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Lawmakers urge Biden administration to update Congress on sanctions against Russian gas pipeline

Opponents of the pipeline in Congress are increasingly impatient with the administration to enforce sanctions on the Russia-to-Germany natural gas pipeline.



— Workers at the construction site of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, near the town of Kingisepp in the Leningrad region of Russia, on June 5, 2019. Anton Vaganov / Reuters file

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By Dan De Luce

A bipartisan group of lawmakers is asking the Biden administration to provide an update on when it intends to enforce sanctions against a controversial Russian natural gas pipeline in

Europe after officials missed a deadline to inform Congress about their plans.

In a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, two Republicans and two Democrats requested that the State Department brief Congress about how it is approaching the Russia-to-Germany gas pipeline, known as Nord Stream 2.

The letter signals impatience on Capitol Hill with the administration over the pipeline amid [reports](#) that companies have resumed work on the project in apparent breach of the U.S. sanctions.

Under legislation adopted in January over former President Donald Trump's veto, the administration was required to report to Congress by Tuesday about which companies involved in the pipeline project should be subject to sanctions. But Congress did not receive the mandatory report.

The letter, signed by Reps. Michael McCaul of Texas, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee, [Adam Kinzinger](#), R-Ill., Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, and Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., asks the administration to explain the status of the report.

When asked about the pending report to Congress, the State Department said it does not discuss its communications with Congress.

Washington and Berlin have been at loggerheads over the pipeline for years. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has insisted that it is a purely commercial matter that should not be subject to geopolitics or tied to human rights concerns.

Nord Stream 2 would double the shipments of Russian natural gas to Germany, providing German industry with inexpensive energy as the country moves from coal and nuclear energy to renewable sources.

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But opponents of the pipeline, including U.S. lawmakers from both parties, as well as governments in Central and Eastern Europe, say the pipeline would leave Europe beholden to Russian energy supplies and economic pressure from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"If completed, Nord Stream 2 would enable the Putin regime to further weaponize Russia's energy resources to exert political pressure throughout Europe," the lawmakers wrote.

Germany has rejected criticism of the project and appealed to successive U.S. administrations to hold off on enforcing sanctions.

German media, citing leaked documents published by an environmental nonprofit, [reported](#) recently that the German government last year offered massive funding for the import of liquefied natural gas from the U.S. in return for Washington's allowing the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The Trump administration ultimately did not support the offer.

The proposal was reported to have been made by German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz to former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, according to the documents posted by Environmental Action Germany.

In an apparent reference to Germany, the U.S. lawmakers in their letter also asked the administration for information about "any proposals offered to the Biden Administration on the future of the pipeline that aim to persuade the Administration to forego or weaken the mandatory sanctions, which have bipartisan support in Congress."

The lawmakers said they "stand at the ready to work with you to counter Russian malign influence, including by ensuring Nord Stream 2 is never completed as intended by the Congressionally mandated sanctions aimed at stopping the pipeline."

Dan De Luce



Dan De Luce is a reporter for the NBC News Investigative Unit.



Gallego, McCaul, Kaptur, Kinzinger Request Information on Nord Stream 2 Sanctions

February 17, 2021 | Press Release

Washington, DC – Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) joined House Foreign Affairs Lead Republican Michael McCaul, Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) and Congressmen Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken to request a briefing on the Biden Administration's implementation plan for mandatory sanctions on the malign Russian Nord Stream 2 pipeline project.

"If completed, Nord Stream 2 would enable the Putin regime to further weaponize Russia's energy resources to exert political pressure throughout Europe. It would also allow Putin to bypass Ukraine, depriving Kyiv of critical transit revenues and making it more vulnerable to Russian aggression," the lawmakers wrote. "We stand at the ready to work with you to counter Russian malign influence, including by ensuring the Nord Stream 2 is never completed as intended by the Congressionally mandated sanctions aimed at stopping the pipeline."

Full text of the letter can be found here (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A_house.us12.list-2Dmanage.com_track_click-3Fu-3De585eec970e20145fb02e3825-26id-3Ddccc5cb3c-26e-3D85f3fdb8de&d=DwMFaQ&c=L93KkKsAC98uTvC4KvQDdTDRzAeWDDRmG6S3YXIIH0&r=x814dyD8DJEnxfzMWUo3sLGO_qMd982ZF2MTE1BXnJA&m=A6mhy_zmlrkfeNxveul8UsRwhuMq6h9azftnc&s=h9xRaDq_xpTdP7QwOt44j6WKQJg2Y0uHys36ykNOd4&e=) and below.

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to you to request information on the Biden Administration's implementation plans for the Nord Stream 2 sanctions required under the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act (PEESA), as amended by the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Clarification Act (PEESCA).

As you know, PEESCA became law with bipartisan support through the enactment of the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on January 1, 2021. The updated law clarified the mandatory sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project to include vessels engaged in pipelaying activities, companies that provide support services or facilities for those vessels, and those that provide insurance, reinsurance or pipeline testing, inspection, or certification services. The law also requires consultations with allies on these sanctions.

In light of these requirements, we write to request a briefing from the State Department on the Biden Administration's efforts to implement PEESCA. The briefing should include, but may not be limited to, details on the following points:

- The status of the Nord Stream 2 project, specifically after reports that work on the pipeline resumed on February 7, 2021;
- The status of the next mandatory report, which was due to Congress on February 16th, on entities engaging in sanctionable activity related to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. In particular, we are interested in your assessment of possible sanctionable activity of the list of vessels (provided below our signatures and obtained from open-source maritime vessel tracking data) that are believed to have been engaged in pipelaying or pipelaying activities since the enactment of the FY21 NDAA;
- Information on which companies have complied with the 30-day wind down period for sanctionable activity outlined in the law;
- The status of ongoing consultations with allies, including with Denmark over how the Nord Stream 2 consortium is meeting the obligations of Danish permits to lay pipe in their waters; and
- Any proposals offered to the Biden Administration on the future of the pipeline that aim to persuade the Administration to forego or weaken the mandatory sanctions, which have bipartisan support in Congress.

If completed, Nord Stream 2 would enable the Putin regime to further weaponize Russia's energy resources to exert political pressure throughout Europe. It would also allow Putin to bypass Ukraine, depriving Kyiv of critical transit revenues and making it more vulnerable to Russian aggression. Therefore, we agree with President Biden's assessment that Nord Stream 2 is a "bad deal for Europe," and with your comments at your confirmation hearing that the United States was "determined to do whatever we can to prevent" the completion of the project.

The majority of Europe also opposes the Kremlin-backed pipeline, particularly in light of the poisoning and wrongful arrest of leading Russian anti-corruption activist and opposition figure Alexey Navalny. On at least three separate occasions, the European Parliament has overwhelmingly passed resolutions calling for the immediate cancellation of the Kremlin-backed Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. We stand at the ready to work with you to counter Russian malign influence, including by ensuring Nord Stream 2 is never completed as intended by the Congressionally mandated sanctions aimed at stopping the pipeline.

We look forward to your swift reply.

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