Environmental impact of the planned gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea to link up Russia and Germany

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The European Parliament adopted by 542 votes to 60, with 38 abstentions a resolution on the environmental impact of the planned gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea to link up Russia and Germany: the Nord Stream project.

The initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Marcin **LIBICKI** (UEN, PL) on behalf of the Petitions committee responding to two petitions (0614/2007 and 0952/2007) by Polish and Lithuanian environmental associations who fear that the planned pipeline could harm marine eco-systems.

Parliament is of the opinion that Nord Stream is an infrastructure project with a wide political and strategic dimension for both the EU and Russia, particularly to ensure the European Union’s security of supply. It recalls that this project, together with other complementary pipelines, such as the Yamal II and Amber, should be planned in the spirit of a common European foreign policy on energy and should take fully into account their impact on the environment and on the security of the EU Member States. Parliament reiterates, in particular, that **Member States must speak with one voice on energy issues**.

Energy: Parliament reiterates its opinion that, taking into consideration the increasing dependence of the EU on a limited number of energy sources, suppliers and transport routes, it is essential to support initiatives aimed at their diversification, both geographically and by developing sustainable alternatives. It considers it necessary to assess the long-term impact on the environment of the new gas infrastructure, with regard to the importance of guaranteeing a stable gas supply.

Securing energy: Parliament emphasises that energy security must be regarded as an essential component of the overall security of the European Union, whereby the definition of energy security should not merely be limited to the lack of internal EU production but should also take into account the geopolitical aspects of dependency on imports and the potential therein for politically motivated interruptions. For the Parliament, the challenge of securing energy supply while respecting the commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development makes it imperative to implement a coherent and coordinated European policy on supply of natural gas based on careful evaluation at European level of the environmental aspects of alternative solutions and on mutual solidarity between Member States.

Marginal role played by the EU in the Nord Stream project: Parliament regrets the marginal role played by the EU in this project and points out that greater EU involvement would reduce the uncertainty felt by many Member States about the Nord Stream project. It also takes note of the opposition expressed by certain Member States to the pipeline project planned for the Baltic Sea area, which is a common asset of the states bordering the Baltic Sea, not a matter of bilateral relations between states. It considers, therefore, that the project should be realised in cooperation with each of the states around the Baltic Sea.

Securing energy supply while respecting the EU's commitment to environmental protection: a real challenge: Parliament voices its opposition to the carrying-out of an investment on the proposed scale, without first having a positive environmental impact assessment. It therefore calls on the Commission and the Council to make a full commitment to analysing the environmental impact of the construction of the North European gas pipeline. Such an assessment should be undertaken by an independent body.

Nord Stream: a threat to biodiversity: Parliament expresses its concern at the project timetable adopted by Nord Stream, the implementation of which will prevent a thorough analysis of the results of the environmental impact assessment by interested states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and HELCOM experts. It points out that a thorough analysis of the results of the environmental impact assessment needs an appropriate timetable. It points out that carrying out work in an area of up to 2 400 km² in the Baltic Sea, requiring the use of a large number of vessels and other equipment, could represent a serious threat to biodiversity and to the number of habitats, as well as to the safety and smooth operation of shipping, in the region.

Parliament calls on the developer to include in its draft environmental impact assessment report comprehensive terms of reference by providing a clear description of the current environmental conditions in the site and by providing data on the site geomorphology in three-dimensional form. It expresses profound concern at the reports that, before commissioning the gas pipeline, the investor intends to use a highly toxic compound known as glutaric aldehyde. It calls on the developer to protect the many species of fish and birds as well as the existence of a population of 600 porpoises which are a species unique to this geographical region.

Parliament also points out a further significant environmental risk factor which is the existence of approximately 80 000 tonnes of munitions dumped on the Baltic seabed after World War II. They contain toxic substances such as mustard gas, sulphur yperite, nitrogen yperite, lewisite…. which represent a hazard both to the Baltic marine environment and to human life and health.

Project failure: Parliament fears the absence of any strategy to address structural failure and external threats to the security of the pipeline. It is therefore necessary to clearly define all aspects related to security and emergency response, including financial resources, actors, roles and procedures. In addition, given the serious environmental risks and the high cost of the proposed project, Parliament emphasises that **alternative gas pipeline routes** should be analysed first, taking into account both environmental and economic aspects. The issue of economic compensation for any failures or damage must also be tackled (particularly in the case of threats for the states bordering the Baltic Sea).

Overall assessment of the project before its implementation: Parliament calls on the Commission and Member States to carry out a thorough assessment of the economic, budgetary and transparency-related aspects of the Nord Stream project and the firms involved in it. It points out the importance of conducting a transparent communication strategy on steps concerning the results of the environmental impact assessment. It also insists that the Council take action at international level to develop mandatory environmental impact assessments in relations between the EU and third countries. The Council, the Commission and the Member States are called upon to ensure that the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline fully complies with EU legislation on environmental impact assessments and with all international conventions.

As for Russia, it is called to show goodwill regarding cooperation in European energy policy and to ratify the Energy Charter Treaty and the Transit Protocol.

The Commission is called upon, within the scope of its competence, to evaluate the market competition situation caused by the possible completion of the Nord Stream pipeline, and if necessary to take measures to prevent Gazprom from assuming a dominant role on the EU gas markets without guaranteeing reciprocal rights for EU companies to enter the Russian energy market.

Common supervision of the pipeline: Parliament suggests the establishment of a system of common supervision of the pipeline, to include all countries in the Baltic Sea region. It further suggests that the obligation to pay compensation for environmental damage should lie solely with Nord Stream. It notes the lack of institutional structures capable of responding adequately to the environmental and geopolitical security issues associated with this project. Lastly, it suggests that the Commission should create an

appropriate post to deal with current and future projects, functioning under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the Commission.