

Russia threatens to cut Ukraine gas over Donbas war

By **ANDREW RETTMAN** 

BRUSSELS, 7. JUN, 07:13

Russia has threatened to cut off Ukraine's gas for political reasons, immediately after announcing the completion of a new pipeline to Germany.

Russian president Vladimir Putin did it at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum on Friday (4 June), which was attended by Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz and former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

Putin said the first link in the Germany pipeline, called Nord Stream 2, was finished and that Russian state firm Gazprom was ready to fill it with gas.

"Gazprom's ready for deliveries, but everything will depend on the German regulator," he said.

When the St Petersburg forum's moderator mentioned that Russian gas currently "feeds" Ukraine's transit pipelines to the EU, Putin interjected, saying: "Do you think we should feed everyone? Do we have such a duty to feed everyone, or what?".

He said he would honour existing contracts for Ukraine transit supplies, worth some €2bn a year to Kiev.

But speaking of supplies in the long term, he added:

"Everything's possible, we're ready for this and we want it [future Ukraine transit], but we need goodwill on the part of our Ukrainian partners".

"Spend money not in order to maintain the army and aim it at solving the problems of Donbas by force, but in order to improve the economy, work with people - do you understand?," Putin said.

Donbas is a region in east Ukraine which Russia invaded in 2014 after a pro-Western revolution in Kiev.

Moscow wants Kiev to give two Russia-puppet 'republics' in the occupied zone a constitutional status in a federalised Ukraine.

The threat of politically motivated gas-cut offs, which could now also hit Poland and the Baltic states, was the main reason why they and the US had opposed Nord Stream 2.

But German chancellor Angela Merkel has backed it for the sake of cheaper gas for German people.

Her predecessor, Schröder, now works for Gazprom.

And Kurz, who spoke at the St Petersburg event by video-link, also praised Nord Stream 2.

"Austrian companies are taking part in this. We, as well as Germany and some other European countries, see it in a positive way," he said.

"Nord Stream 2 now provides us with safe, modern gas pipeline routes ... we're very optimistic about it," Kurz said.

Sputnik V lie

The Russian president also used the St Petersburg event to promote Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine.

"The Russian vaccine has been declared the safest and most effective vaccine in the world, with an efficacy of over 96 percent. According to our regulatory bodies, not a single death has been reported among those who received the vaccine," Putin said.

He complained EU states were not buying it because the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in Amsterdam, the EU regulator, was taking so long to approve it.

But his claim that "not a single death has been reported among those who received the vaccine" was a lie.

EUobserver has published [case files](#) from Russian vaccine-administration body RosPotrebNadzor showing that four people died shortly after taking Sputnik V.

The authenticity of the RosPotrebNadzor files was confirmed by Russia's top virologist, Denis Logunov, and by the EMA, which said it was treating the deaths "seriously".

And, for his part, Kurz, who was grilled by the St Petersburg-forum moderator as though he spoke for the EU, defended Europe's approach.

"Sputnik hasn't yet been approved ... We're sorry about that," Kurz said.

"We'd really be ready to purchase Sputnik for Austria and use this vaccine, but as I said, we can only use vaccines in Austria that ... are approved for use in the EU," he said.

EU spokesman

The Austrian leader backed old EU sanctions on Russia, imposed over its invasion of Ukraine, which come up for renewal in June and September.

He also defended new EU sanctions on Russian ally Belarus for its recent hijacking of a Ryanair passenger flight to snatch an opposition activist, Roman Protasevich, who was living in Poland.

"We in Austria support the ... sanctions that the European Union has introduced [on Russia], because we believe that there've been steps that are contrary to international law," Kurz said on Russia's Ukraine invasion.

"He [Protasevich] isn't a terrorist, but a blogger and journalist," Kurz also said.

"Forcing a plane to make an emergency landing, arresting people, then beating confessions out of them ... this isn't normal," the Austrian chancellor said, after Belarus paraded Protasevich on TV in a forced confession to his 'crimes'.

SHARE ARTICLE

Twitter

Facebook

LinkedIn

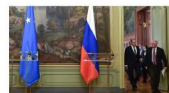
Reddit

Mail



EXCLUSIVE

**Belgium
seizes
assets
in
Russia
money-
laundering
affair**



**Ukraine
urges
Borrell
to visit
Russia
front
line**

16. APR, 07:24



**EU
highlights
suffering
of
Belarusian
boy-
prisoners**

3. JUN, 07:10