

Russia's Homage to Nord Stream Pipelines

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David Brinkley, the legendary American newscaster with a career that spanned an amazing fifty-four years from World War II once said that a successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him. How many American statesmen ever practised this noble thought inherited from Jesus Christ remains doubtful.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's stunning proposal to Turkish President Recep Erdogan to build a gas pipeline to Turkiye to create an international hub from which Russian gas can be supplied to Europe breathes fresh life into this very "Gandhian" thought.

Putin discussed the idea with Erdogan at their meeting in Astana on October 13 and since spoke about it at the Russian Energy Week forum last week where he proposed creating the largest gas hub in Europe in Turkey and redirecting the volume of gas, the transit of which is no longer possible through the Nord Stream, to this hub.

Putin said it may imply building another gas pipeline system to feed the hub in Turkiye, through which gas will be supplied to third countries, primarily European ones, "if they are interested."

Prima facie, Putin does not expect any positive response from Berlin to his standing proposal to use the string of the Nord Stream 2, which remained undamaged, to supply 27.5 billion cu. metres of gas through the winter months. Germany's deafening silence is understandable. Chancellor Olaf Scholz is terrified about President Biden's wrath.

Berlin says it knows who sabotaged the Nord Stream pipelines but won't reveal it as it affects Germany's national security! Sweden too pleads that the matter is far too sensitive for it to share the evidence it has collected with any country, including Germany! Biden has put the fear of God into the minds of these timid European "allies" who have been left in no doubt what is good for them! The western media too is ordered to play down Nord Stream saga so that with the passage of time, public memory will fade away.

However, Russia has done its homework that Europe cannot do without Russia gas, the

present bravado of self-denial notwithstanding. Simply put, the European industries depend on cheap, reliable supplies of Russian for their products to remain competitive in the world market.

Qatar's energy minister Saad al-Kaabi said last week that he cannot envisage a future where "zero Russian gas" flows to Europe. He noted acerbically, " If that's the case, then I think the problem is going to be huge and for a very long time. You just don't have enough volume to bring (in) to replace that (Russian) gas for the long term, unless you're saying 'I'm going to be building huge nuclear (plants), I'm going to allow coal, I'm going to burn fuel oils.'"

Quintessentially, Russia plans to replace its gas hub in Haidach in Austria (which Austrians seized in July.) Conceivably, the hub in Turkiye has a ready market in Southern Europe, including Greece and Italy. But there is more to it than meets the eye.

Succinctly put, Putin has made a strategic move in the geopolitics of gas. His initiative rubbishes the hare-brained idea of the Russophobic European Commission bureaucrats in Brussels, headed by Ursula von der Leyen, to impose a price cap on gas purchases. It makes nonsense of the US' and EU's plans to put down Russia's profile as a gas superpower.

Logically, the next step for Russia should be to align with Qatar, the world's second biggest gas exporter. Qatar is a close ally of Turkey, too. At Astana recently, on the sidelines of the summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Putin held a [closed-door meeting](#) with the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. They agreed to follow up with another meeting soon in Russia.

Russia already has a framework of cooperation with Iran in a number of joint projects in the oil and gas industry. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak [recently disclosed](#) plans to conclude an oil and gas swap deal with Iran by the end of the year. He said that "technical details are being worked out – issues of transport, logistics, price, and tariff formation."

Now, Russia, Qatar and Iran together account for [more than half of the world's entire proven gas reserves](#). Time is approaching for them to intensify cooperation and coordination on the pattern of the OPEC Plus. All three countries are represented in the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

Putin's proposal appeals to Turkiye's longstanding dream to become an energy hub at the doorstep of Europe. Unsurprisingly, Erdogan instinctively warmed up to Putin's proposal. Addressing the ruling party members in the Turkish parliament this week, [Erdogan said](#),

"In Europe they are now dealing with the question of how to stay warm in the coming winter. We don't have such a problem. We have agreed with Vladimir Putin to create a gas hub in our country, through which natural gas, as he says, can be delivered to Europe. Thus, Europe will order gas from Turkey."

Apart from strengthening own energy security, Turkiye also can contribute to Europe's. No doubt, Turkiye's importance will take a quantum leap in the EU foreign policy calculus, while also strengthening its strategic autonomy in regional politics. This is a huge step forward in Erdogan's geo-strategy — the geographic direction of Turkish foreign policy under his watch.

From the Russian viewpoint, of course, Türkiye's strategic autonomy and its grit to pursue independent foreign policies works splendidly for Moscow in the present conditions of western sanctions. Conceivably, Russian companies will start viewing Türkiye as a production base where western technologies become accessible. Türkiye has a customs union agreement with the EU, which completely removes customs duties on all industrial goods of Turkish origin. (See my blog [Russia-Turkey reset eases regional tensions](#), Aug 9, 2022)

In geopolitical terms, Moscow is comfortable with Türkiye's NATO membership. Clearly, the proposed gas hub brings much additional income to Türkiye and will impart greater stability and predictability to the Russia-Turkey relations. Indeed, the strategic links that tie the two countries together are steadily lengthening — the S-400 ABM deal, cooperation in Syria, the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, Turk-stream gas pipeline, to name a few.

The two countries candidly admit that they have differences of opinion, but the way Putin and Erdogan through constructive diplomacy keep turning adverse circumstances into windows of opportunity for “win-win” cooperation is simply amazing.

It does need ingenuity to get the US' European allies source Russian gas without any coercion or boorishness even after Washington buried the Nord Stream gas pipelines in the depths of the Baltic Sea. There is dramatic irony that a NATO power is partnering Russia in this direction.

The US foreign policy elite drawn from East European stock are rendered speechless by the sheer sophistication of the Russian ingenuity to bypass without any trace of rancour the shabby way the US and its allies — Germany and Sweden, in particular — slammed the door shut on Moscow to even take a look at the damaged multi-billion dollar pipelines that it had built in good faith in the depths of the Baltic Sea at the instance of two German chancellors, Gerhard Schroeder and Angela Merkel.

The current German leadership of Chancellor Olaf Scholz looks very foolish and cowardly-and provincial. The European Commission's Ursula von der Leyen gets a huge rebuff in all this which will ultimately define her tragic legacy in Brussels as a flag carrier for American interests. This becomes probably the first case study for historians on how multipolarity will work in the world order.

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Featured image: Who stands to gain? First pictures of Nord Stream pipeline show 50 metre hole after “powerful explosions” confirming sabotage.

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