



RUSSIA

EU Parliament Set To Demand Halt To Nord Stream 2 Over Navalny Arrest

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By RFE/RL

European lawmakers are expected to pass a resolution on January 21 calling on the European Union to halt construction on the nearly complete Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which would carry Russian natural gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea.

Members of the European Parliament **are calling** for expanded sanctions against Russia over the weekend arrest of opposition figure Aleksei Navalny upon his return to Moscow after being treated in Germany for poisoning with a nerve agent over the summer.

Navalny was remanded in custody for 30 days on January 18 in a summary hearing held in a Moscow police station. The court claimed he violated probation requirements in a previous criminal case that is widely considered trumped up and politically motivated.

Russia has rebuffed the global outrage and chorus of international calls calling for Navalny's release. He faces up to 3 1/2 years in prison.

The nonbinding resolution calls for EU sanctions already imposed on Russian officials responsible for his poisoning to be expanded to include those involved in the Kremlin critic's imprisonment.

Sanctions should also include "Russian oligarchs," President Vladimir Putin's "inner circle," and "media propagandists," so that the EU makes clear it will "no longer be a welcoming place for Russian wealth of unclear origin," European lawmakers demand.

EU member states must "review cooperation with Russia in various foreign policy platforms and on projects such as Nord Stream 2, the completion of which the EU must stop immediately," the resolution states.

The resolution has wide support from the European Parliament's factions, including the conservative European People's Party (EPP), the liberal ALDE group, Greens, and Social Democrats.

Manfred Weber, the leader of the EPP faction and close ally of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, told **Der Spiegel Online** that after the nerveagent attack and arrest of Navalny, energy issues must be put on the table.

"This is the most powerful instrument we have. And the Nord Stream 2 project is therefore one of the ways to generate further pressure," he said ahead of the vote. "Simply appealing to Russia is not enough."

Any additional sanctions on Russia would need unanimous consent from all 27 EU member states.

EU foreign ministers are expected to discuss the issue next week, but any concrete decisions are likely to wait until the completion of Navalny's judicial proceedings.

There is mounting pressure on the German government at home and abroad to halt Nord Stream 2, which is designed to double capacity of the existing undersea Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany.

The U.S. government and several EU members want to prevent the pipeline from being completed, saying it will strengthen Russia's energy hold on Europe and undercut Ukraine's role as a transit country for Russian gas.

On January 19, the United States sanctioned a Russian pipe-laying vessel in its latest bid to stop completion of pipeline, which is 94 percent completed.

Despite the growing criticism, the German Economy Ministry said on January 20 its plans for the project were "unchanged."

With reporting by Der Spiegel
