
RUSSIA AND TURKEY REVIVE EU PIPELINE PLAN

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Russia and Turkey have revived plans to build a gas pipeline to the EU, but EU-Russia ties continue to deteriorate over Syria and Ukraine.

The meeting, at an Ottoman-era villa, marked another step in the improvement of relations after Turkey shot down a Russian jet on its border with Syria last year.

I have full confidence that the normalisation of Turkish-Russian ties will continue at a fast pace," Erdogan told press after the meeting.

"Our relations will [improve] in many fields, be it in the defence industry, political, economic, trade, tourism or culture. We will make up for lost time in the coming days, he said.

Putin, who also attended an energy congress with Erdogan the same day, said: We are currently working hard on the Nord Stream 2 project * we had detailed talks with our Turkish partners and president Erdogan and reached agreement on implementing the Turkish Stream project.

The Turkish Stream pipeline is to ship 30 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas a year under the Black Sea to Turkey and onward to Greece by 2019.

The Nord Stream 2 plan is to ship 55 bcm of gas a year under the Baltic Sea to Germany in a similar timeframe.

The EU currently consumes 530 bcm per year, 160 bcm of which is imported from Russia.

Sensitive subject

The Russian and Turkish leaders also discussed the war in Syria.

Recent Russian airstrikes have helped Syrian forces to advance on a rebel enclave in the city of Aleppo, amid reports of mass-scale civilian casualties described as potential war crimes by France and by the US.

Erdogan, who opposes the Syrian regime, described the Syria talks as very sensitive, but both he and Putin said they had agreed on the need to get humanitarian aid into the combat zone.

The Russia-Turkey rapprochement stands in contrast to worsening EU-Russia ties.

Putin is due to visit France on 19 October to inaugurate a Russian orthodox church in Paris and to meet president Francois Hollande.

His aides said on Monday that he would also visit Berlin the same day to discuss the war in Ukraine.

The visits are to coincide with an EU summit in Brussels in which EU leaders will discuss whether to extend the life of economic sanctions on Russia, imposed two years ago over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Turkish Stream and Nord Stream 2 pipeline deals have caused divisions in the EU.

Eastern European EU states have said they would harm Ukraine, which transits Russian gas to Europe, and would help Russia to bully former Communist and Soviet nations by making it easier to cut their supplies.

The European Commission has said they would likely fall foul of EU competition law and are not needed in terms of gas demand.

But Russias actions in Ukraine and in Syria are much greater obstacles to better ties.

Hollande snub?

Reacting to Russias bombardment of Aleppo, Hollande told the TMC broadcaster in an interview aired on Sunday that he might snub Putin in Paris.

"These are people who today are the victims of war crimes. Those that commit these acts will have to face up to their responsibility, including in the ICC," he said, referring to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

"If I do receive him [Putin], I will tell him that it is unacceptable, Hollande added.

France had earlier indicated that it might be willing to relax the Ukraine-linked Russia sanctions.

But most other EU states, led by Germany, have taken a hard line on Moscow because it has continued to flout a Ukraine ceasefire accord agreed last year.

Donald Tusk, the EU Council head, told an event hosted by the German newspaper Passauer Neue Presse on Monday: It's obvious for me today, the only way is to prolong the sanctions against Russia ... Otherwise it will be a clear capitulation.

With Russias recently moving nuclear-capable Iskander missiles within range of Berlin and Warsaw, Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato chief, also told the event: We don't want to increase our presence [in eastern Europe], but we'll continue to send a signal that our troops can be reinforced if needed.

Kaynak/Source: