



# Moscow's Continuing Leverage over Europe, vis-à-vis Energy Dependence

**OE Watch Commentary:** Quietly building momentum throughout all of its more dramatic foreign policy maneuvering is Russia's continuing – and future – influence over a number of European states in the energy sector. Per EU statistics, the first half of 2018 demonstrated that Russia remained the largest supplier of natural gas and oil to EU countries. Many European states have long relied on Russian imports of natural gas and oil; this has traditionally complicated European efforts to craft broad-based responses to perceived Russian misdeeds. Moreover, European reaction to Russia's recent seizure of Ukrainian naval vessels and personnel may point to a lessening of concrete European resolve in this regard – especially when compared to events in 2014.

In 2014, after a series of varied measures (e.g., travel bans, asset freezes) taken by the EU in response to Russian actions (seizing of Crimea, the destabilization of Ukraine) leading to the adoption of economic sanctions, the European Parliament in the fall of 2014 enacted a resolution that called on EU countries to cancel longstanding plans with Russia regarding the planned “South Stream” gas pipeline. South Stream plans ended in December 2014. After the recent seizure of Ukrainian ships by Russia in the Sea of Azov, however, the European response has been strong diplomatically – but the results are not yet known. A successor gas pipeline to South Stream, the “TurkStream” project (whose first line is intended for the Turkish market) is nearing completion and continues toward an eventual completion of a second gas line that would supply European customers beyond Turkey.

The accompanying excerpted articles mention two possible routes of TurkStream's second line: through Bulgaria (and then Serbia) or via Greece. In the north of Europe, progress continues on “Nord Stream 2,” two additional lines that would bypass traditional transit countries like Ukraine and, largely paralleling the extant Nord Stream pipeline, carry natural gas to Germany directly. In the immediate aftermath of the Azov incident, diplomatic pressure from the EU Parliament included a call for a cancellation of Nord Stream 2 construction. Additionally, German Chancellor Merkel, while addressing the Bundestag, noted that Germany will back an extension of EU sanctions against Russia. However, Nord Stream 2 construction continues throughout, Berlin has not dropped its support of Nord Stream 2, and Germany remains, by far, the largest importer of Russian natural gas in Europe.

While it is not yet certain if Russian gas pipeline plans have truly reached some sort of tipping point, beyond which Moscow may wholly act with impunity in the region without risk of disrupting these plans, it is clear that European reliance on Russian natural gas and oil will continue for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, it is believed that the current and future ability of Russia to supply European customers, without transiting nettlesome states, will offer Moscow even greater freedom of maneuver within these targeted regions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Sarafian)**

*“Greece, along with other European countries, is of the opinion that the EU, within the framework of a multipronged energy policy, should cooperate with Russia on TurkStream.”*



Nord Stream pipeline map.

Source: OpenStreetMap contributors [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nord\\_Stream-et\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nord_Stream-et_map.png).

**Source:** “Сербия рассчитывает на газопровод ‘Турецкий поток’ (Serbia is counting on the “Turkish Stream” gas pipeline),” *Vesti Ekonomika*, 26 November 2018. <https://www.vestifinance.ru/articles/110762>

*“For Serbia, it is extremely important that Russia considers a route for the TurkStream pipeline - that would pass through our country - to be a priority”, stated [First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister] Dačić.*

**Source:** “Ципрас: “Турецкий поток” может стать “Европейским потоком” (Tsipras: “Turkish Stream” could become “European Stream”),” *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 6 December 2018. <http://vestikavkaza.ru/news/TSipras-Turetskiy-potok-mozhet-stat-Evropeyskim-potokom.html>

*Greece is having a dialogue with the EU on the extension of the gas pipeline “Turkstream” through Greek territory to other EU countries.*

*Greece, along with other European countries, is of the opinion that the EU, within the framework of a multipronged energy policy, should cooperate with Russia on TurkStream, said [Prime Minister] Tsipras.*