

COMMENTS

on the Regional Master Plan for the Development and Management of the Watersupply and Sewerage Sector in Stara Zagora Region, published in Dec. 2013 in connection with the implementation of project

ENHANCING CAPACITY TO MOBILIZE CIVIL SOCIETY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

implemented by Earth Forever Foundation and funded by Swiss Development Cooperation, Thematic Fund "Reform Fund Linked to Civil Society Participation"

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SWISS-BULGARIAN COOPERATION PROGRAMME
ШВЕЙЦАРСКО-БЪЛГАРСКА ПРОГРАМА ЗА СЪТРУДНИЧЕСТВО



Earth Forever

ENHANCING CAPACITY TO MOBILIZE CIVIL SOCIETY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

The period of the implementation of the project Enhancing capacity to mobilize civil society in rural communities for sustainable water and sanitation services implemented by Earth Forever Foundation, funded by Swiss Development Cooperation, Thematic Fund “Reform Fund Linked to Civil Society Participation” coincides with the development and the beginning of implementation of a number of strategic documents for Bulgarian water sector. The series of regional master plans for the development and management of the water sector in Bulgaria suggest short-term (2014-2020), mid-term (2021-2027) and long-term (after 2028) vision for the sector that is meant to support the implementation of the new Strategy for Management and Development of the Waternsupply and Sewerage Sector in the Republic of Bulgaria (2012).

Egis Infrastructure Bulgaria was contracted by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of Bulgaria to develop the Regional Master Plan for the Development and Management of Waternsupply and Sewerage Sector of the Stara Zagora Region. This product is a result of the collaboration among the Government of Bulgaria, World Bank and European Commission. The implementation of the Plan has started since the beginning of 2014. It is based on the current status and immediate challenges faced by the waternsupply and sewerage operator – Waternsupply and Sewerage Company, Stara Zagora, as well as the local and national governments, to identify the specific needs and necessary steps to implement successfully the EU Directives for drinking water quality and urban waste water.

The Regional Master Plan for Waternsupply and Sewerage of the region served by the Waternsupply and Sewerage Company, Stara Zagora, is a leading strategic document identifying the framework for the development of the sector during the next 25 years. The Plan is to be followed by feasibility studies, application forms, technical projects and construction works.

The Regional Master Plan identifies the needs and determines the priority of investments for rehabilitation of the waternsupply network and construction of new sewerage networks and wastewater treatment plants. In this way, Bulgaria will meet the requirements of EU legislation in waternsupply, wastewater and environment. The news measures, policies and investments are planned to raise the credibility and to improve the quality of drinking water supply for the population; to support the capacity building of the local governments.

As the title of this strategic documents identifies, the decision-makers at highest level accept only one of the technologies for collection, transportation and treatment of wastewater – the conventional centralized sewerage system with a conventional wastewater treatment plant. Though the Strategy shyly mentions the experience of other countries in the implementation of other technologies, incl. decentralized sanitation systems, the regional master plans prescribe everywhere and always the construction of a conventional centralized sewerage systems of mixed type (for both residential and storm water) finalized with anventional wastewater treatment plants. The Master plans mention in e very flimsy way the possibility for the construction of modular wastewater treatment plants but again only such consisting of moduls that copy the technology only of the conventional wastewater treatment plants. In this way, the established framework is extremely restrictive and condemns the sector to offer services at extremely high price – for sure socially unacceptable for a large portion of Bulgarian population. This situation will only increase the

existing problem of decreased rate of collection of the fees for waternsupply and sanitation services and will add other groups of the population additional to the dominated by the Roma minority neighbourhoods. The operational expenses of the settlements with less than 10000 PE, and especially these under 2000 PE, will become unbearable even for the richest among the households as the same conventional infrastructure is always plans for these everywhere. The usual case for settlements under 10000 PE is to prescribe a pumping station for raw wastewater and transportation of such waters tens of kilometers away to the closest conventional wastewater treatment plant built or planned to be built close by a larger agglomeration. This approach is also applied to agglomerations under 700 PE in which a central sewerage system had already been built.

The EU Directive of urban wastewater has been translated in a similar way and everywhere „collecting system“ has been identified only with “sewerage”.

All these mislead the decision-makers at all levels that the EU standards for collection, transportation and treatment of wastewater would only be met with the application of conventional centralized sewerage and conventional treatment system.

This approach understandably goes hand in hand with active lobbying for more and more funding for the implementation of the Directive: starting from 2.5 billion EUR of preliminary accessment planned within the cohesion agreements going to 52 billion accepted recently by the government as the necessary amount.

The contract for Accession of Bulgaria and Romania in EU - 21.06.2005, defines the terms of agreement for the acceptance of the country and transposing the EU aqui communauterre into the national legislation.

As it was expected, the most difficult legislative document in water sector proved to be Directive 91/271/EEC for urban wastewater. It is dealing with collection, transportation and treatment of wastewater in agglomerations larger than 2000 PE (population equivalent). In the context of the Directive, “agglomeration” defines as an area where the population and/or economic activities are sufficiently concentrated for urban waste water to be collected and conducted to an urban waste water treatment plant or to a final discharge point; and “population equivalent”(PE) as the organic biodegradable load having a five-day biochemical oxygen demand (BOD5) of 60 g of oxygen per day.