

Alekperov, Bulgarian Leader Talk

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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SOFIA — LUKoil will speed up installing full metering at its Bulgarian 142,000-barrel-per-day refinery to ensure its operations, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borisov said Friday.

The refiner's failure to install product metering required to enable officials to monitor production on time in line with tax regulations has sparked a tax dispute that led to its temporary closure last week.

The refinery has started to increase its processing of crude oil after customs officials removed their seals from the installation, it said Tuesday.

The anti-monopoly office has also launched probes into LUKoil's Bulgarian units over possible abuse of its dominant market position.

The moves against Bulgaria's only refinery, a key fuel provider and taxpayer, may boost the government's support ahead of Bulgarian presidential polls in October and signals growing tensions between the European Union country and Russia on the energy front.

Bulgaria has been dragging its feet on talks for building a new nuclear power plant, Belene, and has been blocking a trans-oil pipeline that would pump Russian crude to the Mediterranean.

"This is an unnerving game linked to the future of Belene and the future of Bulgaria's probing for shale gas, which can end its dependence on Russian gas," said Ivan Hinovski, a Sofia-based energy expert.

The refinery spat could still escalate later this month with authorities seeking court rulings, but Borisov indicated that the problems are likely to be overcome.

He said LUKoil's chief executive Vagit Alekperov has assured him that the full metering structure will be in place by December, a month earlier than previous estimates, in a telephone call Wednesday.

"Alekperov apologized for the problems they have caused us, and said they will be ready with the metering by December at the latest," Borisov told national Nova TV channel.

Alekperov also pledged that LUKoil will continue with its investment in the refinery at the Black Sea port of Burgas, Borisov said.

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