
New pipeline projects to boost Europe's energy security - Putin

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MOSCOW, December 18 (RIA Novosti) - Projects to build an oil pipeline across the Balkans and a natural gas pipeline under the Black Sea will boost Europe's energy security, the Russian president said on Tuesday.

Vladimir Putin, speaking after a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis in the Kremlin, said building the South Stream gas pipeline and the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline "will not only bring tangible economic dividends, but will improve energy security on the European continent."

Karamanlis arrived in Moscow on December 17 on a two-day visit for talks focusing on energy cooperation. The Russian leader said the sides had discussed a wide range of bilateral measures to expand trade and economic cooperation.

"We believe that we should concentrate our efforts on advancing major bilateral and multilateral agreements, including the construction of the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline and the South Stream gas pipeline," he said.

Russia, Bulgaria, and Greece signed a memorandum on the oil pipeline in April 2005. Once completed, the pipeline will pump 35 million metric tons of oil a year (257.25 million bbl), a volume that could eventually be increased to 50 million metric tons (367.5 million bbl).

The South Stream natural gas pipeline is set to cover over 900 km (560 miles) under the Black Sea from Russia to Bulgaria and supply 30 billion cu m of gas annually to the European Union. Possible routes for the land section, which will pass through Greece, are still being discussed.

Speaking after the talks, the Greek prime minister praised energy cooperation with Russia.

"Our cooperation is advancing rapidly, in particular the procedures linked to the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline - a project that will contribute to Europe's energy security and turn our country into an important energy transit corridor. We also discussed natural gas cooperation and the South Stream project," Karamanlis said.

Putin said that during the Greek premier's visit, Russia, Bulgaria and Greece have signed a tripartite protocol on establishing an international project company for the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline.

"This document is the penultimate step toward practical implementation of this project."

Putin said that during discussions with Karamanlis, the sides had expressed similar approaches to many international issues.

"During our meeting, we discussed a wide range of European and international problems. Our approaches towards solving many of these issues coincide. These issues include first and foremost the situation in the Balkans, in particular

the Kosovo problem, and also the settlement of the Cyprus problem, and the development of Russia-EU and Russia-NATO partnerships," Putin said.

The Greek premier said: "bilateral relations in all spheres are developing very dynamically and have transformed into strategic partnership based on common historical and cultural values."

Karamanlis also said Greece was ready to share its experience with Russia in hosting Olympic Games, and proposed to announce a Year of Russia in Greece and Year of Greece in Russia before the 2014 Winter Olympics, which are to be held in the Russian Black Sea resort city of Sochi.
