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**Trump approves sanctions against Russia-Europe gas pipeline**

21/12/2019



The US sanctions were included in the 2020 military spending bill that Trump signed on Friday at a ceremony on Joint Base Andrews, an air force installation outside Washington, DC.

The sanctions, which are opposed by the European Union, target companies building the nearly \$11 billion Nord Stream 2 pipeline under the Baltic Sea with the aim of doubling deliveries of Russian natural gas to Germany, Europe's largest economy.

US lawmakers claim the pipeline would vastly increase Russian President Vladimir Putin's influence in Europe and enrich Russia's government at a time of heightened tensions with Moscow.

Both chambers of Congress overwhelmingly approved the sanctions, with the Senate voting on Tuesday and sending the measure to Trump for him to sign into law.

Trump, who has been accused by Democratic opponents of being soft on Putin, had little choice but to give his approval.

The sanctions were inserted into a much wider \$738 billion annual Pentagon spending bill and, given the level of congressional support, a veto would likely have been overturned.

The US measures have angered Moscow and the European Union, which says it should be able to decide its own energy policies.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas discussed the issue during a phone call Friday with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who expressed “strong opposition” to the project, US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said.

The German-Russian Chamber of Commerce said last week that the pipeline was important for energy security and urged retaliatory sanctions against the US if the bill is approved.

The US sanctions target pipe-laying vessels for Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream, a Russia-Turkey pipeline, and include asset freezes and revocation of US visas for the contractors.

One major contractor that is targeted is Swiss-based Allseas, which has been hired by Russia’s state-owned energy giant Gazprom to build the offshore section.

US Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican from Texas, said that halting Nord Stream 2 should be a major security priority for the United States and Europe alike.

However, Senator Rand Paul, another Republican from Kentucky, voted against the bill, objecting to its bid to “sanction NATO allies and potentially American energy companies.”

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