

## **Bulgaria to Back Hungarian Energy Diversification Initiative, Nabucco Project**

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Sofia - Bulgaria will support the Hungarian initiative NETS for linking the national gas networks of several countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria and, possibly in future, Serbia, in order to secure supplies of natural gas from Azerbaijan under the so-called project "mini Nabucco", Deputy Economy and Energy Minister Yavor Kouyoumdjiev [Kuyumdzhev] told journalists on Tuesday [ 16 September] after meeting with Abel Garamhegyi, state secretary at the Hungarian National Development and Economy Ministry, who has been on a visit to Bulgaria since Monday.

Kouyoumdjiev said mini Nabucco is already working and natural gas is supplied to Europe from Azerbaijan via the Turkish network. Greece is already receiving natural gas from Azerbaijan, and Bulgaria needs some 100 km of pipeline to connect to the Greek network, another 15 km to connect to Romania and some 60 km to connect to Serbia. If an investor is found, the building of this section will take no more than two or three years, Kouyoumdjiev said.

He recalled that Economy and Energy Minister Peter [Petur] Dimitrov last year signed a memorandum for the supply of 1 million cubic metres of natural gas annually from Azerbaijan. After building the link to Greece, Bulgaria will be able to receive this amount of natural gas even before the Nabucco pipeline is built. With the Hungarian initiative NETS, the countries will also receive access to natural gas from the North Sea, Kouyoumdjiev said.

The project does not supersede Nabucco and the other energy projects as Europe will need large amounts of natural gas by 2050, he said. Bulgaria and Hungary have reached agreement on the need to increase pressure on Brussels for prompt signature of an intergovernmental agreement on the pipeline. Six countries are taking part in the project. Turkey has reservations regarding the multilateral agreement, because the country does not want to be a transit country in the project, but a trader who buys from Azerbaijan, Iran, and Iraq and sells to the rest of the countries in the project, Kouyoumdjiev said.

The deputy minister noted that in the early spring of 2009 Bulgaria will host a high-level conference involving the Central Asian countries, the United States and Russia. The idea of the forum, which will proceed under the auspices of President Georgi Purvanov, is to look for opportunities to provide natural gas for Nabucco.

Both Nabucco and South Stream are important for Bulgaria and Hungary, the deputy minister said.

Citing information from the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, Kouyoumdjiev said the country has not lost interest in taking part in the Bourgas [Burgas]-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline project, as was reported by the media a few days ago. Kazakhstan remains willing to share in the project, Kouyoumdjiev said.

The Bulgarian and Hungarian Economy Ministries signed an agreement on cooperation in energy, the environment and investment. A declaration of intent was also signed between the two ministries and the Plovdiv Fair. According to the declaration, 2009 will be Year of Hungary within the Fair.

According to the Bulgarian Economy Ministry, in the first six months of this year Bulgarian exports to Hungary amounted to 60 million euro, and imports from Hungary to Bulgaria stood at 288 million euro.

**Source: BBC Monitoring European**