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Motion regarding the Baltic Sea and pipelines

For the past few years the plan to construct a pipeline for natural gas from Vyborg in Russia to Greifswald in Germany, by the consortium Nordstream, has been known and discussed. The final decision whether the pipeline can be built or not has not yet been taken. The Swedish government plays a key roll in the process at the moment. Since the pipeline will pas through Swedish territorial waters outside, and close to, the Baltic Sea island of Gotland, it is the Swedish government that has the opportunity to review the plan for the pipeline. In this very moment the plans for the pipeline is on the governments table for analysis from an environmental perspective.

The basic idea with building the pipeline is simple. Russia has an interest in selling and exporting natural gas to countries within the EU and they have a mutual interest in buying it. So far there is nothing wrong with the idea, but there are several reasons to stop and think twice about whether it is a good idea or not to build a pipeline through virtually the full length of the Baltic Sea, reasons that might lead to the conclusion that the pipeline should not be built according to the present plan. These reasons include the preservation of the sensitive environment in the Baltic Sea and also security policy.

To start with examining the later alternative we can not disregard the fact that there are security policy implications on building a pipeline through the Baltic Sea. In the original sketch for the pipeline there was a service and surveillance platform included just outside the Swedish island of Gotland that should have been manned by personnel from the Russian armed forces which from a security policy perspective would have been somewhat problematic. The platform has recently in a late stage of the process been taken out of the proposal which of course is a small step forward. The big question from a security policy perspective is not mainly about the existence or not of a platform where Russian military might be able to watch Gotland but about what is excluded if the pipeline is built, namely everything that is in between Russia and Germany.

It is for those who want to see rather obvious that the Russian government tend to look upon its natural resources of gas and oil as something more then just commodities. We have all seen this in terms of pressure on neighbour countries of Russia like the Baltic States, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and others through the Russian gas monopoly Gazprom. This way of thinking and acting is some sort of a relic from the cold war based on different interests in Europe. To be able to sell and export gas directly to Germany and other countries in Western Europe without having to go through countries that Russia look upon as their backyard means that this can be delivered without interruption at the same time as Russia can still use gas as a means of putting pressure and influencing the countries that are geographically closer to Russia. This is a strategic and security policy measure that the government of Sweden and all members of the EU can not ignore.

The review that currently is being undertaken by the government and authorities of Sweden however does not officially concern it self with the security policy

implications of the pipeline project but instead focuses on the environmental aspect since the different necessary environmental permits required to build the pipeline has to be granted by the Swedish government. It would, we suspect, be overly naive to totally disregard the security policy side of the project for the Swedish government the environment alone raises obstacles that seriously challenges the project. The Baltic Sea is a very sensitive sea. It has already over the years been the victim of serious environmental abuse. Today we know that the Baltic Sea is a sea that is seriously threatened, the level of oxygen in the water is low, waste areas of the sea bottom is virtually completely dead and without any oxygen. The Baltic Sea is also, even though we have better regulations and more cleaning today, constantly added environmentally dangerous substances, a development that we have to halt and reverse.

The planned pipeline runs a serious risk of impacting the already sensitive environment in the Baltic Sea in a very negative way. Since the plan is to let the pipeline rest at the bottom of the sea it runs a risk of starting a leaking of dangerous substances that over the past hundred years, or more, have been stored in the seabed and in that way causing irreparable damage to the environment in the sea. The pipeline also needs constant surveillance and maintenance witch also adds to this leaking and contributes new dangers and new pollution to the waters, and to this we should also add the risk of the pipeline its self leaking in to the water if you should be damage in some way. All accounted for the proposed pipeline poses a very serious threat to the already endangered and delicate environment in the Baltic Sea.

When taking both the environment and the security issues in to consideration the pipeline from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea should not be built. The review currently undertaken by the Swedish government for the environmental permits should come to the same conclusion and reject the application for building the pipeline.

If there is a need, which it probably is, to build yet another pipeline to supply the countries within the EU with gas from Russia it should from both a security and an environmental perspective be built on shore through the Baltic States and Poland.

With this as a background we the Nordic Conservative Student Union have come to the following conclusions:

- the proposed pipeline from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea should not be built,
- if there is a need to build a new pipeline to the EU from Russia it is better to build it on shore

We also encourage the Swedish government to reject the applications for permits to build the pipeline.

Written by

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