi reservoir (900 metres);
- Splitting railway systems in two parts;
- Abolishing the central railway station and upgrading the two existing stations of Didube and Navtlughi;
Total cost of the project is over **EUR 350 million**;

Funding sources:

- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) - EUR 100 million;
  - In April 13, 2010 European Investment Bank (EIB) also approved EUR 100 million but in September Georgian railway company refused the loan;

- Issued obligations of Georgian Railway Company – over EUR 250 million;

- Neighborhood Investment Facility (NIF) grant – EUR 8.5 million
  - To assess historical pollution (Depots etc.) and create clean up plan in the freed territories after abolishing the Central Station (74 hectares) before their future utilization.
Main concerns of the project

- Need for the project;
- Social impact;
- The drinking water pollution;
- The waste management;
Need for the project

While the project will support the improvement of safety within the Tbilisi it does not describe problems that will be caused by dividing the passenger railway in two parts;

After abolishing the direct linkage (Central Station) from Didube to Navtlughi stations, people will have to use different means of transport to get to Central Station for trading or other purposes, thus increasing significantly their transport expenses that was not studied by the project.
Social Impact

Another concern of the project relates to:

- Construction of the new railway through the densely populated Avchala district, which fully undermines the idea of the project (Ensuring increased safety of Tbilisi population).

- Non existence of compensation measures for the population living along the proposed high embankments (18-20 metres height) in Avchala district;

- The leakage of hazardous goods such as oil carried by the trains and brake fluid, which will also negatively impact living conditions in the area.
Drinking water Pollution

The projected railway route runs near the Tbilisi reservoir (Minimum of 900 metres Away), one of the major drinking water suppliers for Tbilisi.

Due to the underground streams running towards the reservoir, in case of spillage of even half a tank it could spoil approximately 50% of the volume of the Tbilisi reservoir leaving 25% of Tbilisi population without drinking water and around 20,000 hectares of agricultural arable Land without irrigation.

Unfortunately safeguard measures are not properly done in the final ESIA in order to protect reservoir in case of accident.
While the project sponsor commits to adhere to EU directives and use the guidance of best international practice, a detailed waste management plan is not available in the final ESIA.

In addition clean up the freed territories in Tbilisi before their future utilization the project will be financed additionally from the EU Neighborhood Investment Facility (NIF) in order to assess historical pollution (Depots etc.);

But still it is not clear how the clean up plans will be implemented (including financial aspects), particularly how will be treated hazardous, construction and other types of waste collected from the cleaned up area.
Conclusion

To sum up abovementioned facts it is clear that:

- Tbilisi Railway Bypass Project is not fits in priorities identified by the EU/Georgia ENP Action Plan, thus the Railway project does not fit in NIFs objectives either;

- The assessment and clean up plans of freed territories financed by the NIF grant has to be integral part of the ESIA, thus by the NIF grant tries to correct one of the serious weaknesses of the project that is unacceptable practice.
Thank you for your attention

Any questions?

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