

Bulgaria hopes to attract Russian, Caspian gas for its gas hub

Wants joint Sofia/Moscow/Brussels meeting to attract Russian gas

Plans to offer up to 50 percent stake in the hub to investors

Bulgaria plans a feasibility study next year for a 1.5 billion euros, \$1.67 bnatural gas hub at the Black Sea port of Varna that would store and transport gas from Russia and the Caspian Sea to southeastern and central Europe.

Bulgaria's plans for the hub follow the cancellation of Gazprom's South Stream gas pipeline project that would have shipped Russian gas under the Black Sea via Bulgaria to central Europe. The scrapping of South Stream was a blow to Bulgaria, which relies almost exclusively on Russian gas.

In creating the hub, Bulgaria would use gas pipeline links it is already building with neighbouring Greece, Serbia, Romania and Turkey, and eventually also an undersea pipeline from Russia.

The aim is to attract foreign investors for the hub and construction would start in 2021.

Bulgaria's Prime Minister Boiko Borisov on Monday urged Brussels to take part in a meeting with Russia to help to get the project moving.

Sofia hopes that Moscow can still be persuaded to build a pipeline under the Black Sea to Bulgaria and ship its supplies to central Europe through the hub, dubbed "Balkan".

"We will not allow Bulgaria to be bypassed," Borisov told an investor roundtable for the hub. "That is why you owe it to us now and look to Bulgaria and help do the work quickly," he said.

Gazprom said earlier on Monday it planned to push ahead with plans to build the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, the project that replaced South Stream, which can further be extended to Turkish-Greek border.

Sofia hopes to take a final investment decision for the hub in 2020 and will offer investors up to a 50 percent stake in the venture, Georgi Gegov, head of gas network operator Bulgartransgaz, said.

source: mobile.reuters.com