

Russian energy giant Gazprom has tabled a new option to revive the South Stream pipeline, local media report.

Alternative routes are being studied for South Stream and Nord Stream II which would possibly use private funding, instead of counting on EU support, Vesti Finance quotes Andrey Konoplyanik, adviser to the head of Gazprom Export, as saying.

The new pipeline could possibly start from the Crimean peninsula, which Russia incorporated in March 2014. The previous version was to begin from Anapa, with an estimated length of the underwater section measuring 781. Crimea is closer to the Bulgarian Black Sea, and the project would be cheaper.

Additionally, a revived South Stream would not use the route to Central Europe through Serbia and Hungary as initially planned, but go through Greece and then offshore to Italy. "Russia is in its right to look for gas export routes that pose the smallest risk to the fulfilling of contracts," Konoplyanik reportedly told the audience at a Central European gas forum in Bratislava.

South Stream, a gas pipeline project that was to bring 63 billion cubic meters of gas annually into Europe via Bulgaria and Serbia, was abandoned in December 2014, with Russian President Vladimir Putin blaming the European Commission for pressuring Bulgaria. The latter had refused to issue building permits for the pipe's offshore action, days before construction was to begin, as the EU Commission and Russia were at odds over the non-compliance of South Stream with liberalization rules.

A possible setback for the "Crimean" option of South Stream is that Bulgaria does not recognize the peninsula as part of Russia and calls for the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The announcement comes after Gazprom signed in March a memorandum of Understanding with Greek DEPA and Italian Edison SpA, which allowed for gas deliveries to Italy via Greece and "third countries". The latter expression could practically mean only Bulgaria in the context of Russian-Turkish tensions over a downed fighter-bomber.

Separately, several weeks ago it was revealed Austrian company Strabag was working on a tunnel beneath the port of Anapa where pipes would be laid. Speculation grew that Russia might be seeking to both provide Crimea with gas and make South Stream shorter and, as a consequence, cheaper as the economy is going through hard times.

source: iene.eu