

INTEGRITY PACTS EU'S IMPACT CASE 09

BULGARIA - CONSTRUCTION OF THE ZHELEZNITSA TUNNEL

BOOSTING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

CONTRACTING PROJECT INFORMATION

Country	Bulgaria
Project	Construction of the Zheleznitsa tunnel (BG)
Project description	Design and construction of a 2 km tunnel along Struma motorway (part of lot 3.1), near the village of Zheleznitsa in Bulgaria.
IP signature date	16/10/2017
Contracting authority	Road Infrastructure Agency (RIA)
Managing authority	Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications
Monitoring organisation	Transparency International Bulgaria
Procedures monitored	3
Contracts awarded	3
Current stage	Implementation
Impact categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Promote better value for money (2) Enhance transparency and accountability (3) Foster project timeliness (4) Increase access and participation of citizens (5) Encourage competition and fairness (6) Support institutional changes

IMPACT CASE

The ongoing construction and modernisation of the Struma Motorway in Bulgaria is an important piece of the connectivity puzzle – for the country as well as the EU. The road carries the heaviest volume of traffic of any route crossing Bulgaria in the north-south direction and provides citizens with easy access to the large cities in the country's western part. The project has considerable strategic importance for the region, with the motorway providing an access to the Aegean Sea through Bulgaria.

The Road Infrastructure Agency (RIA) is managing this complex project and has divided the construction into different lots. One of them (lot 3.1) foresees a construction of a two-kilometre tunnel, passing between the municipalities of Blagoevgrad and Simitli, named after the closest village – Zheleznitsa.

Transparency International Bulgaria monitored the corresponding public contracting procedure, divided into three different contracts. Despite the multiple delays during its planning, tendering, and awarding stages, it is currently under construction and is expected to be completed in 2022.

To boost citizens' engagement, TI Bulgaria **designed and launched an online reporting tool** called [Tunnel.report](#). They aimed to **collect all feedback relevant to the implementation of the project from citizens**, especially the affected communities living nearby. Using the tool, people can share various observations, including reports about potential breaches to the contract, and submit questions. They can also upload images and geo-references, as well as report anonymously. TI Bulgaria has promoted it through different channels, including social media and a billboard.

While the reports received so far have not indicated any breaches of the contract or other wrongdoing, the tool has successfully channelled citizens' doubts and concerns regarding the project to the RIA. For instance, one citizen asked about how the village of Zheleznitsa would be connected to the new highway. Another one was interested in safe passages for the local fauna and the measures to protect the different species in the area. A couple of reports expressed concerns about safety measures because of rains and landslides observed in the construction sites.

Through TI Bulgaria's tool, citizens found a channel to reach out to RIA, share their doubts and concerns, and receive answers to their questions. In all cases, the monitor collected input from RIA – either written or verbal – and published online a response to each question received.

Thanks to the Integrity Pact implemented on the Zheleznitsa tunnel project in Bulgaria, the contracting authority boosted citizen engagement and answered local population's burning questions. In doing so, they **enhanced transparency and accountability of the project**, as well as **increased access and participation of citizens**.

This impact case was developed in the framework of the project [Integrity Pacts – Civil Control Mechanism for Safeguarding EU Funds](#), Phase 2 funded by the European Commission. It brought together government agencies, civil society and the private sector in 11 EU countries, to ensure that 18 public contracts were designed, awarded and implemented to the highest possible standards of transparency and accountability. **Last case update:** 21 July 2021.