

South Stream Construction Timelines On Track, Lavrov Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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SOFIA — All construction timelines for the South Stream pipeline are on track and the European Union should restart talks about the project, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on a visit to Bulgaria on Monday.

The proposed pipeline to bring Russian gas under the Black Sea to Europe will make landfall in Bulgaria. It has put Bulgaria, which relies almost entirely on Russia for its energy supplies, at the center of the row between Moscow and the West.

Bulgaria's Socialist government, which will step down within weeks, strongly backed the pipeline but reluctantly suspended construction amid threats of punishment from Brussels, which is concerned the project does not comply with EU rules.

"We are appealing to the European Commission to resume contact and we hope that the talks

can be successful," Lavrov told a news conference via an interpreter.

"We are convinced that if there is goodwill, every problem can be solved," he said. "We are counting on the talks with the European Commission to be unfrozen."

Lavrov also called for an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine and expressed concerns about the growing number of civilian deaths and the destruction of infrastructure in the country.

Bulgaria has sought to allay the EU's concerns about South Stream. Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski said in a statement during Lavrov's visit that Bulgaria was optimistic the EU would accept its arguments that South Stream was above board.

Moscow has accused the EU of putting pressure on some of its partners in the \$40 billion project, intended to carry Russian gas to Central Europe via the Black Sea, bypassing Ukraine and reducing the country's importance as a transit route.

Dozens demonstrated in front of the Bulgarian presidency on Monday, demanding an end to Bulgaria's energy dependency on Russia. Another group, led by the nationalist Attack party, chanted in support of the South Stream pipeline.

A third group, waving Ukrainian national flags and posters reading "Putin murderer," demanded the release of a Ukrainian film director, who was arrested on accusations of plotting bomb attacks in Crimea in May.

Bulgaria, which has historically been close to Russia, gets almost all its natural gas from Russia's Gazprom, its aging nuclear reactors run on Russian nuclear fuel and its only oil refinery is controlled by Russia's LUKoil.

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