



The Danish Catch-22

A Weakening of European Energy Security

Morten Tastum

Assistant to Ambassador Simonyi

Center for Transatlantic Relations

Johns Hopkins University

SAIS

Denmark is currently deliberating on whether to approve or veto a gas pipeline to pass through its territorial waters. Russia and its European project partners are pressing for the approval of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline through the Danish territories, but such an approval would bring the ire of a close military partner, the United States, as well as risk the future geostrategic security of Europe, Central- and Eastern Europe. Vetoing the pipeline would likely draw strong criticism from Germany, one of the main stakeholder countries and a close Danish trade partner, as well as from Russia. Despite this, [representatives from both the sitting Danish government and the opposition have come out against the pipeline](#) stating security and recent Russian actions as the main motivators. There are however major concerns about the future of European energy security and what geostrategic effects the proposed pipeline could have on European, Central- and Eastern European policy. These concerns are great enough to warrant considerable restraint when considering such a project that could potentially destabilize much of Europe. With this and the recent years of Russian actions in mind I therefore consider the pipeline to be a major liability for Europe regardless of how cheap the energy might be. Subverting our own political power and making us even more dependent on Russian oil and gas is too high a price.

[With the recent German approval](#) the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline has taken a major step toward starting construction and operation between Europe and Russia. All legal blockades toward construction of the pipeline within the German exclusive economic zone (EEZ) have been cleared and now approval decisions remain only with Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark, all of whom are along the route of the proposed pipeline. The pipeline is being built between Russia and Germany to increase the energy influx particularly to Germany, in addition to the other European nations whose energy usage has increased in recent years. The project is between the state-owned Russian Gazprom, Uniper and Wintershall from Germany, Shell representing the Dutch and British, OMV from Austria, and the French Engie. Approval of the project has in Europe been spearheaded by Germany despite concerns and opposition from several Central- and Eastern European countries and the United States.

Denmark is the only nation on the way from Russia to Germany where the pipeline will pass through sovereign territorial waters and not just through the EEZ. This gives Denmark a greater say in the approval of the currently proposed route for Nord Stream 2. A Danish veto

would force Russia to find a new route for the pipeline. The cost of the project would increase significantly. It would further [cause a delay that could weaken Russian Gazprom's position in talks with Ukraine for a new gas transit deal in 2019](#). Finally, it would create uncertainty for Gazprom's European partners and potentially lead to issues regarding their continued support for the project. With Germany's approval Denmark now stands as the last country that could cause major issues for the future of Nord Stream 2. As such the Danish government is under immense pressure from all sides to make a ruling. Fierce lobbying from Russia and some EU allies, Germany in particular, are trying to sway the Danish toward an approval, whereas the United States has been openly pushing toward a veto. As a result, Denmark is caught in a catch-22. No matter the final ruling, it is sure to sour relations with allies, trade partners, and neighbors.

Energy policy requires balance and diversification, not only to avoid energy crises from unanticipated shortages, but to diminish the risk of foreign political influence and interference. The construction of Nord Stream 2 would push Europe further toward reliance on Russia for the majority of its energy needs and open itself up to being threatened and manipulated to serve Russia's foreign policy goals. This would be a major issue for the Central- and Eastern European countries that rely on Europe and the US for support in their handling of Russia. Recent actions by Gazprom in Ukraine should be considered –Gazprom [has several times and most recently in 2018 turned off crucial exports of gas and oil to Ukraine during the winter](#). Central- and Eastern Europe is already highly reliant on gas and oil from Russia and giving Russia more power and sway could cause major political issues in the future. As Russia has shown, it is not above using its state-owned enterprises to further its own foreign policy goals. While Russian gas is significantly cheaper than most other sources the dependence weakens European energy security.

To understand how dangerous this type of energy policy can be and its potential effects on foreign policy and security, we need to consider a situation with a completion of both the proposed Nord Stream 2 pipeline connecting Russia directly to Germany and the rest of Europe, and the proposed Turk Stream. [Turk Stream would link Russia to Turkey and Bulgaria further into Europe](#). Should both of these come to fruition Central- and Eastern Europe, Ukraine in particular, would be faced with a massive security issue. Currently the Brotherhood pipeline that runs through Ukraine and other Central- and Eastern European countries from Russia supplies a lot of energy both there and to Europe, but if the other lines were to be completed this entire area would be circumvented. Gazprom could then, as they have done several times before, shut off gas exports and pressure Ukraine and others to further Russian foreign policy goals. With Europe being dependent on Russian energy they would have little power to protest as Russia could retaliate with cutting off energy there as well. In such a situation Ukraine and the other Central- and Eastern European countries would be left in the cold and there would be little incentive to defend them from future Russian attacks or pressure Russia to return occupied territories.

Most policies concerning energy are driven by cost considerations and market factors but it is in the best interest of Denmark and the rest of Europe to veto and reject the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The security concerns are simply too great considering the recent years of Russian actions and aggressions. Russia is not a country Europe should tie itself to further for dependence on something as vital as energy. Instead it would be prudent to look toward new sources such as American LNG exports and the improvement and construction of current LNG capable ports in Europe to diversify and balance the energy import portfolio. An overreliance

on Russia is a significant security and foreign policy issue and it is in the best interests of Europe to limit Russian sway over European policy on all fronts.