

EU Calls On Bulgaria to Halt Gazprom's South Stream Pipeline Construction

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Construction of the Bulgarian branch of the South Stream pipeline getting under way.

BRUSSELS — The European Commission has asked the Bulgarian government to suspend work on Gazprom's South Stream gas pipeline pending a decision on whether it conforms with EU law, a Commission spokeswoman said Tuesday.

The Commission, the EU's executive arm, says South Stream does not comply with its rules that prohibit gas suppliers from also controlling pipeline access, and it put the approval process on hold following Russia's annexation of Crimea in March.

Bulgaria, however, has decided to start construction of South Stream as a national priority. The country is heavily dependent on Russian gas and wants to shore up its gas supplies, while Russia wants South Stream as a route that would bypass Ukraine for shipping gas to western Europe.

"Whilst discussions with the Bulgarian authorities are taking place and until there is full compliance with EU law, we have also asked the Bulgarian authorities to suspend the project," Commission spokeswoman Chantal Hughes said.

She also said the Commission had sent the Bulgarian authorities a letter of formal notice asking for information, a preliminary step that could eventually lead to full infringement proceedings and possible fines.

The Bulgarian government has a month to reply.

While Russia seeks alternative routes for its gas exports, which provide roughly one third of EU gas needs, the European Union is looking for other ways to improve its security of supply.

The Commission published a strategy paper last week, which member states will debate later this month.

The paper underlined that any new infrastructure must comply with EU rules on a single energy market, including the so-called Third Energy Package, which prevents the companies, such as Gazprom, which supply gas, from also owning the infrastructure through which it is distributed.

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