

The Croatian government will use all possible legal means to prevent the entry of Russian oil companies in Ina and the purchase of a majority stake.

This is the message of state officials a week before the arrival of the President of the Gazprom Board, Alexei Miller, in a meeting with President Ivo Josipovic and Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic.

Miller supposed to come in Zagreb tomorrow, but the arrival has been delayed, according to the president's office, due to technical reasons.

However, Gazprom delegation surely comes next week. As "Morning Journal" unofficially finds out, Gazprom management has requested an audience with Milanovic, at what has been answered positively.

And even yesterday U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy Policy Amos Hočstein met with the Minister of Economy Ivan Vrdoljak in Zagreb and sent a clear message that the United States saw Croatia as an energy leader in the region.

He also transferred that the United States helped Croatia in the construction of LNG terminal (for the liquid natural gas cooling).

"Croatia is no longer in the role to be concerned whether it will have energy, but its role is to provide energy to its northern neighbors, Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and we work together with the U.S. State Department on this strategy", said after the meeting, Minister Vrdoljak.

He also revealed that the U.S. delegation discussed on business models for the LNG terminals construction and talked about the process of oil and gas exploitation on land and at sea.

The newspaper estimates that "these clear messages indicate that Croatia has chosen the United States as a partner in the development of its energy resources and sends a clear message to Russia and its companies that there is no place for them".

Prime Minister Milanovic, however, said it would not allow turning Croatia into a geopolitical competition space between Russians and Americans.

"So, when it comes to work to everyone equally", he said on this matter.

Miller, as writes "Jutarnji", wants to talk in Zagreb about oil exploitation in the Adriatic Sea, INA sale and the South Stream pipeline.

However, hosts can only inform him that there is nothing of INA selling to Russian companies, while branch of South Stream in Croatia is not possible until further and also to inform him about the competition course for the Adriatic exploitation.

The paper reminds us that Croatia, as a member of the European Union, cannot allow the sale of INA shares to the Russian companies at this moment, primarily due to the sanctions imposed by the EU to Russia over the situation in Ukraine.

Besides, the Prime Minister Milanovic has recently announced change in the law on the INA privatization that would ensure the protection of national interests in the company, namely,

to regulate it in a different way and to limit the possibility of acquiring ownership in INA to those investors who are not from the EU.

In this way, the purchase of a stake in INA would be directly prevented to the Russian company. Croatia has a very clear opinion for the South Stream gas pipeline. The government, in fact, follows a policy of the European Union and, in contrast to Austria, which was recently approved an agreement between OMV and Gazprom on the gas pipeline construction, it is not inclined to oppose the policy of the European Commission.

Otherwise, Ina has recently got into the focus of the Croatian public, after the conviction of former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader for taking bribes of 10 MEUR from the Chairman of the Board of the Hungarian MOL in exchange for management rights in INA.

After the final verdict, the Croatian President Josipovic said stated that it was “high treason” and the Prime Minister Milanovic has announced that the state would protect the national interest in the oil company by new talks with MOL, and it is possible to cancel disputed contract.

In the meantime, the Zagreb County Court confirmed the indictment against the President of the MOL management, Zsolt Hernádi, who is charged with bribing Sanader to secure a majority management rights in INA to the Hungarian oil company. Trial council said it would tried Hernádi in absentia, which is not available to the Croatian judiciary.