

Turkish Prime Minister Blackmails European Union

BRUSSELS. January 19, 2009: Turkey will review its support for the Nabucco gas pipeline to Europe if the energy portion of its EU accession talks remains blocked, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday in a rare visit to Brussels, Reuters reports. The Turkish prime minister also raised doubts about the economic viability of the project, which is seen as one of Europe's best hopes for limiting its dependence on Russian gas. The European Union has stepped up efforts to diversify its energy sources since Russia's invasion of Georgia last summer and amid a dispute between Moscow and Kiev that has curtailed supplies across Ukraine to Europe.

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The EU is backing the Nabucco pipeline, which is expected to have the potential to carry 30 billion cubic meters (bcm) of Caspian or Middle Eastern gas annually to an Austrian hub via Turkey.

"If we are faced with a situation where the energy chapter is blocked, we would of course review our position," Erdogan told a conference in Brussels when asked if his country would block the project if energy talks with the EU were not opened.

Diplomats say Cyprus has been blocking the opening of talks in the energy area because of a row with Turkey on gas exploration at sea. Energy is one of the 35 areas, or so-called chapters, in Turkey's accession talks.

Erdogan questioned whether there was enough gas available in order to justify the Nabucco project, which enters Europe via Turkey.

"The information is that the countries that say that they will provide sufficient amounts of natural gas do not have enough natural gas to provide," he said.

"In the Nabucco project there needs to 30 billion cubic metres of natural gas flowing, but it's not there."

Analysts say only 3 bcm has been sourced for the pipeline, compared to a bare minimum of 15 bcm needed to get it started.

Iran remains a potential source of gas for Nabucco, and Erdogan criticized those countries that oppose taking Iranian gas for political reasons.

Erdogan's comments on Turkish accession to the EU come after Cypriot Foreign Minister Markos Kyprianou told Reuters in an interview last month his country would not agree to let talks on energy start until an oil exploration dispute was resolved.

Cyprus has accused Turkey of harassing hydrocarbon research vessels four times since Nov. 13. Turkey has said the ships, on two known occasions, encroached on its continental shelf.

Cyprus's Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities have lived apart since a Turkish invasion in 1974 triggered by a brief Greek-inspired coup. Greek Cypriots represent Cyprus in the EU and have the power to veto the enlargement talks.

Turkey has said Cyprus' oil exploration could upset reunification efforts because natural resources should belong to all residents of the island -- Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Turan).