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Putin Promises to Keep an Eye on Gazprom Situation in EU

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Monday that Moscow was paying close attention to recent European raids on Gazprom subsidiaries that have been linked to concern in Brussels over the continent's dependence on supplies of Siberian natural gas.

Putin ordered the gas export monopoly to cooperate with European authorities, who ordered searches of units in Central and Eastern Europe last week as part of an investigation of firms involved in the supply, transmission and storage of natural gas.

"The government of Russia will follow what is going on around Gazprom in the most attentive way," Putin told Gazprom chief executive Alexei Miller in a meeting at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow.

Ahead of the opening of Russia's 55 billion cubic meter capacity Nord Stream pipeline this week and with plans to build a massive pipeline through southern Europe, Moscow wants to keep a firm grip on one of the world's biggest gas markets.

With plans from Germany and other EU states to phase out nuclear power, Europe is likely to be more dependent than ever on its gas supplies.

Miller, who called the raids an "unpleasant surprise," said Gazprom was ready to defend its rights according to law.

The European Union's executive commission has said the raids are linked to suspicions over anti-competitive practices, and sources on both sides said they were linked to EU efforts to reduce reliance on Russian gas, which makes up about a quarter of Europe's supplies.

"You must cooperate with the authorities of the countries where you work, and it is necessary to be open and help the agencies that are carrying out the checks and supply them with objective and full information," Putin said.

Putin told Miller that he wanted to be kept up to date on the situation with Europe.

Nord Stream, which will pump gas into Germany, and the planned South Stream pipeline that is planned to be laid on the bed of the Black Sea have raised fears in Europe over Russia's increasing stake in the continent's gas supplies.

Russian gas exports to Europe had grown 25 bcm in the first nine months of the year, Miller said.

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