

Opinion **Nord Stream 2 AG**

## Opening Nord Stream 2 would be a catastrophic mistake

Caught between Russia and an increasingly adversarial US, Germany's ties to Europe are being tested

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Published MAR 20 2025

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Remember the bizarrely menacing Russian [video](#) of ice-bound European cities set to a baleful song called “Winter Will Be Long”? It went viral in September 2022, about six months after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and for Germans, it remains a visceral, shudder-inducing reminder of their country’s worst energy crisis since the second world war.

That year, Germany had finally — after years of sanctions threats from the US, as well as urgent warnings from its eastern European neighbours — grasped the enormity of its error in making itself hugely dependent on Russian energy. Now it was [racing](#) to undo it. As it became clear that Russia was about to attack Ukraine in February 2022, Berlin refused to certify the new twin Nord Stream 2 pipeline that was to double the capacity of the older Nord Stream 1. Later, it announced a step-by-step decoupling from Russian fossil fuels, with gas imports to end in 2024.

But Russia struck first. On September 2, the Kremlin-controlled gas giant Gazprom stopped all supplies to Germany. Twenty-four days later, three of the four Nord Stream pipelines were blown up in an act of [sabotage](#). With a wrenching national effort and huge subsidies to industry and consumers, Germany managed to almost completely substitute Russian pipeline gas deliveries with liquefied natural gas from the US, Norway and Qatar.

Today, almost all of Russia's pipelines to Europe are shuttered. The continent is now the [primary customer](#) for US LNG; shortly after the re-election of Donald Trump last year, EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen [said](#) that Europe should bring down Russian gas imports by replacing them with even more US LNG.

Recent reports of US-led efforts to open the last undamaged Nord Stream 2 pipeline and possibly repair another are therefore somewhat startling, to say the least. As this newspaper [pointed](#) out, "it would require the US to lift sanctions against Russia, Russia to agree to resume sales it cut off during the war and Germany to allow the gas to flow to any potential buyers in Europe." Indeed.

But recent weeks have shown how quickly the unthinkable can become thinkable again. It is all rather reminiscent of the [legendary line](#) from US TV show *Mad Men*: "It will shock you how much it never happened."

A Swiss court has miraculously moved to [stay](#) bankruptcy proceedings against the pipeline's parent company until early May 2025. The White House and the Kremlin are clearly eager to put the war behind them — if necessary, over the heads of Ukraine and Europe. A two-hour phone call between Trump and Vladimir Putin on Tuesday did nothing to halt the fighting. Yet Washington's readout [mentioned](#) "enormous economic deals"; Moscow's [statement](#) (while reiterating all of Putin's hardline demands) spoke of "potential ties of mutual interest in economy and energy". Gazprom, which last year was posting [record losses](#), has seen its share prices [tick upwards](#) since the first intimations of a US-Russian thaw.

Which leaves Germany, where the centre-right CDU/CSU and the centre-left SPD are currently negotiating to form a government. Departing Green economics minister Robert Habeck [warned](#) this week: "The Social Democrats and the Conservative party in Germany, they built the German energy dependency from Russia, and they did it willingly."

[Some industry leaders](#) and conservative [negotiators](#) have already welcomed the prospect of Russian gas taps being turned back on. The CDU legislator Thomas Bareiß

recently [posted](#) on social media: “When peace returns and the weapons between Russia and Ukraine fall silent, relations will normalise, sanctions will be lifted, and of course, gas can start flowing again.” He added: “just like before, Nord Stream is a private project and will be decided by private business.”

To call this argument naive strains all credulity. It is an open secret that Germany’s conservatives have so far failed to reckon with their own old and deep “Moscow connection”. For the next German government to acquiesce in opening the Nord Stream 2 pipeline under US ownership would be nothing short of catastrophic. It would alienate its European partners, refinance the Kremlin’s war machine, and sell out Ukraine.

Germany would be trapped again — but this time, between a Russia determined to extinguish Ukrainian sovereignty and pull the rest of the continent into its sphere of influence, and a Trump administration bent on pursuing a condominium of authoritarian great powers. It would be a betrayal of Europe.

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