



# Germany power plan would be a gift to Putin

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European energy security isn't a pressing concern for most Americans — but it should be. If Europe, the West's frontline against Russian aggression, falls under de facto Kremlin control through energy domination, America will be left vulnerable.

For the past seven years, Vladimir Putin has been working to achieve just that, through a pipeline known as Nord Stream 2. And his efforts are coming close to fruition — with not a little assistance from the Germans, who are putting their own energy needs before Western security.

A joint project of the Putin-linked Russian energy giant Gazprom and several European firms, Nord Stream 2 would allow Russia to pump 55 billion cubic meters of gas to Germany annually. And because it runs on the Baltic seabed, Nord Stream 2 would bypass traditional land routes across Ukraine and Poland.

That's dangerous for two reasons.

First, it would allow Putin to tighten his energy grip on the continent. Energy security is an essential piece of leverage in any diplomatic negotiation. Countries and regions that are dependent on others, particularly somewhat hostile states, for their energy have little room to chart their own course.

Second, Nord Stream 2 would cut off Ukraine, Poland and other states in Central and Eastern Europe. For Kiev, that means the loss of the transit fees it receives for delivering Gazprom gas to Europe, amounting to 3 percent of Ukrainian GDP. With the fees will go the modest leverage Ukraine enjoys over Russia with the current, land-based arrangement.

Which is why a political backlash is beginning to build. This month, the US Congress passed a resolution opposing Nord Stream 2. Successive administrations of both parties have also warned Germany about the perils of expanding Russian energy influence in Europe.

Likewise, the European Parliament passed a resolution this month calling for the project to be canceled. That followed a 2016 letter from eight European governments to European Commission boss Jean-Claude Juncker, detailing the "potentially destabilizing geopolitical consequences" of the new gas line.

Berlin won't pay heed. Earlier this month, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas confirmed that Germany would fall into line with Putin's energy ambitions.

The Germans claim they can contain the security risks posed by Nord Stream 2. They believe the deal will give them political influence in Moscow, influence that can be used to sway Russian policy in hot spots like Ukraine.

But this is wish-casting. Past experience shows that the deal will increase Russian influence on Germany — not the other way round. Maas is groping desperately to justify the corrupting effects of Russian money on German governance.

Then, too, Putin's energy conquest of Europe isn't based on Nord Stream 2 alone, meaning that Russia doesn't need to hand Germany any leverage in return for greenlighting the project. Putin's commercial surrogates have been buying up German distribution networks, such that not only the importation of gas but its distribution will be in Russian hands.

Putin has also been seeking other pathways to energy dominance in the continent, with recent reports pointing the finger at Croatia as his point of entry.

Between the Western front in Germany and the Eastern front in Croatia and the Balkans, Putin's pincer movement may lead to total Russian control of European energy for the foreseeable future. And it's not as if Russia is Europe's only energy source. Far from it. Germany itself has vast reserves of shale gas — 2.3 trillion cubic meters, by some estimates, enough to meet domestic need for a century.

Instead of banning fracking over unproved environmental fears, Germany and France, among others, could lead an energy revolution much like the fracking renaissance that has turned the US into a global energy powerhouse. Combined with fracking, nuclear power, US natural gas and renewables, Europe could be totally energy independent within a few years.

Europe must outmaneuver Russia on energy — not invite it in.

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