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Bulgaria and Serbia want to co-decide on the route of the South Stream gas pipeline

On 8 August Bulgaria's Prime Minister Boiko Borisov announced that during his meeting with Serbia's President Boris Tadic in Varna they agreed on the route of the South Stream gas pipeline in the Bulgarian-Serbian border section. By joint consultations both countries are seeking to strengthen their positions in negotiations with Russia.

Prime Minister Borisov said that the two countries agreed that the South Stream pipeline should cross the Bulgarian-Serbian border near the Serbian town of Dimitrovgrad. Furthermore, he underlined that Serbia will be a minority shareholder in the Bulgarian power plant in Belene, thus confirming speculations that lasted several months regarding Belgrade's possible participation in this project (so far only Russia has officially expressed its interest in the project).

Borisov's announcement, widely commented on in the Russian press, sparked off strong reactions from Gazprom representatives. The spokesman for the Russian company pointed out that the route of the gas pipeline would be traced out only during the preparation of a feasibility study and Gazprom is the only entity that takes decisions about the route. The joint position of Belgrade and Sofia about the route of the gas pipeline is a demonstration of the countries' status of participants in the South Stream project. It is likely to complicate the process of tracing out the route of the gas pipeline and delay the possible implementation of the project. <dab>