

Germany tells US to back off over Russian pipeline



BERLIN – Germany on Thursday warned Washington to mind its own business after US lawmakers gave initial approval to a bill that would sanction contractors working on a Russian pipeline to Germany.

“European energy policy is decided in Europe, not in the US,” Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said on Twitter.

“We reject external interference,” he said.

The 9.5 billion euro (\$10.6 billion) Nord Stream 2 pipeline will run under the Baltic Sea and is set to double shipments of Russian natural gas to Germany.

The German-Russian Chamber of Commerce (AHK) said the pipeline was important for the energy security of Europe as a whole and called for retaliatory sanctions against the United States if the bill passes.

“Europe should respond to sanctions that damage Europe with counter-sanctions,” said AHK chief Matthias Schepp.

Supporters of the 1,230-kilometer (760-mile) line say it will be a reliable source of cheap energy but critics warn it could end up vastly increasing Russia’s political influence in Europe.

The EU joined in criticizing proposed US action.

EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan said Brussels “opposes the imposition of sanctions against any EU companies conducting legitimate business”.

“The (European) Commission objective has always been to ensure that Nord Stream operates in a very transparent and in a non-discriminatory way with the appropriate degree of oversight,” he said.

Germany’s Schepp said the sanctions would end up affecting European companies more than Russia.

Half of the project is financed by Russian gas giant Gazprom, with the rest covered by its European partners: Germany’s Wintershall and Uniper, Anglo-Dutch Shell, France’s Engie and Austria’s OMV.

Despite its own diplomatic tensions with Russia, including over the murder of a former Chechen rebel in Berlin earlier this year, Germany has repeatedly defended the long-running project.

The German economy ministry said it was awaiting the result of a US Senate vote expected next week on the bill – part of much wider US defense legislation.

US President Donald Trump has already said he would sign off on the measures if they are approved.

The bill requires the US State Department to report back

within 60 days with the names of companies and individuals involved in pipe-laying for Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream, another pipeline from Russia to Turkey.

The sanctions envisioned by the bill include asset freezes and revocation of US visas for the contractors.

One major contractor that could be hit by the sanctions is Swiss-based pipeline laying company Allseas, which has been hired by Gazprom to build the offshore section.

The power of Gazprom and therefore the Russian state is at the center of concerns about the pipeline in the United States and in eastern and central Europe.

Europe is Russia's main customer for natural gas and critics fear the pipeline, which has an annual capacity of 55 billion cubic meters, will increase its reliance.

Countries like Ukraine, a major transit country for Russian gas, also fear they could lose influence.

Russia had hoped to launch the pipeline in late 2019 but the completion has been delayed by difficulties in obtaining permits from Denmark.

In October, Copenhagen gave Russia a permit to build a section of the pipeline on the Danish continental shelf in the Baltic Sea.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak told reporters last month that he expected the pipeline to become operational in mid-2020. — AFP

World on course to burn more coal, threatening climate goals



Coal consumption is set to rise in the coming years as growing demand for electricity in developing countries outpaces a shift to cleaner sources of electricity in industrialised nations. While use of the most polluting fossil fuel had a historic dip in 2019, the International Energy Agency anticipates steady increases in the next five years. That means the world will face a significant challenge in meeting pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. “There are few signs of change,” the agency wrote in its annual coal report released in Paris yesterday. “Despite all the policy changes and announcements, our forecast is very similar to those we have made over the past few years.” While this year is on track for biggest decline ever for coal power, that’s mostly due to high growth in hydroelectricity and relatively low electricity demand in India and China, said Carlos Fernandez Alvarez, senior energy analyst at the Paris-based IEA. Despite the drop, global coal consumption is likely

to rise over the coming years, driven by demand in India, China and Southeast Asia. Power generation from coal rose almost 2% in 2018 to reach an all-time high, remaining the world's largest source of electricity. The steady outlook for coal comes in spite of waning demand in industrialised nations. Europe has set a goal of zeroing out carbon pollution by the middle of the century, which would mean drastic reductions for coal. In the US, competition from natural gas has cut into demand for coal, despite President Donald Trump's vows to revive the industry. The story is different in Asia, which will more than make up for reductions elsewhere. India, with a population of more than 1.3bn, will see coal generation increase by 4.6% a year through 2024 to help power its growing economy. In Southeast Asia, coal demand will grow more than 5% annually. China, which accounts for almost half the world's consumption, will also have modest growth with usage peaking in 2022. "How we address this issue in Asia is critical for the long-term success of any global efforts to reduce emissions," Fatih Birol, the IEA's executive director, wrote in a foreword to the report. Any new coal plants added to meet the growing power demand in these countries will likely be in use for decades. Even as China's coal consumption slows and then declines after 2022, emissions from the fuel would need to rapidly decline in order to meet climate targets. Under current policies, the world is set to warm almost 3 degrees Celsius (5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century. That's double the rate scientists say is needed to constrain the worst impacts of climate change. To prevent those increases, it would be necessary to use technology that captures and stores carbon as it's emitted from power plants, the IEA said. While the technology is expensive and untested at scale. But with coal here to stay, it may be the only option to reduce emissions.

StanChart boosts clean energy target and nudges clients on coal



Standard Chartered Plc plans to facilitate \$35bn of funding for clean technology by 2025, joining rival banks including Goldman Sachs Group Inc that are stepping up their climate-change promises. The London-based bank also vowed to only support those clients who are moving to generate less than 10% of their earnings from thermal coal by 2030, according to a statement on Tuesday. The new target extends the previous 2016 goal that foresaw \$4bn of green funding by 2020. "There has not been sufficient investment into this sector across emerging Asia, Africa and the Middle East," the bank said. Chief executive officer Bill Winters said Standard Chartered is the first bank active in emerging markets to "confirm that we will be out of thermal coal by 2030." Emerging markets are the focus of Standard Chartered's business, and generally rely more heavily on coal to generate electricity than developed countries do. The bank also said it will withdraw from three coal-fired power projects that it agreed to finance before revising its policies last year. On

Monday, Goldman Sachs announced a revision to its own policies, pledging to avoid directly financing new thermal coal mines and upstream Arctic oil exploration. Standard Chartered also released a report detailing its progress aligning its lending portfolio with the goals of the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global warming to significantly below 2 degrees. Standard Chartered's plan to withdraw support from clients that aren't transitioning away from coal will be implemented in phases, starting in January 2021. In 2018, the bank said it would prohibit direct financing for new coal-fired power plants.

EU Overcomes Nuclear Divide to Reach Key Green-Finance Deal



The European Union agreed on a landmark green-finance

regulation, advancing the bloc's push to embed environmental goals in standards for banks, money managers and insurers.

EU lawmakers approved an accord on the list of sustainable activities late Monday, following an agreement by the bloc's member states earlier in the day. Policymakers had to overcome last-minute divisions over the kinds of technologies that should be eligible to be classified as green, with nuclear-energy proponents, including France, seeking revisions to an earlier version of the proposed rules.

"With this deal, we now have a common language and new rules for financial markets," Pascal Canfin, a French member of the EU parliament, said in an email. The final compromise means both nuclear and gas "are neither included nor excluded in principle" from parts of the list, and – like all other activities – would feature only if they comply with the so-called "do no significant harm" principle, he said.

The EU's definitions of sustainable activities for investment purposes, dubbed "taxonomy," are the centerpiece of its plan to regulate the fast-growing market of green finance, in the hope of directing trillions of euros to fund a radical overhaul of the region's economy. It's meant to define what's green and what's not, an effort that could find a range of uses and serve as an example for governments around the world.

The back-and-forth over the rules shows what kind of obstacles the EU has to overcome to meet its ambitious climate targets. Leaders last week agreed that the bloc should achieve zero net emissions by 2050, paving the way for a flurry of legislation that's needed for the unprecedented clean-up of the economy.

Green Investment

The agreement on the taxonomy is a vital step as it's meant to help countries shoulder the cost of fighting global warming. "This is the much-needed enabler to get green investments to

flow and help Europe reach climate neutrality by 2050,” Valdis Dombrovskis, the European Commissioner in charge of financial-services policy, said on Twitter.

Monday’s agreement on the green investment catalog is just the first step of the process, setting out the overall framework. The concrete list of activities will be drawn up based on recommendations by a panel of experts and adopted by the European Commission, the EU’s executive arm.

All financial products will need to make clear to which extent they comply with the new framework, though issuers can opt-out if they don’t pursue any environmental goals. The first set of definitions will be applied from the end of 2021, with the rest following a year later.

“We are delighted that there is progress in the approval of the EU taxonomy,” Nathan Fabian, chief responsible investment officer at Principles for Responsible Investment, said in an email. “Investors in Europe and around the world see the taxonomy as a major reform in investment practices and are keen to understand their obligations under the framework.”

Gazprom and Ukraine agree on gas transit, settle legal issues



Bloomberg/ Moscow

Gazprom PJSC and Ukraine reached an agreement that will allow Russian gas to flow to Europe via its neighbour through the end of 2024 and settle all of the related legal disputes.

Ukraine's gas company, Naftogaz PJSC, will organise the transit of Russian gas through the country, with a booked pipeline capacity of 65bn cubic meters for 2020 shipments, Gazprom chief executive officer Alexey Miller said in a statement yesterday.

In 2021-2024, the booked capacities will reach 40bn cubic meters a year, he said. The companies also agreed to mull the possibility of gas transit through 2034, according to a protocol, signed late Friday evening in Minsk. An extension for the following 10 years may be on the same terms as the five-year deal, according to Ukraine's Energy Ministry.

"The transit via Ukraine will continue and the strategic nature of the transit was understood by everyone and I believe it would help us open a new chapter in this relationship," EU Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic told Bloomberg yesterday.

The bilateral agreement paves the way for the continuation of Russian gas flows to Europe via Ukraine, which has been the

key transit route for Gazprom even amid the legal spats and political tensions between the two nations.

It also supports Europe's energy security as Russia has been the European Union's dominant and often cheapest energy supplier, providing some 37% of the fuel to the region last year. The current 10-year transit deal between Russia and Ukraine expires January 1. "There are very precise deadlines until when everything should happen," Sefcovic said. "I have no doubt that everything will go smoothly as of January 1 because there was full understanding of what needs to be done."

Russia and Ukraine reached the deal as the US administration imposed sanctions on Russia's future subsea gas-export pipeline, Nord Stream 2. The \$11bn pipeline is just weeks away from completion, but it has faced criticism from the US, and it wasn't immediately clear if the pipeline work can be completed without the input of AllSeas Group SA, which said it would halt operations.

Talks to find a deal between Russia and Ukraine intensified in recent days as the deadline loomed. "To be honest we have done almost the impossible in three months," Ukraine's Energy Minister Oleksiy Orzhel told reporters in Kiev yesterday.

Under the deal, Gazprom and Ukraine have agreed not to start any new gas lawsuits against each other and to cancel all their current legal claims that haven't been subject to court rulings, according to Miller. The Russian gas giant will also pay to Naftogaz \$2.9bn awarded by the Stockholm arbitration in 2018.

The sum includes a \$2.6bn debt and fines accumulated thereafter, a spokesman for Gazprom said in a separate statement. "It is very important that these \$3bn in line with Stockholm arbitration will be paid in cash if we implement all the package of proposals before year-end," Orzhel said. At the same time Ukraine will withdraw its legal claims against the Russian company.

Last month, Naftogaz filed a lawsuit against Gazprom with a court of arbitration in Stockholm, asking to revise transit

fees totalling more than \$12bn.

Gazprom and the Ukrainian government are also set to sign an “amicable agreement” on cancelling an antitrust claim that has reached about \$7.4bn, including fines. All the legal issues should be resolved by December 29, according to the protocol.

How cleaner ship fuel will raise costs, ease coughing



By Brian Wingfield/ London

Ship owners and refiners are facing the biggest change to their industries in a generation: strict environmental rules for vessel fuel that kick in on January 1, 2020. Technically, it's just a cap on sulphur content, but the repercussions are sweeping. Governments and companies across the globe have raced to prepare amid concerns about fuel shortages that could affect thousands of ships. Consumers, from cruise ships to truckers, will face higher prices. Some companies are already

making a fortune. But the health benefits are expected to be substantial around the globe. If adopted widely – and enforcement is an open question – it may be the biggest single global change for air quality ever.

1. What are the new rules?

Fuel must have a maximum sulphur content of 0.5%, down from the current 3.5% limit in most cases. Known as IMO 2020, the regulation is set by the International Maritime Organization, a UN agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping as well as marine pollution by ships. Sulphur emissions are linked to acid rain and medical conditions such as asthma and heart disease.

2. Why does shipping cause pollution?

Because ships use heavy fuel oil – the gunk that's left over in the refining process once more valuable, less sulphurous products such as gasoline, diesel and jet fuel have been squeezed out of crude oil. Although IMO rules have progressively tightened sulphur limits since 2005, there's a long way to go: A Finnish study in 2016 estimated that air pollution from ships under current guidelines would contribute to more than 570,000 premature deaths worldwide between 2020 and 2025.

3. How are refiners affected by shipping rules?

Even though the rules apply specifically to ships, those vessels have to get their fuel from somewhere. Simply put, if refiners can make more IMO-compliant fuel, they stand to make more money. Complex refiners, such as those on the US Gulf Coast, would benefit. So-called simple plants, which can't adjust as easily, could be at risk. Demand for so-called sweet (low sulphur) crude such as Brent is set to rise, at the expense of sour (high sulphur) crude produced mainly in the Middle East. Refiners' economics from making a range of fuels – from gasoline to jet fuel – are being upended.

4. Which fuel will shippers switch to?

As of now, they seem to be favouring a somewhat broad group of products called very-low sulphur ship fuel, or VLSFO. Another option is marine gasoil, a distillate-based fuel. For this reason, analysts expect distillate demand to increase when the rules take effect. However, no single, IMO-compliant benchmark fuel has emerged. The market is still evolving, and companies including Exxon Mobil Corp and Royal Dutch Shell Plc plan to offer a range of products. Shell has already made \$1bn from fuel oil trading this year.

5. Will there be enough compliant fuel?

It depends who you ask. In recent months, a flotilla of vessels storing compliant fuel has gathered near Singapore, the world's largest bunkering port. Shipping company Euronav NV has even filled a supertanker with oil to help it comply with the rules and sent it to the region – for a profit of \$52mn by one estimate. In other places, such as Gibraltar, there's been a back-up of vessels. Researcher EnSys Energy & Systems Inc – an early sceptic of fuel availability – thinks that even if there's enough compliant-fuel at the outset, stockpiles will wind down within months.

6. Do shippers have any other options?

Yes, they can install pollution-reducing scrubbers that can handle oil with a higher-sulphur content. But here's the thing: Fitting a scrubber can cost as much as \$6mn per ship. New orders for scrubbers have dwindled, and only 3,000 new orders are expected to be installed by the end of the year, according to BloombergNEF. That means the vast majority of ships will need to switch to using more expensive, low-pollutant fuel.

7. How will these changes be enforced?

The IMO says it expects strict enforcement of the rules, and it's up to ports to make sure that happens. Some, such as Greece, have pledged strict adherence and potential sanctions for violators. Others, like Fujairah, the Middle East's main

bunkering hub, are taking a much softer approach. In places like Denmark and Norway, drone aircraft are being used to sniff out those who run afoul of the IMO's mandate. Still, it's going to be tricky – about half of the IMO's members didn't sign up for the switch.

8. Who will suffer?

Potentially anyone who buys petroleum products – including cruise ships, trucking companies and automobile drivers. That's because the extra demand for cleaner fuel from shippers could mean refiners may produce lower quantities of products such as jet fuel and gasoline. Some shippers contend that the new rules have the potential to upend world trade, since the cost of compliance will be high for many.

A major shipping fuel change is coming, and so are higher prices



Bloomberg/ London

A defining moment in the history of the oil-refining and shipping industries is at hand.

In fewer than two weeks, thousands of ships the world over will be forced to use fuel containing less sulphur in order to comply with global rules set out by the International Maritime Organization. Those who don't could face penalties and even imprisonment. Ports are deploying drones to – literally – sniff out wrongdoers. The regulations are having a profound effect on oil refineries and the cost of seaborne trade looks set to rise.

What's the big deal?

For decades, shipping has been the oil market's dumping ground for a pollutant blamed on aggravating human health conditions including asthma and causing acid rain. That's because refineries have struggled to eradicate it when turning crude into fuels. Even so, when the regulations were mandated back in October 2016, they came as a shock to many observers who had expected a later start date. While a panic about getting ready has subsided, there's clearly still work to do – as a slump in the price of non-compliant fuel demonstrates.

"IMO 2020 is the most fundamental and dramatic product

specification change the oil industry has experienced, with an impact on both shipping and refining,” said Torbjorn Tornqvist, the chief executive officer of Gunvor Group, one of the world’s largest oil and gas traders. “It has the potential to change every product and crude differential out there.”

The cost of shipping a twenty-foot box-load of goods from Latin America to Europe could rise by \$26, according to IHS Markit, a consultancy. A week-long ship cruise could go up by \$130 per cabin, the firm estimates. Add 5 cents onto a crate of bananas.

It’s still too early to say exactly who the biggest winners and losers will be among refineries because there are thousands of variables that shape their profit – more than 600 grades of crude, and many ways of setting up the plants.

Safety concerns

The shipping industry has been consistent in flagging a safety concern about the rules. As yet, there’s no single global standard. The new fuel must simply have certain properties – including sulphur and other important metrics – that don’t exceed specified levels.

But the lack of a single global product means refineries can make a compliant fuel in different ways. It’s thought that some will essentially be low-sulphur crudes that are carefully mixed with other oils, for example. Another way of making the product is to mix the residues from crude that have gone through what’s known as vacuum processing in a refinery with other material. These different approaches mean the ships’ chief engineers will need to be vigilant so as to avoid mixing incompatible fuels.

Proof of the greater risks have emerged in northwest Europe, where supplies of the new fuel have been found to contain too much sediment. If such fuel found its way onto ships, it could potentially clog filters and lead to engine problems.

“We still have concerns over safety and availability of compliant fuels,” said Guy Platten, secretary general of the International Chamber of Shipping, an umbrella group for

maritime trade associations. "This is a pressing issue."

Trade impact

There are already signs that the changeover is having an impact on maritime logistics.

In Singapore, the world's biggest refuelling centre, vessels have had to wait longer than normal to collect bunker fuel. Likewise, the government of Gibraltar said that a lack of refuelling barges has emerged.

"When you consider that 90% of global trade is carried out by seas, it is very important," said Robert Hvide Macleod, the chief executive officer for the management unit of Frontline Ltd, one of the world's biggest supertanker owners. "It will surely be disruptive and create some supply chain bottlenecks in the early goings and logistics constraints when it comes to sourcing marine fuels."

In broad terms, fuel represents shipping's single biggest expense and the new types are trading at several hundred dollars per tonne more than the old variety. So the cost of seaborne trade could creep up if owners manage to pass on the higher prices.

"I think we will see its impact on global trade in terms of waiting days and increased costs," said Sadan Kaptanoglu, president of BIMCO, the world's largest shipping association. "There could even be chaos in extreme situations, where fuel shortages could delay cargo deliveries and non-compliance by ships ending in port state punishments and court cases."

Compliance complications

It's important to remember that oil refineries and shipping companies have spent billions getting ready.

Some ship owners installed scrubbers, units that can cost several million dollars each and allow carriers to remove sulphur from fuel as it's burnt. This enables them to keep using today's cheaper product. Likewise, refineries have invested in technology to convert sulphur-rich crude into higher-quality fuels.

For compliant companies, cheating by others is a problem. Yet there could be non-compliance, at least initially. Industry estimates are that something like 10%-15% of the fleet won't comply with the rules at the start.

Not every country in the world signed up to the regulations, including some large coastal states with significant refining capacity. Even among those that did, not all look likely to start with strict enforcement. There's also a disparity between what penalties will be imposed from one nation to the next.

South Africa, which sits on a shipping lane connecting eastern and western hemispheres, doesn't yet have the domestic laws in place to punish non-compliant vessels.

Bottom line

Nevertheless, these rules should work.

Full enforcement may happen more slowly than the IMO and some in the shipping and refining industries would like. There's a big financial incentive to cheat, and an opportunity to do so on selected trades.

Barring any obvious safety concerns though, the overriding view of analysts is that there should nonetheless be substantial compliance.

That means less airborne pollution and be a positive for those companies that invested in conforming.

"There's almost certainly never been a simultaneous global specification change in the oil industry," said Spencer Welch, oil markets and downstream director at IHS Markit. "For the whole world to change specification of a product on the same day is almost unheard of."

Bullish oil bets surge after Opec+ reaches deal on cuts



LONDON, Dec 16 (Reuters) – Hedge fund managers piled back into petroleum last week after Saudi Arabia and its allies in the OPEC+ group of major oil exporters announced deeper-than-expected cuts to their production in the first quarter of 2020.

Hedge funds and other money managers bought futures and options equivalent to 154 million barrels in the six most important contracts linked to petroleum prices in the week to Dec. 10.

Purchases were the largest in any one week for more than two years, according to position records published by ICE Futures Europe and the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission on Friday.

In recent weeks, portfolio managers have struggled to form a consistent view about production and consumption next year, amid conflicting signals about the intentions of OPEC+ and prospects for a U.S.-China trade deal.

The result has been exceptional volatility and reversals in hedge fund positioning on a weekly basis. Last week's purchases reversed sales of 107 million barrels in the previous week, which in turn reversed purchases of 144 million in the week to Nov. 26, as managers were whipsawed by rumours in the run up to the OPEC+ meeting and conflicting signals on the likelihood of a phase one U.S.-China trade pact.

In the event, funds were buyers across the board last week, including NYMEX and ICE WTI (80 million barrels), ICE Brent (43 million), U.S. gasoline (12 million), U.S. heating oil (11 million) and European gasoil (8 million).

Buying in NYMEX and ICE WTI was the heaviest since the original OPEC+ output deal was announced in December 2016 (<https://tmsnrt.rs/2YPLHSM>).

The hedge fund community has now accumulated a net long position across the six main contracts equivalent to 775 million barrels, up from a recent low of 437 million in early October and the highest since late May.

Fund managers own 5.3 long positions for every short, up from 2.67 in the middle of October. From a positioning perspective, risks look roughly equal, with the long-short ratio sitting roughly in the middle of its range over the last three years.

The danger of long liquidation causing a setback in prices is matched by the potential for some further short covering and fresh buying pushing the market higher.

From a fundamental perspective, however, fund managers seem increasingly confident the global economy will avoid a recession and OPEC+ will cut output enough to avert a build up in inventories next year.

The result is that hedge funds are gradually loading up on petroleum derivatives, buying a total of 338 million barrels over the last nine weeks, in anticipation of a tighter market

and higher prices in 2020.

GECF highlights challenges posed by climate change at COP25



Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) secretary-general Dr Yury Sentyurin spoke at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP25) that concluded in Madrid recently.

Addressing the participants, the GECF official reaffirmed the crucial importance of challenges posed by climate change, alongside with the shared values and joint efforts undertaken by the international community to deal with the environmental issues.

Speaking on behalf of the organisation's member countries – 19 major natural gas producers, Sentyurin emphasised that the natural gas industry looks seriously to technology options that can further promote decarbonisation potential of natural gas, including carbon capture, utilisation and sequestration options, and production of hydrogen from natural gas.

This adds to other progress in efficiency and digitalisation that enables a substantial reduction of greenhouse gases emissions along the entire supply chain.

Furthermore, the current expansion and technology progress of natural gas vehicles (NGVs) across the world offers a valuable opportunity to reduce emissions in the transportation sector. GECF's strong belief in the role of constructive international co-operation as a driver for effective global responses to climate change and sustainable development was specifically highlighted by the speaker.

Meanwhile, the professional community's main concern is that in the era of energy transitions, introduction of discriminatory regulation against cleaner hydrocarbon fuels such as natural gas, disturbs overall gas markets design, undermines investment in critical gas transport infrastructure and new gas supply projects. Natural gas is a balanced solution that contributes substantially to reducing carbon intensity and pollution resulting from energy-related activities, supports access to modern energy, improves availability of supply, and provides affordable energy.

The "blue fuel" can also be a vector of increased co-operation and technology transfer between energy stakeholders. These credentials have been explicitly recognised in the G20 Ministerial Meeting on Energy Transitions and Global Environment for Sustainable Growth in Japan early this year.

The GECF engagement in the UNFCCC as an observer organisation marks the willingness to contribute to scale up the Member Countries' collective actions in order to reduce the environmental footprint of natural gas.

In this context, the GECF has initiated the Environmental Actions Framework that aims to create a supportive platform allowing Member Countries to share best practices dealing with the environmental challenges, building capabilities and establishing progressive research collaborations on various environment-related topics. This commitment is largely anchored in the GECF Heads of State Declarations including the recent one adopted in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea and the Organisation's Long-Term Strategy.

In line with this environmental ambition, the GECF has reinforced its co-operation with various organisations to

strengthen its research activity, exchange expertise and develop studies related to the interactions between energy and our environment.

Study outcomes are to be translated into concrete recommendations on energy policy actions for the GECF Member Countries.

At the same time, the recently established GECF Gas Research Institute is set to become a pivotal project for the organisation with the aim to develop technical knowledge and innovative technologies that reduce GHGs emissions.

هيل إلى بيروت... القديم على ! قَدَمَه؟



منذ ولاية جورج دبليو بوش، إقترنت السياسة الاميركية بالنفط. تهتم أميركا أوّلاً بأسعار النفط الذي تستخدمه لبسط سيطرتها على الأسواق حاميةً بذلك اقتصادها الوطني، وفي الوقت عينه، تضغط من خلاله على قوى منافسة تعتمد بشكل أساسي عليه وعلى رأسها الصين. يتكئ الاقتصاد الأميركي إذاً على "التموين النفطي" الذي يؤمّن بدوره استقراراً في السوق، كما يؤمّن نوعاً من "التسيّد" يزخر به الدولار على حساب العملات الاخرى.

من هنا، يتخذ موضوع الغاز اللبناني - بكل ما يحمله من تفاصيل تقنية - منحى استراتيجياً بامتياز، علماً أن أبعاده السياسية في شقّيها الداخلي والخارجي مرتبطة بشكل عضوي. فخارجياً يتخذ النفط اللبناني أهمية مضاعفة نظراً "للكميات الهائلة" التي بات من شبه المؤكد أنه يخزنها براً وبحراً. وإن كانت هذه الكميات نظرياً لا تغير الميزان الاستراتيجي المتعلق بانتاج الطاقة في الشرق الاوسط والمطلوبة بغالبيتها للانتاج الصناعي، إلا أن الحقول اللبنانية متصلة جغرافياً بالحقول المصرية والاسرائيلية والسورية والأهم القبرصية. ذلك يعني انه وعدا عن الدور المباشر الذي يحظى به "غاز لبنان" فهو قد يبرز أيضاً لدى طرح إشكالية أساسية هي المتعلقة بآماكن انشاء محطات تسيل وتكرير الغاز بالإضافة الى المنشآت والبنى التحتية الضرورية لتسييله مع آليات نقله وتسويقه. وعليه، لا يمكن التنبؤ بهويّة الدولة التي ستتحوّل بما قد يستجدّ من تحالفات إقليمية ودولية؛ هذا الامر سيحتم حداً أدنى من التعاون بين الدول المعنية، وهنا يكمن بيت القصيد، بما أن هذه البلدان في حالة عداوة أو في حالة تصادم ما بين المحاور السائدة في الاقليم والمرشّح للتفاقم بسبب التنافس الشرس على الثروة الجديدة . في شرق المتوسط .

اما البعد الثالث الذي يكتسبه غاز لبنان فـ"مالي" بحت والمقصود هنا ليس مالية الدولة بل الميل الى الالتفاف حول القانون لاستفادة الفريق السياسي المهيمن، وذلك من خلال السمسرات وعقود الخدمة للشركات والانشاءات المرتبطة بهذا القطاع فضلاً عن القدرة على توظيف "الازلام" تماماً كما جرى ولا يزال في شركتي الاتصالات وكازينو لبنان والكسارات والسدود وغيرها من المجالس التي قد تكون اكثر إغراء، خصوصاً اذا استغلت المراسيم كمنفذ مقونن للهيمنة على ما تبقى من موارد في البلاد، لا سيما وأن التعويل على العائدات النفطية "اليوم"، أي في ظلّ عدم وجود قانون واضح ينظّم وجهة استخدام هذه الاموال من خلال الصندوق السيادي، يعني حُكماً أننا تخلينا عن ثروتنا هذه لخدمة الدين وتحويلها من أموال استثمارية الى أموال "منهوبة".

من هذا المنطلق، لا يجوز الإفراط في التعويل على الثروة النفطية لانتشال لبنان من مأزقه النقدي، فالجدوى الاقتصادية، بحسب الخبراء، للنفط والغاز في المنطقة ككلّ لم تُثبت بعد لا سيما وأن كلفة استخراج هذه المواد من قعر البحر تفوق بكثير الكلفة التي تتكبدها روسيا لاستخراج غازها. وبرأي الخبراء، فإنّ امكان تصدير هذا الغاز

الى أوروبا على سبيل المثال قد يكون صعباً بما أن الاسعار ستكون عاجزة عن منافسة الغاز الروسي من جهة، ومن جهة ثانية بسبب العوامل الجيو - سياسية في منطقة شرقي المتوسط. أما كلٌّ ما أثير عن احتمال إنشاء أنابيب لربط هذه الآبار بأوروبا مروراً باليونان فقد سقط عملياً بعد دخول اسرائيل الى طاولة المباحثات اضافة الى صعوبة تأمين الاموال الاستثمارية اللازمة له.

لا تعني كلٌّ هذه الفرضيات أن دولة من دول العالم الثالث كلبنان "عاجزة عن الاستفادة من ثرواتها النفطية بل يمكن استغلالها، وإن لم يكن للتصدير، فذلك في إصلاح الكهرباء وتحويل الانتاج ليرتكز على الغاز، وهكذا يتم تخفيض العجز وتالياً تقليص الخضوع لهيمنة صندوق النقد الدولي كلما وجدنا أنفسنا مضطرين الى الاقتراض بنسب وشروط تعجيزية"، بحسب الخبراء.

الطروحات الاميركية

من جهة ثانية، تُضاف معضلة ترسيم الحدود التي لا تزال تتخذ حيّزاً من المفاوضات والتي يوليها الجانب الاميركي أهمية كبيرة خصوصاً في ظلّ التواجد الصيني والروسي في المنطقة. ولا شكّ أن مساعد وزير الخارجية الأميركي للشؤون السياسية ديفيد هيل سيتطرق الى هذا الملف خلال زيارته إلى بيروت في الايام القليلة المقبلة.

طروحات ثلاثة، هي ما قدّمه الطرف الاميركي في ما خصّ مسألة ترسيم الحدود مع الكيان الإسرائيلي في المنطقة المتنازع عليها: الاول هو تقسيم رضائي بنسبة ثلث للكيان وثلثين للبنان. الثاني هو تصنيفها كم منطقة عدم أنشطة وبالتالي اعتبارها محظورة للطرفين؛ أما الطرح الثالث فيتمثّل باعتبارها منطقة أنشطة مشتركة، وهو ما يرفضه الجانب اللبناني حتى الساعة متسلّحاً بالقوانين التي ترعى حقوقه في المياه الاقليمية إضافة الى الطلب الذي كان تقدّم به الى الامم المتحدة لحلّ النزاع في هذه القضية" يقول الخبير في قوانين وسياسات الطاقة المحامي علي برّو.

ويضيف برّو في اتصال مع "نداء الوطن" أن "قبرص تتحمّل مسؤولية مخالفة أحكام الاتفاقية مع لبنان سنداً لاتفاقية 2007 حيث لم يكن ينبغي عليها ترسيم الحدود مع الكيان الاسرائيلي من دون موافقة الدولة اللبنانية. من جهتها، أودعت الدولة اللبنانية الامم المتحدة احداثيات منطقتها الاقتصادية الخالصة، إلا أنها قصرت في مطالبتها قبرص لخرقها احكام الاتفاقية معه. من الناحية القانونية،

لبنان جاهز لعملية إعادة الترسيم وفقاً للوسائل العلمية التابعة لقانون البحار. ومن خلال لجؤنا الى القانون الدولي، سنتمكن من "استعادة حقوقنا السيادية في المياه البحرية".

في الاطار عينه، يوضح الخبير النفطي رودي بارودي أنه "من المتوقع أن يأتي ديفيد هيل وفي جعبته ملف ترسيم الحدود البحرية. هذا الموضوع بحاجة الى حل جذري لا سيّما مع بدء لبنان بحفر أول بئر استكشافي مطلع العام المقبل. وبحسب قانون الامم المتحدة للبحار لا شك أن لبنان سيحظى بالحصة الاكبر من المنطقة (UNCLOS) الاقتصادية الخالصة المتنازع عليها، فصحیح أن الكيان الاسرائيلي ليس طرفاً في المعاهدة مع الامم المتحدة، الا أنه طبق قواعدها من خلال تقيده ببنود الاتفاقية بينه وبين قبرص. بالتالي أصبح من الممكن اللجوء الى إتفاقية تنمية مشتركة تماماً كما هي الحال بين الكويت والسعودية في ما يُعرف بالمنطقة المحايدة. بهذه الطريقة، تقوم شركة محايدة بعمليات الاستخراج وتوزّع لكل دولة حصّتها وفق "المعايير الدولية".

كثيرة تصبح التأويلات عندما يتعلّق الأمر بغاز لبنان وليس هناك من حقيقة مطلقة عندما تكون المسألة جيو - سياسية. وحدها الايام المقبلة ستُظهر نوايا الولايات المتحدة تجاه لبنان إلا أن معيار ترسيم الحدود البحرية يجب أن يبقى القانون الدولي منفرداً. ولعلّه من الافضل لهذه الثروة أن تبقى نائمة في قعر البحر لحين ايجاد حلول آنية تُعيد خلق اقتصاد منتج بدلاً من اقتصاد ريعي وترك هذا الملف يأخذ مساره الطبيعي لئلا تصبح عوائده... "أموالاً منهوبة".