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U.S. Says 18 Western Companies Have Pulled Out of Nord Stream 2

Biden pledges more cooperative approach with Germany over controversial Gazprom pipeline.

By AFP

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Jens Büttner / dpa / TASS

The United States said Monday it had seen progress from European companies moving out of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia to Germany, but critics urged stronger action.

In a report required by Congress, the State Department named 18 mostly Western companies that would not be subject to sanctions, the State Department and lawmakers said.

The companies made "good-faith efforts to wind down activities related to Nord Stream 2," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"This demonstrates that the legislative goals and our actions are having a good effect," he

said of bipartisan U.S. opposition to the project dating back to former president Donald Trump's time.

He publicly named just one firm that would be subject to U.S. sanctions — Russian tuna company KVT-Rus, which he said had been engaged in piping activities for Nord Stream 2.

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Biden has maintained criticism of Nord Stream 2, saying that it emboldens Russia and weakens leverage of vulnerable nations such as Ukraine.

But the Biden administration has also pledged a more cooperative approach with European powers including Germany, which argues that the project is vital for its supply of energy despite concerns on Russia.

"When it comes to our allies and partners, it is fair to say that they would not be taken by surprise by any action we would take," Price said.

"We will continue to monitor activity that could lead to additional penalties including sanctions, but I think it would be wrong to think of sanctions as the only tool in our toolbox here."

In an op-ed published in Politico, Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau and his Ukranian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba warned that Russia was "dangerously close" to completing Nord Stream 2.

If it succeeds, Ukrainians will be convinced that the West did not care about their security, they wrote.

"We call on U.S. President Joe Biden to use all means at his disposal to prevent the project from completion," they wrote.

Related article: Explainer: What is Nord Stream 2 and Why Might Navalny's Poisoning Stop Its Completion?

Lawmakers of Trump's Republican Party in turn accused Biden of reneging on his pledges to get tougher on Russia.

"This report is a gift to the Russians and their ongoing efforts to undermine European energy security, destabilize Ukraine and facilitate corruption and malign influence throughout Europe," said Senator Jim Risch, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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