
Iran, Switzerland sign natural gas deal

RIA Novosti - 17/3/2008

Iran signed a natural gas export contract with a Swiss energy group on Monday, the Iranian foreign minister said.

The 25-year gas deal between the National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC) and Switzerland's Elektrizitaetsgesellschaft Laufenburg (EGL) was finalized in September last year. Under the deal, Iran has to deliver 5.5 billion cubic meters of gas per year to Europe via a pipeline scheduled to be complete in 2010.

"Today, we have witnessed the signing of an important gas agreement between companies of the two countries," Manouchehr Mottaki said at a joint news conference with his Swiss counterpart Micheline Calmy-Rey, who is currently on a visit to Iran.

The Swiss minister said the bilateral deal did not violate United Nations sanctions imposed on Iran over its controversial nuclear program and served only to secure uninterrupted energy supplies to her country.

"We have a strategic interest to secure our gas supplies and diversify our gas suppliers," Calmy-Rey said.

She also said the current deal may reduce Europe's dependency on energy supplies from Russia.

"We are decreasing our dependence, and the dependence of Europe, on Russian gas," she said.

Russia's energy giant Gazprom announced last week that the average price for natural gas for Europe in 2008 could reach \$400 per 1,000 cubic meters, 13% more than previously expected.

'Bern does not need US permission'

press tv - 18/3/2008

Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey says her country does not need Washington's permission to advance its strategic interests.

"Switzerland is an independent country that has its own strategic interests to defend," Calmy-Rey said after the signing of a multibillion-dollar gas deal.

She shrugged off US criticism of her trip to Iran, in which she met the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The Swiss minister added that the Alpine republic, which excessively attempted to bring the deal to fruition, considers the agreement with Tehran a success for both diplomacy and business.

Her remarks comes a day after the US embassy in Bern warned Switzerland against a 25-year natural gas contract between Swiss energy trading company EGL and state-owned National Iranian Gas Export Company.
