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Second Russian vessel begins Nord Stream 2 pipelaying in Danish waters: developer

Author [Stuart Elliott](#) 
Editor [Allsdair Bowles](#) 
Commodity [Natural Gas](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

Akademik Cherskiy now laying line alongside Fortuna

Pipelaying using Fortuna vessel resumed Feb 6

Work in German waters could restart from June

A second Russian vessel has now begun laying the almost-complete Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in Danish waters, the pipeline development company said April 27, in a move likely to accelerate the final work on the Russia-Germany link.

The Akademik Cherskiy -- which has dynamic positioning capabilities allowing for speedier pipelaying -- has joined the Fortuna pipelayer carrying out work south of the Danish island of Bornholm in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

"After successful sea trials, the pipelay vessel Akademik Cherskiy has started pipelay works in the Danish EEZ today," the Nord Stream 2 developer said in emailed comments April 27.

"The pipelay barge Fortuna is continuing pipelay works," it said.

The Fortuna, which uses anchors in pipelaying meaning a slower rate of work, resumed operations in Danish waters on Feb. 6.

The Akademik Cherskiy departed from the port of Wismar in Germany on March 4 and spent almost four weeks offshore Kaliningrad before carrying out sea trials in Danish waters.

It had long been considered as a likely candidate to lay some of the remaining pipeline and arrived into the German port of Wismar on Jan. 24, according to S&P Global Platts trade flow software cFlow.

Wismar was also the last port of call for the Fortuna before it resumed pipelaying work in Danish waters in February.

Nord Stream 2 has submitted the relevant notification to the Danish Maritime Authority (DMA) to use the Akademik Cherskiy for pipelaying offshore Denmark.

According to a DMA notice to seafarers, work is being carried out by the Fortuna and Akademik Cherskiy, assisted by the construction vessels Baltiyskiy Issledovatel and Murman.

The notice is valid until September 2021.

Summer completion?

The Fortuna has been working at a slower rate than the Pioneering Spirit, which laid much of Nord Stream 2 before its owner, Switzerland's Allseas, halted work in December 2019 due to the threat of US sanctions.

However, with the Akademik Cherskiy joining the effort, pipelaying is likely to be completed much more quickly.

On April 15, Pavel Zavalny, head of the Russian State Duma's energy committee, said he was confident that Nord Stream 2 would be completed in time to begin flowing gas by the end of this summer.

"Everything leads to the fact that we should complete all works no later than summer," Zavalny said at a meeting with German parliamentarians.

Zavalny said he hoped both lines would be laid "no later than June."

"We very much hope that by the end of the summer all the work on the construction and adjustment of the gas supply will be completed, and that by the end of the summer, there is a hope that Germany can receive the first gas via this pipeline," he said.

As of March 31, a total of 2,339 km of the 2,460 km two-string pipeline had been laid. Approximately 121 km remained to be laid -- 93 km in Danish waters and 28 km in German waters.

German waters

At present, a permit to allow for pipelaying in German waters is suspended after an environmentalist group lodged an appeal against the construction permit with a court in Hamburg.

Environmentalist group Deutsche Umwelthilfe (DUH) argued that the Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency (BSH) did not adequately consider environmental factors when it awarded in January the permit to

resume work to lay the pipeline offshore Germany in the period up to May.

A first appeal against the permit was rejected by the BSH on April 1, but DUH lodged a new case on April 13 with the Hamburg court.

However, the BSH told Platts that the lawsuit relates only to an amendment to the permit that allowed anchored vessels to be used to lay the pipeline during the months of October through the end of May.

"The pipelaying with these vessels from June onwards until the end of December is covered by the existing permit," a spokeswoman said.

This means the Fortuna -- which already laid some kilometers of Nord Stream 2 in German waters -- would be able to operate from the start of June.