
Gazprom voices concern over South Stream Serb section delay

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MOSCOW, April 23 (RIA Novosti) - Russian energy giant Gazprom [RTS: GAZP] is concerned over delays in the ratification of the South Stream gas pipeline agreement by Serbia, a Gazprom official said on Wednesday.

Russia and Serbia signed an agreement on January 25 as part of the South Stream project to construct a pipeline for the transit of Russian natural gas through Serbia to the Balkans and onto other European countries. The Serb section of the South Stream pipeline will be 400 km (250 mile) long.

"There is some concern over this delay but we hope that the agreement will be ratified as early as possible," Alexander Medvedev, deputy chairman of the Gazprom management committee said.

The Tanjug news agency reported early in April that Serbia's caretaker government had failed to ratify the January gas deal with Russia. Pro-Western ministers blocked a bid by nationalists to launch the ratification process for the key energy deal, stating that parliament and the government did not have the legal authority to undertake strategic agreements.

Only six out of 22 ministers voted in favor of the deal, while others refused to discuss it until after early parliamentary elections due on May 11.

In March, pro-Western President Boris Tadic dismissed parliament and urged new elections after former-nationalist premier Vojislav Kostunica refused to govern alongside Tadic's Democratic Party over disagreements on EU integration.

The South Stream pipeline is expected to pump 30 billion cubic meters of Central Asian gas to Europe per year. Serbia and Hungary joined the project, already involving Italy and Bulgaria, earlier this year. Greece announced plans to join South stream last summer.
