**Nord Stream and Its Political Meaning**

Gas is a major commodity in Europe, mainly used to heat homes and power businesses. Despite this, it's not a mineral mined in Europe, hence the need to source it from outside. One country that has taken advantage of this is Russia. It has intensively invested in the business of supplying gas to Europe. A Russian company named Gazprom is leading the way in trying to increase its supply in this region by implementing different projects and initiatives. One major project is Nord Stream. Looking at different factors and reasons, Russia's intention to supply gas to Europe seems not to be well-intended but a way to raise its leverage in the region.

**Understanding Nord Stream**

Nord Stream is a network of pipelines used to transport natural gas from Russia through Germany to Europe. It specifically runs under the Baltic Sea from Russia all the way to Greifswald in Germany. This network of pipelines is made up of two distinct projects, but all of them end up in Germany. The first project is called Nord Stream One (NS1), which originated from Vyborg and started its operations in 2011. The second project, Nord Stream 2 (NS2), originated from Ust-Luga and was completed in 2021 but is yet to be operational. Each of these projects is made up of two pipes, with each pipe having a capacity of 27.5 billion cubic meters. The project is owned by a company called Gazprom. The pipelines are used to transport gas from Russia to Germany. In Germany, the country's pipelines, primarily NEL (North European Gas Pipeline) and OPAL, transport gas to final destinations throughout Europe.

**Politics Around the Nord Stream**

Since its birth, this project has been the subject of criticism and praise. Mainly, those criticizing the project have seen it as political in nature. It is because of its perceived current political influence in Europe. According to MacKinnon (2020), most ballistic states, as well as Poland, see the project as a Russian master plan to increase its leverage over these nations, thereby jeopardizing their energy security. This is supported by evidence of how Russia initially weaponized this precious resource. For example, Estonia faced cuts from Russia in 2007. Latvia faced the same cut in 2003 and 2004. Additionally, Lithuania became a victim of energy blockage during its independence period and then again faced cuts in 2001, 2005, and 2006 (Rodrguez-Fernandez et al., 2020).

The loudest country objecting Nord Stream project is the United States of America. According to this country, the main aim of Russia is not goodwill but a desire to dominate. It pointed out this project as an evil plan by Russia to increase its dominance in Europe and also gain geopolitical interest (MacKinnon, 2020). In addition, the increasing dependence of Europe on gas from Russia presents itself as a threat to the tactical interests of the common market and the EU.

Ukraine is also another country that will be affected negatively by this project. It is because the start of Operation Nord Stream 2 would mean an end to the use of the transit line in Ukraine for gas transportation. This step would negatively affect the country because it would give Russia a chance to increase its military. It will also negatively affect Ukraine and Belarus as they will not be relying on them for energy transportation (Sydoruk, 2019). This fear is evident in the current war between Russia and Ukraine. Looking at Nord Stream 1, Ukraine received 3 billion dollars annually as a transit fee from Gazprom before it became operational. Still, after the pipeline became operational, the annual fee went down to below 2 billion dollars, and this is feared to get worse with the launch of Nord Stream 2, which has the same capacity as Nord Stream 1 (Åslund, 2021).

This project is considered a violation of European energy policy based on its impact on energy policy. According to the policy, there is a need for gas production and supply diversification. Nord Stream has violated this by having the pipeline network fully owned by Gazprom as both the producer and the supplier (Siddi, 2020). The other political argument is that Europe is moving towards using clean energy, and gas is not one of them. Therefore, it means that they are reducing their need for gas.

Despite its negative side, this project also has a positive side. There is the belief that the coming of gas from Russia will help lower the overall gas price as it will lower the monopoly of other gas providers and increase its availability (de Jong et al., 2022). Still, on security matters, in the past and even currently, there have been problems between Ukraine and Russia, and this has greatly affected the gas supply as it was the main transit. It is believed that the Nord Stream Pipeline has helped solve this problem and made Europe more gas secure than before. In addition, this will be a source of revenue for Germany, with the country expecting to get at least 2 billion dollars annually in transit fees.

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