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## **SOUTH STREAM PROJECT WILL BE CARRIED OUT, RUSSIAN OFFICIAL SAYS**

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The abandoned South Stream gas pipeline project designed to pump Russian gas into Central Europe via Bulgaria "will probably be carried out," Russia's commercial attaché to Bulgaria has said.

At a Russian-Bulgarian business forum in Bulgaria, Igor Ilinkin has recalled that South Stream's alternative project, Turkish Stream, will only consist of two pipes.

South Stream, on the other hand, was designed to have four pipes, news website Dnevnik.bg quotes him as saying.

He has cited Russian President Vladimir Putin, who last year announced Moscow would demand "iron-clad guarantees" if the project were to be revived.

Ilinkin has announced Russian investors are interested in the Port of Varna as it has been recently operating at a profit, "due to the fact it has business contacts and projects with Russia. This does not only concern the type of cargo, but also the South Stream pipes stored at the port."

Ilinkin has also made a reference to the Balkan Gas Hub, whose feasibility study is to be ready by the end of the year or the beginning of 2018. So far Russia has shown its skepticism about the project launched by the previous government.

Some of the South Stream pipes were taken away from the country, but others remained at the port after Russia ditched the project in December 2014, citing EU opposition to the project.

Pointing a finger at Bulgaria, Russian President Vladimir Putin then accused it of succumbing to pressure from Brussels and blocking the issuance of construction permits for the area of the pipeline within its exclusive economic zone.

Putin blamed Bulgaria again during a visit to Hungary earlier in February.

South Stream was to carry 63 billion cubic meters of gas per year to Austria and Hungary via Bulgaria and Serbia, its landfall designed to be in the Black Sea city of Varna.

Initially, its substitute Turkish Stream was designed to have the same annual capacity, but it was cut in half during talks between Moscow and Ankara.

Earlier, another Russian official had argued a "pipeline to Varna" might be built after all.

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