

Bulgaria Convinced South Stream Pipeline Plan Will Go Ahead

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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An engineer welding a section of the South Stream pipeline in Bulgaria.

SOFIA — Bulgaria has not given up plans to build the South Stream pipeline delivering Russian natural gas to Europe and sees the Gazprom-led project as irreversible, Bulgarian Energy Minister Dragomir Stoynev said Monday.

Bulgaria said Sunday it had halted work on the pipeline after the European Union and U.S. expressed concerns about the project.

Designed to bypass Ukraine, the pipeline has inflamed tensions between the EU and Russia after Brussels asked Sofia last week to suspend work pending a decision on whether it complies with EU law.

Stoynev said in a statement he was certain South Stream would be built once disputes over how to structure it as a European project are cleared.

"If we look at the situation strategically and without emotions, the South Stream project looks irreversible and important for both Europe and Bulgaria," Stoynev, who is on a visit to China, said.

"I am convinced that all pending issues will find a solution."

In response to Bulgaria halting work, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted by RIA Novosti news agency on Monday as saying: "We need to check, it is too early to say anything."

Washington has also warned Sofia that picking a consortium led by sanction-hit Stroitanogaz to build the Bulgarian section of the pipeline could result in sanctions on Bulgarian companies involved.

South Stream is being built to pipe 63 billion cubic meters of gas per year from Russia, beneath the Black Sea, and through Bulgaria into central and southern Europe.

Bulgaria's Stoynev, a staunch supporter of the project, says it will boost the country's energy security and economy.

"We really are actively working to close the open issues with the European Commission, meaning that we have not abandoned the project," Stoynev said.

State-controlled Gazprom is pushing ahead with the project, expected to cost around \$45 billion, despite Western sanctions against Moscow over the Ukraine crisis.

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