Russia resumes Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, defying U.S. sanctions

Construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, near the Baltic Sea port of Baltiysk, Kaliningrad. (Photo: Reuters)

Moscow, December 13 (RHC)-- Russia has restarted construction of the politically-delicate Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany, laying pipes after a one-year interruption driven by U.S. sanctions, the pipeline operator said.

“The pipelay vessel Fortuna will lay a 2.6 km section of the pipeline in the German Exclusive Economic Zone in water depths of less than 30 m (100ft),” Nord Stream 2 announced in a statement from Moscow. Swiss-Dutch company Allseas halted the laying of pipes in December 2019 after Washington threatened to sanction the firm, forcing Russia to use its own resources to build the 1,230-kilometre pipeline, which is designed to double the 55 billion cubic meter annual gas capacity of the existing Nord Stream pipeline.

The two pipelines, which bypass Ukraine, will have the capacity to pump more than half of Russia’s total gas exports to Europe. Disputes between Moscow and Kiev over gas supplies led to the interruption of Russian gas flows to Europe in the past decades.

The pipeline, which the U.S. claims compromises European energy security, has turned into a flashpoint in relations between Moscow and the West that have seriously declined to post-Cold War lows with the Kremlin dismissing the US sanctions as “unfair competition.”

The consortium -- led by Russian gas giant Gazprom -- has yet to lay more than 100 kilometres of pipeline, though more than 90 percent of the project has reportedly been completed. It further added that all construction activities would be carried out in full compliance with existing permits and it would provide information about further offshore construction works in due course.

Gazprom’s western partners in the project -- estimated to cost $11.5 billion -- are Germany’s Uniper, BASF’s Wintershall Dea , Anglo-Dutch oil major Shell, Austria’s OMV and Engie. Meanwhile, the maritime authority in the German city of Stralsund has notified shippers in the Baltic Sea area where Nord Stream 2 will make landfall that there will be pipeline-laying activities from December 5 through 31.

The development came a week after US lawmakers agreed to extend sanctions on companies involved in the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline even though Russia’s Gazprom had already announced plans to resume the construction efforts last Saturday.

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