

Russia to pump first gas through Nord Stream

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MOSCOW (AFP) - Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said that Russia would begin pumping the first gas through the long-awaited Nord Stream pipeline on Tuesday so that European clients could receive gas next month or in November.

"Tomorrow we will start pumping technical gas near Vyborg," Putin said on Monday at a meeting of his governing United Russia party, referring to gas needed to start energy supplies.

The 7.4-billion-euro (10.1-billion-dollar) 1,220-kilometre (760-mile) pipeline aims to deliver 55 billion cubic metres of gas per year, linking Russia's Vyborg, a city 130 kilometers northwest of Saint Petersburg, to the German city of Greifswald.

Constructed under the Baltic, the pipeline will run past the coasts of Finland, Sweden and Denmark.

One of Putin's pet projects, the pipeline, which is led by Russia's state-run energy giant Gazprom in partnership with Germany's [E.On](#) Ruhrgas and BASF-Wintershall, is meant to help avoid a repetition of recent supply problems.

The project was heavily backed by former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and now sees the Putin ally chair the Nord Stream shareholders' committee.

"Gradually, in a calm manner we are departing from the diktat of transit states," Putin said in televised remarks, speaking from the city of Cherepovets in northwestern Russia.