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1. INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian Authority (PA) intends to construct a port in the Gaza Strip to support economic development of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The initiative is rooted in longly felt needs of the Palestinian people as expressed in the 'Declaration of Principles' (DOP). The DOP, that was signed on 13 September 1994, foresees establishment of a Gaza sea port Authority (Article VII DOP).

The Government of the Netherlands recognizes the need for establishment of a sea port. It warrants funding of the port for 40 million Netherlands guilders if additional funding is assured by the PA. Netherlands funding will be provided via the ORET^{1]} Programme of the Netherlands Government.

The PA is the competent authority in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank. The PA decides on matters concerning the sea port. The Netherlands government is the competent authority with regard to agreement on the ORET funding of the Gaza sea port.

Port construction is an activity that, according to OECD standards (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and international loan agreement conditions, requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Objective of the EIA in support of Gaza sea port is to provide both competent authorities with relevant information on the environmental effects of the activity so that well-informed decisions can be made.

A working group of the Commission (for its composition see annex 3), visited Gaza and Israel from 10 to 17 February 1995 to collect the information for formulation of a project and site specific advice for Terms of Reference for the EIS. The advice for Terms of Reference was submitted 1 March 1995.

In the advice the Commission suggested to simultaneously formulate the EIS and execute the studies for the detailed design of the port. According to the Commission this would result in the situation that basic and essential information for decision-making, to be collected in the context of the design studies, would also be available for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Moreover, the EIS would be more focused on the realities of construction, design alternatives could directly be checked for their environmental consequences and expertise of the writers of the EIS could be used to develop these alternatives. A further advantage would be that time could be gained by simultaneous action.

In July 1995 the Minister for Development Cooperation facilitated the detailed design studies. The EIS for the Gaza port was published 1 April 1996.

By letter dated 1 April 1996 (appendix 1) the Minister for Development Cooperation requested the Netherlands Commission for EIA to advise on review of the EIS. The working group that formulated this advice for review is identical to the working group that advised on Terms of Reference.

In this advice the Commission considers location IVa of the Basic Design Study as the selected location for port construction.

1 Ontwikkelings Relevante Export Transacties: export transactions relevant for development.

2. JUDGEMENT ON THE QUALITY AND ADEQUACY OF THE EIS

The Commission is impressed by the quantity, the quality and the relevance of the information contained in the EIS. The Commission is convinced that the team which prepared the EIS could hardly have done better, particularly taking into account the difficult and adverse circumstances under which the information had to be collected.

In table 10.1, the EIS comes to the conclusion that on a number of essential points information was not available due to delays in the execution of the design studies. The Commission agrees with the EIS that very important information in a number of fields relating to environmental impacts is lacking.

Accordingly, the Commission has the opinion that additional information must be provided. Special attention must be paid to local hydrogeology, borrow areas and conditions of the sea floor. This information will come from the detailed design studies and shall be the basis for further environmental impact assessment.

! Local hydrogeology:

Due to dredging of the port basins and the approach channel it is possible that kurkar^{2]} layers or other impermeable layers, preventing sea water to intrude in the coastal aquifer under the Gaza strip, are perforated. Whether or not this will happen must be determined from borings which have to be executed for the final design of the port. Additional borings must indicate to what extent the aquifer will be affected and, if necessary, which mitigating measures must be foreseen to prevent damage to the aquifer.

! Borrow areas

Exact quantities of sand needed for fill and construction purposes, gravel and rock are not known. It is clear that considerable quantities will be needed. At the same time identification of borrow areas has not yet taken place. To allow assessment of environmental impacts at the borrow sites it is very important to know their exact location. Environmental impacts of borrowing, borrow methods and transport of borrowed materials can be considerable.

! Conditions of the sea floor

Geotechnic properties and the suitability of the sediments as fill material will be determined in the framework of the detailed design.

Provided that the above mentioned additional information will be made available in due time, the Commission recommends to proceed with further decision making. The Commission offers to review this additional information when it is available.

3. FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

In this paragraph the Commission presents observations on shortcomings of the EIS which are not essential for decision-making on funding of the project. Information on these points should become available for the Palestinian Authorities during construction of the port. If required, the Commission can assist in reviewing of this information.

Port and port facilities

2 Calcareous sandstone

- ! The EIS states that there must be no limits to land reclamation for further port development on either sides of the port. According to the Commission land reclamation must be limited to the extent that is needed for phase 3 of port development as described in the EIS.
- ! The presence of a passengers terminal was not foreseen in the basic engineering study. It should be noted that if this facility is included in the proposed activity, its safety aspects should be addressed.
- ! No information is given on facilities for reception, treatment and disposal of various types of liquid waste from ships calling at the port.
- ! In the EIS no description has been given of conveyance systems for sewage of the port. In general no detailed information is given on solid and liquid waste handling and disposal.
- ! No description is given of equipment to control oil spills in phase 3.

Construction

- ! No information is given on the source from which water will be available for the construction of the port. The quantities of water needed are not specified but will be considerable.
- ! The possible establishment, the location, operation and effects of a concrete plant have not been addressed.
- ! Environmental effects of transport have not been described in the EIS. If construction materials will be delivered over land, this will have temporary but considerable impacts on the environment.
- ! Observations in the EIS on resettlement concern the first phase of port construction only. In the third phase the resettlement may well concern about 1000 individuals.
- ! According to page 57 of the EIS dredging for construction will take 8 -12 months, according to page 58 it will take 12 – 18 months.
- ! In phase 1A a port area of 260 hectares will be developed on land. From the EIS it does not become clear whether archaeological research and rescue operations are included in project activities in this phase.
- ! Although in general terms the nature of goods to be transshipped is known, no risk assessment has been included in the EIS.

Dredging

- ! No information is given on impacts of maintenance dredging, particularly on the ratio fine/coarse fraction and the expected pollution load of the fine fraction.
- ! Dumping sites for dredged material both in the construction and operational phase have not been identified. Site specific impacts of dumping and methods and impacts of dumping of potentially polluted material have not been assessed.

Natural values

- ! According to information in the EIS the Wadi Gaza will be declared protected area. Formalisation of this intention might have consequences with respect to the significance of the impact from project implementation on this area.
- ! Information on marine flora and fauna has not been given in sufficient detail in the EIS. Detailed information is in particular required regarding the possible presence of vulnerable ecosystems (e.g. sea grass beds) in the dredging areas. Detailed information allows a proper assessment of the impact which may arise from project implementation.

Scores on criteria

In the comparison of the alternatives, alternatives are compared to the no action alternative including the autonomous development. For a number of criteria, however, the Commission thinks that the autonomous development might well be more negative or as negative as one of the alternatives. The Commission does not understand how the scores were determined.

E.g. the autonomous development could possibly imply further encroachment of the port area by tourist industry or other enterprises. This must be valued negative from an aesthetic point of view if compared with the existing situation. From the viewpoint of archaeology, planned port development including identification and safeguarding of archaeological remains must be valued less negative than encroachment, possibly destroying these remains.