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NATIONAL BUSINESS

US energy chief sees business potential in Portugal project

BY BARRY HATTON ASSOCIATED PRESS

FEBRUARY 12, 2020 09:21 AM



United States Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette gestures during an interview at the LNG terminal of the deepwater port of Sines after visiting the port, in Sines, southern Portugal, Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2020. The US government and american companies are expressing interest in the expansion of the port. ARMANDO FRANCA/AP PHOTO

SINES, PORTUGAL

The U.S. government and businesses are eyeing an Atlantic port in Portugal as a springboard for expansion and an increased presence in Europe, the U.S. energy chief said Wednesday.

The planned expansion of Sines port's container and liquefied natural gas terminals present "an enormous opportunity for U.S. industry, as well as the government," Dan Brouillette, the U.S. Energy Secretary, told The Associated Press.

"This is the closest (European) port to the U.S.," he said in an interview at Sines, about 150 kilometers (90 miles) south of the Portuguese capital Lisbon. "This port serves as an important gateway to Europe."

The rapid development of fracking in the United States has allowed it to boost LNG exports and offer low prices.

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The U.S. government has long argued that the European Union is over-reliant on Russian gas and is keen for American companies to rival Russian supplier Gazprom.

Sines received the first U.S. shipment of LNG to Europe, in 2016. The Portuguese government would like to act as a conduit for American LNG through a gas pipeline from Sines to the rest of Europe.

But regulators in France and Spain, whose countries a pipeline would cross, dashed those hopes by rejecting the project last year.

Against a backdrop of transatlantic trade tensions, Brouillette vowed to keep pressing EU leaders to adopt the Sines pipeline project.

He told the AP the pipeline would help provide energy diversity and security for Europe.

The port of Sines, which is well-placed to serve shipping between Europe and North and South America, also plans to grow its container terminal.

That project has drawn the interest of China, whose ambitious Belt and Road strategy aims to build infrastructure around the world and increase Beijing's influence.

Brouillette said the U.S. isn't setting itself up as a challenger to China in Portugal, which like other EU countries has attracted large Chinese investments in recent times.

But he noted that he had brought around a dozen senior U.S. business executives with him on his trip to Sines.

Portuguese Infrastructure Minister Pedro Nuno Santos said the visit "is evidence of the importance (the U.S.) places on Sines."

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