

COVID-19 in numbers:

Ukraine

Cases: 1,921,244

Deaths: 39,096

Recovered:
1,465,820

Worldwide

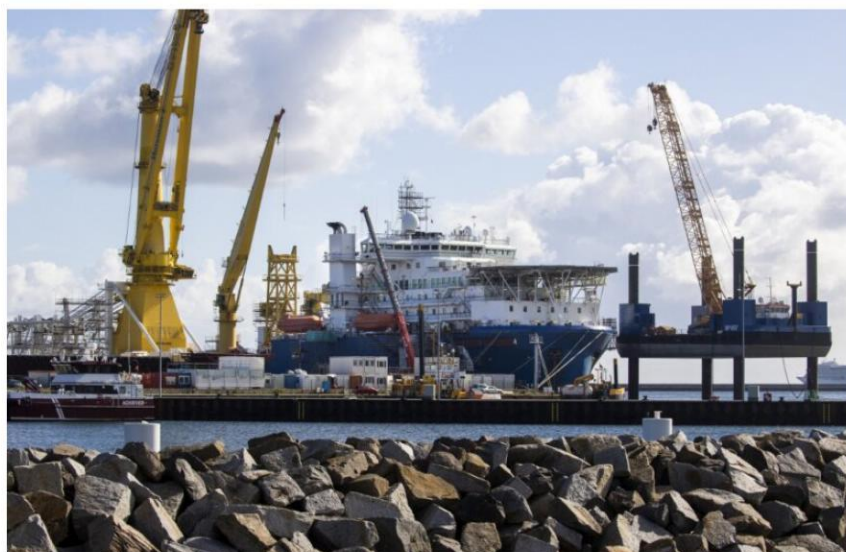
Cases: 139,860,708

Deaths: 3,002,788

Recovered:
118,916,354

Report: Russia's outdated construction fleet in Nord Stream 2 may lead to catastrophe

By Alexander Query. Published April 2 at 4:48 pm




 The Russian pipe laying vessel Akademik Cherskiy is moored in the port of Mukran near Sassnitz on the Baltic Sea island of Ruegen in Germany, on Sept. 7, 2020, as it waits to continue work on the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline. Russia's use of outdated vessels to build its controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline could lead to a catastrophe, according to a report by Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service published on April 2.

Photo by AFP

Russia's use of outdated vessels to build its controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline could lead

to a catastrophe, according to a report by Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service published on April 2.

Russia is forced to use its decaying fleet because economic sanctions against the project discouraged other participants. This creates an ecological disaster risk, the intelligence service stated.

"The use of technologically obsolete vessels and equipment in the future increases the likelihood of a man-made disaster with environmental consequences on a regional scale at any peak load," the report reads.

Of the six vessels working on the project, the Katun is in the worst shape. It's been under repair in the port of Munkebo, Denmark since March 16 and its hull and controls are in dire need of repair.

This is not the first time the pipeline raised ecological concerns.

In 2018, Greenpeace and other environmental groups accused Nord Stream 2 of polluting Germany's Baltic coast with toxic grease found on beaches and in the sea.

People living near the Bay of Greifswald in northeastern Germany reportedly started telling authorities in June about "tennis ball-sized" lumps of pink-purple oil washing ashore, some of it into areas covered by the European Union's Natura 2000 environmental protection program.

The last country to pause the project due to environmental concerns was Denmark. It has since allowed the pipeline to proceed.

In the event of an ecological disaster, it will be Denmark and Sweden that will suffer the most, James Wilson, director of the nonprofit International Foundation for Better Governance, wrote in an opinion piece for the publication EU Today.

Russia has renewed construction at the beginning of the year despite the dangers and sanctions from the US.

According to Nord Stream 2, the pipeline is 95% complete. About 121 kilometers are left to be built and Russia is rushing to finish the project.

If completed, Nord Stream 2 would allow Russia to bypass Ukraine when transporting an annual 110 billion cubic meters to European countries through Germany, depriving Ukraine of at least \$1.5 billion in transit fees per year.

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FOREIGN POLICY

Forthcoming Russia sanctions won't include Nord Stream 2

DOJ's legal approval for a new slate of sanctions to stop the Russia-Germany pipeline was reversed recently.



FireEye CEO Kevin Mandia, SolarWinds CEO Sudhakar Ramakrishna and Microsoft President Brad Smith talk before a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing. The Biden administration is expected to roll out sanctions in response to the Russian espionage campaign known as SolarWinds. | Drew Angerer/Photo via AP

By **NATASHA BERTRAND** and **ANDREW DESIDERIO**

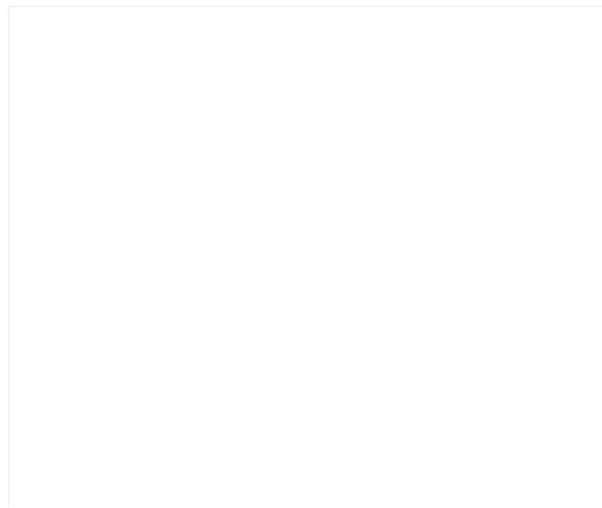
04/14/2021 09:20 PM EDT



Congressionally mandated sanctions against the major Russia-Germany gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 won't be included in the Biden administration's expected rollout of new penalties on Moscow over its SolarWinds espionage campaign and election interference efforts.

The Justice Department gave legal sign-off last month [to at least two sanctions packages targeting Nord Stream 2 AG](#), the company responsible for the planning, construction and subsequent operation of the pipeline, and its CEO Matthias Warnig. But that legal approval was reversed last week amid an ongoing internal debate over which entities meet the legal threshold for sanctions, according to three people familiar with the matter.

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Democratic and Republican lawmakers have already inquired with the State Department about the reversal, which they only learned about through unofficial channels, according to two people familiar with the conversations.

Lawmakers have argued that several pipe-laying vessels and entities, including Nord Stream 2 AG and its CEO, meet the legal threshold for sanctions under the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019, known as PEESA.

But another person familiar with the reversal said some administration officials felt the legal approval was granted prematurely, before the State Department was fully ready to implement the new penalties. Legal signoff is one of the final steps in the interagency process before sanctions are imposed.

The NSC referred to the State Department for comment. The State Department and Justice Department declined to comment.

The Biden administration is expected to roll out new sanctions against Russian government and intelligence officials as soon as Thursday [in response to the Russian espionage campaign known as SolarWinds](#) and election interference in 2020, according to two people with knowledge of the plans. Several Russian diplomats will also be expelled from the U.S. as part of the response, the people said. The State Department was notifying partners and stakeholders of the imminent sanctions on Wednesday night.

At the same time, though, the administration has been reluctant to move too aggressively on Nord Stream 2 as it works to rebuild the U.S.-Germany relationship, officials said. While the administration does want to impede Moscow's energy leverage — President Joe Biden has called Nord Stream 2 “a bad deal for Europe” — it also wants to strengthen the U.S. relationship with Berlin, which has been lobbying Washington for the pipeline's construction to continue unabated.

“We very much want to restore our relationship with Germany after four years of abuse by the previous administration,” said a senior administration official. “But Congress is not budging. We are between a rock and a hard place.”

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Lawmakers are indeed [pressuring the administration to do more to halt the pipeline](#), which is more than 95 percent complete and proceeding quickly. Last month, the Danish Maritime Authority revealed that a new Russian pipe-laying vessel named the Akademik Cherskiy would soon be joining Nord Stream 2, potentially speeding construction of the pipeline even further.

The issue is particularly urgent for Ukraine. Nord Stream 2 would allow Russia to bypass Ukraine in shipping Russian gas to the EU through the Baltic Sea, depriving Kyiv of crucial revenue.

The Biden administration is required under PEESA to submit a report to Congress every 90 days — the next is due in May — identifying entities involved in the construction of the pipeline that are eligible for sanctions. The list now includes at least seven Russian vessels, according to a letter sent by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho) to Secretary of State Antony Blinken last month.

So far, however, the State Department has not issued new sanctions on Nord Stream 2; rather, it has upheld sanctions imposed by the Trump administration on the Russian pipe-laying vessel Fortuna and its owner KVT-RUS.

FILED UNDER: STATE DEPARTMENT, RUSSIA, JOE BIDEN, JOE BIDEN 2020, 

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U.S. Justice Department gave green light to new U.S. sanctions against Nord Stream 2 in March

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Thu 4/8/2021 9:51 AM

To: Daniel Vajdich <dvajdich@yorktownsolutions.com>

<https://www.interfax.ru/world/760070>

Approval of the US Department of Justice of new sanctions against Nord Stream 2

Moscow. April 7. INTERFAX.RU - The US administration is considering the possibility of introducing another package of sanctions in connection with the Nord Stream 2 project, Politico writes, citing an American official who is aware of this situation.

According to the source of the publication, the US Department of Justice in March gave the go-ahead for at least two more sanctions packages aimed at the operator of the Nord Stream 2 AG project and its head Matthias Warnig. The interlocutor of Politico emphasizes that so far these packages have not been approved.

According to him, the inclusion of Nord Stream 2 AG and Warnig in the sanctions list, which the US administration will have to submit to Congress next month, remains in question.

Earlier on Wednesday, Politico reported that the US administration is exploring the possibility of appointing a special envoy in negotiations with partners on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The task of the special envoy will be to convince the partners of the need to close the project.

According to the interlocutors of the publication, in the American administration, Amos Hochstein is seen in this position, who was the coordinator for international energy issues in the Barack Obama administration and worked closely with Joe Biden, who was then vice president. Hochstein's candidacy at the end of March was unofficially proposed by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. However, Hochstein himself has not yet agreed to this work and refuses to comment.

<https://ria.ru/20210407/sanktsii-1727283978.html>

Politico: US approves two sanctions packages against Nord Stream 2

MOSCOW, April 7 - RIA Novosti. The US Justice Department has approved two packages of sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, but no final decision has yet been made on them, Politico reported, citing a source in the US administration.

Blacklists approved by the ministry affect the operator of the project - the Swiss company Nord Stream 2 AG and its head Mathias Warnig.

The Nord Stream 2 sanctions packages will be presented to Congress in May.

The final decision will be made by President Joe Biden, and it is not yet clear whether Nord Stream 2 AG and Warnig will make the final list.

Earlier, the publication reported that the White House is discussing the appointment of a US special envoy to negotiate the termination of the construction of Nord Stream 2. The role of the emissary was offered to Biden's close adviser, ex-State Department coordinator for international energy issues, Amos Hochstein.

As the publication clarified, some members of the administration fear that the appointment of a special envoy may delay the imposition of sanctions. At the same time, Berlin and Moscow may perceive this plan as a signal of Washington's readiness for some "form of peaceful settlement" of the issue.

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FOREIGN POLICY

Biden looks to appoint special envoy to kill Russia-Germany energy pipeline

The administration is vetting Amos Hochstein to negotiate the thorny geopolitics surrounding Nord Stream 2.



Amos Hochstein, who served as the special envoy and coordinator for international energy affairs under President Barack Obama, was informally offered the special envoy role late last month and is being vetted. | AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

By NATASHA BERTRAND and ANDREW DESIDERIO

04/07/2021 01:06 PM EDT



The White House is in talks to appoint a special envoy to lead negotiations on halting the construction of Russia-to-Germany gas pipeline Nord Stream 2, current and former U.S. officials said, as the Biden administration grapples with how to stymie a nearly completed energy project that would serve as a major financial and geopolitical boon to Moscow.

Amos Hochstein, who served as the special envoy and coordinator for international energy affairs under President Barack Obama and was a close adviser and confidant to then-Vice President Joe Biden, was informally offered the role by National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan late last month and is being vetted, the officials said, but he has not yet accepted the job.

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Hochstein, who stepped down from the supervisory board of the Ukrainian energy company Naftogaz late last year, declined to comment.

The potential appointment of an envoy indicates a new strategic focus by the administration. Previously, the White House had tasked the European affairs experts at the National Security Council and the State Department with handling the pipeline diplomacy; officials tell POLITICO there's consensus that the thorny geopolitics surrounding Nord Stream 2 now require more dedicated attention — especially as the pipeline, which is already nearly 96 percent finished, races toward completion.

It's also a nod to the pressure campaign from Capitol Hill, where senators from both parties have been pushing the Biden administration to effectively cripple the pipeline before it's too late. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) has held up speedy confirmation of Biden's top State Department nominees as part of that effort, and other senators have publicly called on the administration to accelerate a sanctions package targeting entities involved in the pipeline's construction, as required by law.



WASHINGTON AND THE WORLD

How One European Pipeline Is Derailing Biden's 'America Is Back' Promise

BY DANIEL BENJAMIN

In a recent private meeting, Cruz pressed Victoria Nuland, Biden's pick to lead the State Department's political affairs office, about the possibility of appointing an envoy to handle the matter, according to two people familiar with the conversation. (The senator's office declined to comment.)

Cruz's efforts, though incremental, are having an impact. Last month, the Texas Republican released his hold on CIA Director William Burns' nomination after Secretary of State Antony Blinken [publicly committed](#) to shutting down the pipeline.

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“The [State] Department reiterates its warning that any entity involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline risks U.S. sanctions and should immediately abandon work on the pipeline,” Blinken said.

But one U.S. official familiar with the matter argued that the administration was already dragging its feet. The Justice Department gave legal sign-off last month to at least two sanctions packages targeting Nord Stream 2 AG, the company responsible for the planning, construction and subsequent operation of the pipeline, and its CEO Matthias Warnig, the official said. But the packages have not yet been implemented, and it remains to be seen whether the administration will include Nord Stream 2 AG and Warnig on the list of sanctionable entities that it is required to provide to Congress next month.

Some officials, however, are wary that the appointment of an envoy could actually be counterproductive, and further delay sanctions against Nord Stream 2 by telegraphing to Germany and Russia that the U.S. is open to some form of reconciliation. But a Senate Democratic aide told POLITICO that Hochstein’s appointment to the role would be “welcomed” by Democrats. “Amos would be a great person for this position,” the aide said, noting that he “has a good reputation” and worked on similar issues during the Obama administration.

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While it is not yet clear what the envoy's exact mandate and parameters would be, the role would at least initially be focused on managing delicate negotiations over how to impede the pipeline without alienating a key U.S. ally in Berlin. It might then expand to deal more broadly with international energy issues, similar to what Hochstein was doing at the State Department under Obama, said two people involved in the discussions.

The diplomatic situation is extremely delicate, officials said. The administration wants to impede Moscow's energy leverage — Biden has called it “a bad deal for Europe” — but it also wants to strengthen the U.S. relationship with Germany, which has been lobbying Washington for the pipeline's construction to continue unabated. “We're between a rock and a hard place,” a senior administration official said last month.

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The German government has floated several potential offers to get the U.S. to lay off the pipeline, said people familiar with the conversations, including trade deals and increased investment in green energy projects in Europe and Ukraine.

But U.S. lawmakers from both parties have argued that regardless of any German attempts to sweeten the deal for Washington, the pipeline would place Russian infrastructure inside NATO territory and thereby threaten its member

states. It would also make some European countries more dependent on Russian energy, the lawmakers contend, while depriving Ukraine of billions of dollars in revenue by allowing Russia to circumvent the country when transferring gas to Europe.

“[C]ounteracting Russian malign aggression is in the vital national security interests of all of NATO, all EU members, and our partners in Eastern Europe,” Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) and Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) wrote [in a letter](#) to Blinken late last month. “We cannot lose sight of this central principle as we engage diplomatically on the pipeline.”

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