



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY
Administrative Capacity Building and Programme Implementation II
The Director

Brussels
REGIO/E.3/TB/gfk/(2023)1412568

Subject: Wastewater Drainage and Treatment of the Ljubljana Aquifer Area

Ref.: Ares(2023)379173

Dear Mr Bernard,

Thank you for your letter dated 18 January 2023 to the Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms and the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries. This letter notifies the European Commission of the request you have addressed previously to the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, now the Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. The Commissioners have asked me to reply on their behalf.

Your request to the Ministry is related to the Ljubljana Wastewater Collection and Treatment project, co-funded by EU Cohesion Policy, and the issue of the so-called connecting channel C0 and the *Ljubljansko polje* aquifer area. Let me mention in this context that EU law does not regulate the positioning of sewage networks; the national authorities of the Member States must observe their own national laws in this area. It should be noted that the project is foreseen to substantially improve the current status of the environment, as an extension and upgrading of the system of discharges of urban wastewater will be carried out in three municipalities. This can considerably help in reducing the pollution of both the surface water and groundwater compared to their current status. As a result, it will improve the quality of the aquifer used for the abstraction of drinking water in the first place.

As you may recall, in its detailed reply of January 2019, the European Commission Directorate General for the Environment (ENV) highlighted that the Ljubljana Wastewater Collection and Treatment project is key for ensuring compliance with Slovenia's obligations under Directive 91/271/EEC concerning urban wastewater treatment. There is currently an open infringement procedure against Slovenia (pending before the Court of Justice of the EU) due to the lack of compliance with this Directive,

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which concerns, among others, the agglomeration of Ljubljana. Hence, the project at stake aims to ensure that Slovenia catches up on the collection and treatment of wastewater, and complies with the EU legislation on wastewater collection and treatment. It is worth noting in this context that there is no provision in Directive 91/271/EEC which prohibits the construction of sewage networks above aquifers.

The European Commission is aware of the concerns raised in relation to the environmental impact of the connecting channel. As you will remember, the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia held the view that a renewed environmental consent (to be issued by the Slovenian Environmental Agency) is needed for the connecting channel, whereas the City Municipality of Ljubljana took the opposite view and asked the Administrative Court of Slovenia to hand down a judgement on the matter. The decision of the national court is still pending.

Please rest assured that the European Commission is closely following the implementation of this important project and that we will rely on the national authorities in Slovenia to ensure the compliance with relevant EU and national legislation.

Yours faithfully,

(e-signed)

Sofia Alves