

BEFORE YOU CALL US SANCTIONS ON NORD STREAM 2 “NEEDLESS”, TRY LIVING NEXT TO RUSSIA

Reducing the US sanctions on Nord Stream 2 to a cynical economic ploy by Trump’s administration, aimed at helping American companies at the expense of Germany, is to close eyes to the geopolitical threat posed to Central and Eastern Europe by that German-Russian pipeline.

In 1973, when the Arab countries imposed an embargo on oil supplies to the West after the Yom Kippur war, the world understood that energy resources could be a powerful political weapon, used despite of all free market rules. This situation has shown that the dependence on oil or gas supplies should be considered not only in the economic context, but also (geo)politically. However, half a century after these events, there are still opinions that ignore the geopolitical dimension of energy resources supplies. One such vote was an article published by the New York Times editorial board titled "Three Trump Supporters Have a New Target: Germany".

The message that stems from that piece is as follows: US sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline are an “needless provocation” against Germany and a threat to the German port of Sassnitz, because the only result of the construction of the pipeline will be the loss of revenues from gas transit fees that supplied the budgets of Ukraine or Belarus. The actions of the Trump administration are supposed to result from the desire to make room for American gas companies on the European market, and the whole thing may push Russia into closer relations with China.

Such a view completely ignores the geopolitical meaning of the Nord Stream 2 project and fits in with the false German rhetoric that says: our gas pipeline is only a business project, not a political one. However, the truth is that Nord Stream 2 is primarily used to build the political influence of Russia and Germany in Europe.

The gas pipeline built by Gazprom and its European partners is changing the architecture of gas supplies from Russia to the West. It will make it possible to bypass the current transit countries (including Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia) and redirect the gas transit to the Baltic Sea. But it is not the transit fees that are at stake here. For example, depriving Ukraine of the status of a transit country may open the way for Russia’s further aggression against this country - the war unleashed by Moscow has been going on in Ukraine for 6 years.

It seems that the editorial board has not noticed this, because the article does not mention the conflict in Ukraine even once – despite of the fact that bypassing this particular country was the main goal of the Russians when building Nord Stream 2, because the original date of putting the gas pipeline into service (2019) coincided in time with the expiry of the Russian-Ukrainian gas transit agreement.

The NYT journalists also do not see that the threat from Russia is not something abstract for a Central European citizen. The Kremlin's imperial ambitions are an element of European reality that costs someone's life practically every day. The war in Ukraine has already resulted in The Anschluss of Crimea, the shooting down of the MH17 passenger plane or the incident near the Kerch Strait. These events - described in the appeal of the American ambassadors to Germany, Denmark and the European Union in February 2019 - did not prevent the construction of this gigantic geopolitical project. Despite the immensity of the tragedy caused by Russia and its allies in recent years, Germany continued to defend that gas pipeline by repeating a mantra that it is an apolitical project. But with the passage of time and subsequent Russian scandalous actions (the Skripals case, a number of espionage cases, the Navalny case), such defense of Nord Stream 2 sounds only more and more absurd.

Germans defend the gas pipeline as much as they can (recent reports suggest that Berlin wants to raise the issue of US sanctions at the UN) because they have economic and political interests in it. Economic - because the gas that will flow through Nord Stream 2 will be exported to Central European countries, providing German companies with significant profits. Political - because the gas trade will strengthen - already strong - German influences in the region.

Therefore, the conclusion is clear: Nord Stream 2 will sensitize Central Europe to the particular actions of Russia and Germany, and perhaps contribute to further aggression by Moscow. And this is at a time when Ukraine is slowly getting back on its feet after anti-Russian change and moving closer to the West, and the future of Belarus is at stake. Meanwhile, the NYT editorial board puts the economic security of the German port of Sassnitz ahead of the energy, political and military security of the entire Central and Eastern Europe.

The article also completely blurs the structure of gas supplies to the European Union, putting supplies from the USA practically on a par with supplies from Russia. Meanwhile, in 2019, Russia accounted for almost 40% of gas supplies to the EU, while the US only for 4%. American gas companies are currently unable to compete with the Russians on a scale that would undermine Gazprom's position in Europe. This is due to from insufficient capacity of European LNG terminals.

There is also no cover in facts for the article's prediction that the American sanctions on Nord Stream 2 will push Russia into closer relations with China. Moscow is already Beijing's satellite - the Chinese are colonizing Putin's state economically, using it as a giant reservoir of natural resources. China is currently saving the Russian economy with increased oil purchases, making Russia more dependent. Blocking Nord Stream 2 will not change anything in Russian-Chinese relations - but it will deprive Moscow of significant influence in Central and Eastern Europe, which is a close partner of the US.

In summary, focusing solely on the financial side of Nord Stream 2 is a complete omission of the lessons learned in 1973. The assessment of the role of this project, made without taking into account the political situation in Central and Eastern Europe, not only distorts the perception of the German-Russian gas pipeline, but also raises legitimate outrage among all inhabitants of this region who feel threatened by Russian imperialism and German appeasement.