

Europe risks rationing if Putin cuts off Russian gas supply



The prospect of Europe getting cut off from Russian gas supplies is starting to get real.

The clock is ticking in a standoff over the Kremlin's demand that its customers in Europe pay in rubles for the fuel, which the region depends on for a fifth of its power generation.

The European Union has said the decree violates sanctions and hands more power to Russia. It suggested an alternative that avoids rubles on Friday, but it's up to Moscow to decide if that's acceptable. Payments come due in May, and that's when the moment of truth arrives.

By refusing President Vladimir Putin's payment terms and testing his threat to turn off the taps, European buyers "would be running a very real risk of their supplies being cut," said Katja Yafimava, a senior research fellow at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

The game of geopolitical chicken could lead to Europe rationing energy for the first time since the oil crisis in the 1970s. As the biggest consumer of Russian gas in Europe, Germany is most exposed, but the fallout would ripple across the continent and beyond. Here's what could happen:

Market meltdown

Europe's natural gas market would show the impact immediately. Trading is already on edge, with prices five times higher than the same time last year. That could get worse.

In the event of a supply disruption, forward contracts could more than triple, especially if Europe enters next winter with depleted storage, according to Kaushal Ramesh, senior analyst, gas and LNG at Rystad Energy.

Such a surge would put governments and central banks under pressure as they seek to control soaring inflation. The risk is that the mounting cost-of-living crisis intensifies and spills over into wider unrest and a deeper crisis.

Power shift

With less fuel for gas-fired generators, the risks of rolling blackouts would increase. While countries would try to shift to other sources, the options are limited.

France would halt large gas-fired power plants to conserve the fuel for other needs, Italy would maximize production from coal or fuel oil, and Germany has discussed burning more local lignite – the dirtiest form of coal. The workarounds are likely to make the region even more polluting.

On the upside, warmer weather would reduce gas consumption for heating, delaying the worst impacts at least until the fall.

By ramping up other energy sources, including an accelerated expansion of renewable power, the EU aims to cut its gas dependency on Russia by two thirds this year.

German rationing

Germany has triggered an emergency plan, with a task force meeting daily to monitor consumption and inventories. Its energy regulator is surveying companies about their usage to help determine how to distribute supplies.

Consumers would be protected as long as possible, and that

means industry would bear the brunt of a rationing plan. That's a big risk for Europe's largest economy. The country depends on Russia for 40% of its gas supplies, and the fuel is critical for processes in the chemicals and metals industries.

At Europe's biggest chemical factory, BASF SE churns out compounds used in manufacturing autos, medicines and fertilizers and all fueled by pipelines filled with Russian gas. The company warns that a sudden halt would send shock waves through many industries and cause irreversible damage to German competitiveness.

The concerns are echoed by the likes of steelmaker Thyssenkrupp AG, automaker Volkswagen AG and utility RWE AG.

"Stopping the pipeline-bound gas supply at this time would have dramatic consequences," RWE Chief Executive Officer Markus Krebber said in an advanced copy of a speech for the company's shareholder meeting next week. Many manufacturers "would no longer be able to operate their plants."

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said a halt to gas flows from Russia would trigger a serious economic crisis in Europe, leading to the loss of millions of jobs.

The sudden halt in Russian gas deliveries could cost Germany's economy 220 billion euros, or about 6.5% of annual gross domestic product, according to a joint forecast of the country's leading economic institutes. The Bundesbank estimates that output could shrink nearly 2% this year in the event of an embargo on Russian coal, oil and gas.

Read more: Germany to Borrow Extra 40 Billion Euros to Cushion War Blow

But the Berlin-based DIW think tank says a combination of energy savings and optimizing alternative supplies could put Germany in position to offset Russian gas as soon as this winter.

The government has expanded its authority over the energy sector with new rules on gas storage. It's also planning to grant itself powers to put critical energy infrastructure under temporary state control.

Global squeeze

Emerging nations would get squeezed by Europe's thirst for energy, especially liquefied natural gas, as they would struggle to compete on price. The region is already pulling most of the spare LNG supply from the U.S. and other nearby exporters, keeping spot rates for the super-chilled fuel well above normal for this time of year.

Pakistan is suffering from blackouts, due in part to European nations outbidding the cash-strapped country for LNG cargoes. Argentina is also dependent on LNG from the spot market and has been forced to fork over hundreds of millions of dollars to secure deliveries for the southern hemisphere's upcoming winter.

Double bluff

As in any game of chicken, there's the chance for one side or both to pull away from the brink. While Europe needs the gas, the continent remains the only potential market in the near term for production from Russian fields.

Turning off the tap now may permanently close the door on Russian energy imports to its neighbor, choking off a key source of revenue in the process. Germany, which has been criticized for cautious support of Ukraine, would face renewed pressure to stand up to Putin more forcefully.

U.S. Natural Gas Surges to 13-Year High on Global Supply Crunch



As a result of strong demand, U.S. natural gasoline prices soared to their highest intraday levels in more than 13 years.

- Despite a drop in backup inventories, production is still flat
- Strong demand from Europe has almost pushed LNG exports to the limit

Futures rose to \$7.558 per million British Thermal Units, surpassing January's -fueled the rally. This was roughly twice the level at the beginning of the year.

As suppliers struggle to keep up with a surge in demand after a pandemic, a global fuel shortage is emerging across the markets. This situation is further complicated by the conflict

in Ukraine. This discount is shrinking, even though U.S. natural gasoline prices have been well below those in Europe and Asia over the past year due to a bounty from shale fields.

The underground caverns and the aquifers holding backup inventories are lower than normal, and production is flat. To help Europe reduce its dependence on Russian energy, the U.S. is currently exporting every molecule possible of liquefied gas.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, temperatures below normal are expected in parts of the northern U.S.A. between April 25 and May 1. This could lead to an increase in demand for heating and power-plant fuels, which would divert supply from storage that is normally used during this time. The U.S.'s shortage of coal has also contributed to the rise in gas prices, which has limited power generators' ability to switch fuels.

According to the Energy Information Administration, inventories increased by 15 billion cubic yards in the week ending April 8, which was less than half of the average gain over the past five years. Stockpiles are still 18% lower than usual.

Russia April Gas Exports Fall On Spot Price Drop, Warmer Weather



(Bloomberg) – Gazprom PJSC’s average daily exports to key foreign buyers so far in April fell to lowest in three months, as warmer weather and lower spot prices started to lure European clients away from Russian gas. The gas giant exported an average of 407 million cubic meters a day to countries outside the former Soviet Union in the first 15 days of April, according to Bloomberg calculations b

The gas giant exported an average of 407 million cubic meters a day to countries outside the former Soviet Union in the first 15 days of April, according to Bloomberg calculations based on a Gazprom statement published Friday. That’s nearly 18% below the daily average for the month of March. The company’s year-to-date exports to its key markets tumbled more than 26% compared to the same period of 2021 to 44.6 billion cubic meters, Gazprom said.

“Russian flows have been reduced and LNG imports strengthened in the last few days, as a result of the TTF day-ahead price falling, making spot volume prices more competitive compared to TTF-indexed Russian pipeline gas,” Rystad Energy analyst

Vinicius Romano said in a research note earlier this week.

The European Union depends on Russia for 40% of the gas it consumes, which makes it challenging for the alliance to stop the purchases immediately in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. However, the bloc is trying taking steps to wean itself off Gazprom supplies, with EU governments starting to assess alternative supply sources.

Moscow's demand that so-called "unfriendly" countries pay for gas deliveries in rubles starting from April is creating additional pressure on its clients to find alternative supplies, as the Kremlin has threatened to cut off exports to buyers that refuse to comply.

Gazprom doesn't provide a detailed export breakdown by country, making it difficult to assess supplies to Turkey and most of Europe, the key market for the company's foreign deliveries. Russian daily flows toward the borders with European nations have averaged nearly 324 million cubic meters between April 1-12, compared with 361.5 million cubic meters per day in March, according to Gazprom data.

Gazprom said it continues to supply gas in line with requests from consumers and is in full compliance with its contractual obligations.

The EU Commission's plan to eventually have the continent's gas storages 90% full by the start of winter is "very ambitious," Gazprom said in the statement. That would imply reinjections of 63 billion cubic meters, which is higher than the volume of gas stored during the warmer months in recent years and still would not cover peak demand if winter is abnormally cold, according to the Russian company.

Gazprom's daily output between April 1-15 averaged 1.393 billion cubic meters, according to Bloomberg calculations. That's 4.3% below the average over the whole of April 2021. Since the start of the year, the producer pumped 155.9 billion

cubic meters of natural gas, down 1.3% year on year, according to Gazprom's data.

Russia's year-to-date domestic gas consumption declined 3.6% compared to the same period in 2021 amid warmer weather in February, Gazprom said.

– *With assistance by Helen Robertson*

Morocco considers onshore, offshore options for LNG import facility



RABAT, April 15 (Reuters) – Morocco is studying options at several ports to build a floating or land-based facility to import liquefied natural gas (LNG), Energy Minister Leila Benali said on Friday.

Morocco relied for much of its gas needs – about 1 billion cubic metres (bcm) annually – on a pipeline that used to channel Algerian gas to Spain, until it was halted last October by Algiers, against the backdrop of worsening relations between the Maghreb's most populous countries.

Whether floating or onshore, studies are underway to choose the “most immediate solution”, Benali told reporters.

The country tendered in January for a study on the upgrade of Mohammedia port near Casablanca to host an LNG floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU).

Mohammedia and the Mediterranean port of Nador appear to be best equipped to host regasification terminals, she said.

“But we can prepare four ports at least,” she said, citing Kenitra and Jorf Lasfar ports.

“It is important for Morocco's energy sovereignty to have regasification capacity on our territory and in our maritime space,” she said.

Morocco will enter the international LNG market “in the upcoming days,” making use of unused capacity at Spanish terminals, she said, without giving further details.

Though she said: “We are not importing Spanish or European LNG.”

“Transit issues have been settled,” she said.

In addition to Spain, Morocco discussed in November with Portugal and France about tapping into the under-used regasification capacity.

“They have regasification terminals that are under-used, and we have a pipeline that has to be used,” Benali said.

The pipeline is key to feeding two small power plants that

supply Morocco's northwest and northeast, which currently rely on the national grid.

Draghi is betting on Africa for Italy's exit from Russian gas



Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi is chasing a raft of natural gas deals in Africa as he seeks to cut energy ties with Russia.

Draghi will travel to central and southern Africa this week in pursuit of further supplies after Italy struck agreements for Algerian and Egyptian gas.

His tour may ruffle some feathers as European partners vie to displace Russian energy following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Potential deals in the Republic of Congo and Angola could

bring Italy an additional 5bn cubic metres and 1.5bn cubic metres a year, respectively, people familiar with the matter said, asking not to be identified discussing private information.

Together with the extra volume it secured from Algeria, which would replace more than half the amount it gets from Russia as early as next year.

Talks are ongoing and details of any accords may change, the people said.

Italy currently gets about 40% of its gas from Russia, and Draghi – together with local energy giant Eni SpA – has sought alternative sources since President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine in February.

With Eni already present in more than a dozen countries in Africa, the continent is an attractive option. Yet the former central banker's energy diplomacy is causing some anxiety among European Union allies.

The Algeria deal stoked concerns in Spain that its own access to the country's gas could be affected, prompting talks between Rome and Madrid.

It's also unclear how Italy's plans square with a push to centralize gas-purchase negotiations at the EU level.

"It's really important that the EU sticks together at the moment, that's essential," said Oliver Sartor, senior industry adviser at think tank Agora Energiewende. "There are some countries that are more exposed than others, so it's normal that they would look to protect themselves. But there's a higher priority here."

Draghi's discussions in Congo and Angola this week will focus – among other things – on boosting deliveries of liquefied natural gas, the people said.

That trip could be followed by travel to Mozambique, though plans haven't yet been confirmed, they said.

Gas discoveries off Mozambique have attracted international operators, including Eni, to its waters.

While work in the country is risky – with attacks by an insurgency group threatening onshore developments – Eni's

Coral Sul offshore LNG plant is expected to start production in the second half of 2022.

The company's deal with Algeria's Sonatrach Group, signed during Draghi's first official visit to Algiers, sees Italy buying an extra 9bn cubic metres of gas annually by 2023-2024.

On Wednesday, the firm struck an agreement with Egypt to increase flows of LNG to Italy. It has also said it's ready to invest billions of euros across the Mediterranean Sea in Libya, where it has been present for decades.

Draghi isn't the only EU leader to court gas-rich countries in a bid to ease dependence on Moscow.

Germany, which relies on Russia for 40% of its gas imports, is creating its own LNG infrastructure.

Others from France to Croatia plan to build or expand import terminals, while the US has also agreed to boost shipments to the bloc.

"Everyone is moving very fast," said Simone Tagliapietra, a senior fellow at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels. "It makes sense for Draghi to act now, and he is doing it very well."

**Qatar, Iran and Saudi Arabia
'bright spots' for Middle
Eastern gas output until
2050: GECF**



Pratap John

Qatar, Iran and Saudi Arabia are the “bright spots” for Middle Eastern gas output over the next three decades, the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) has said in a report.

In its Global Gas Outlook 2050, GECF said between 2020 and 2050, the natural gas supply is set to climb by an annual average growth rate of 2.4% in Iran, 2.2% in Qatar and 1.2% in Saudi Arabia.

It said Qatar aims to maintain its status as the top LNG producer and exporter in the world. The planned expansion of production from the North Field and other fields will increase Qatar’s total gas production by an overall of 91%, from about 175 bcm last year to 330 bcm in 2050.

National oil companies in the Middle East are focusing on developing their gas fields. As most of the countries in the Middle East are also crude oil producers, the majority of natural gas production in the region is associated gas.

With almost 17% of global gas production, the Middle East is the third-largest gas-producing region worldwide after North America and Eurasia. The region is a net exporter of gas, and supply has been growing rapidly by an annual average growth rate of 6.3%, from about 190 bcm in 2000 to around 650 bcm in 2020.

According to GECF, associated-dissolved natural gas (gas obtained from crude oil reservoirs) has always been accounted for as a share of total gas production. This gas can be found as free gas (associated) or in solution with crude oil, referred to as dissolved gas.

Like the impact that Covid-19 had on non-associated gas production, the demand for oil also declined in 2020, resulting in a lower level of associated gas production in that year.

According to the EIA, associated gas production in the US fell in 2020 by 1.5% reaching a level of around 140 bcm, following three years of growth. For the first time since 2016, the share of associated gas production in the US was reduced to almost 37.7%.

The GECF report forecasts that the demand for oil will stabilise through to 2050 and the level of global oil production will peak at slightly more than 100 mboe/d in around 2035 and will steady at around 90 mboe/d by 2050.

This lower level of crude oil production will consequently affect the level of associated gas production. Furthermore, the need for EOR measures by the injection of associated gas into oil wells will be magnified by the ageing oil reservoirs. "So a lower level of associated gas will reach the market, and the total volume of production from this category in the future is forecast to be lower than current levels," GECF said.

Currently, it is estimated that slightly less than 500 bcm of marketed natural gas is sourced from oil wells, and this level excludes the volume of the gas obtained from unconventional crude oil production.

The total level of associated gas production is even higher than this, as injection and recirculation do not count in marketed production, GECF noted.

Germany faces \$240bn hit if Russian energy cut off

Bloomberg / Berlin

Germany was warned it could face a €220bn (\$240bn) hit to output over the next two years in the event of an immediate interruption in Russian energy supplies over the war in Ukraine.

Economic institutes advising the government in Berlin said on Wednesday in a joint forecast that a full halt in Russian natural gas imports would result in a “sharp recession.”

“The decision to become independent from Russian supplies of raw materials is likely to remain valid even when the military and political situation calms down again,” the report said. “That means part of the energy supply and energy-intensive industry must realign itself.”

While the €220bn estimate is the equivalent of 6.5% of annual output, it’s nowhere near the almost €890bn in borrowing Germany carried out in 2020 and 2021 to shield the economy from the fallout of the pandemic.

Amid mounting casualties and reports of brutal atrocities, Germany has been under increasing pressure to justify its resistance to an embargo on Russian gas – widely seen as the ultimate leverage against President Vladimir Putin.

Ukraine snubbed a request by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany’s president, to visit Kyiv this week following criticism for his past support for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany and for his role when foreign minister in encouraging reconciliation and dialogue with the Kremlin.

Finance Minister Christian Lindner highlighted the huge challenges facing Germany as it tries to wean itself off

Russian energy as quickly as possible while also pursuing a goal of climate neutrality by 2045.

“Our world will not be the same again as it once was,” Lindner, who’s chairman of the pro-business Free Democrats, wrote in a guest article for the Handelsblatt newspaper published on Wednesday.

“We need new business models, new ideas, new supply chains and new trade relationships,” he said. “We have to reduce one-sided dependencies, be it when it comes to importing energy from Russia or exporting to China.”

Berlin-based DIW, one of the institutes involved in the estimate, said on Friday that Germany could be in position to survive without Russian gas, which currently accounts for two-fifths of its gas deliveries. The group said a combination of high storage, bolstering other energy supplies and implementing programmes to lower demand could offset Russia as soon as this winter.

That’s not a view that’s generally shared by the business community, with industry leaders including Deutsche Bank AG Chief Executive Officer Christian Sewing warning of dire economic consequences if Russian supplies are severed.

Even absent a cutoff, Wednesday’s report pared the outlook for Germany’s economy, predicting growth this year of 2.7% and 3.1% in 2023. Those numbers compare with previous projections for expansion of 4.8% and 1.9%. Inflation will average 6.1% in 2022 – the most in 40 years.

“The shock waves from the war in Ukraine are weighing on economic activity on both the supply side and the demand side,” said Stefan Kooths, vice president of the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. “Increasing prices of critical energy commodities following the Russian invasion further fuel the upward pressure on prices.”

Germany’s industry-heavy economy faces considerable hurdles after the war sent energy prices higher while disrupting supply chains that had already been suffering from pandemic-related snarls. Inflation reached 7.6% in the first full month of the war – the highest level since records began after

reunification in the early 1990s.

Companies are seen as particularly vulnerable because of Germany's reliance on Russian gas. The ruling coalition last week agreed on an aid package for suffering businesses that includes loans, loan guarantees and capital injections, and is meant to help energy firms in particular.

US and EU reach LNG supply deal to cut dependence on Russia



Bloomberg / Brussels

The US and the European Union will push to boost supplies of liquefied natural gas to European countries by the end of 2022 in a bid to displace Russian gas, a political framework that now leaves companies to sort out the details.

Under the agreement, Europe will get at least 15bn cubic

metres of additional LNG supplies by the end of the year, though it's not clear where it will come from. Member states will also work to ensure demand for 50bn cubic metres of American fuel until at least 2030. The aim is to work with international partners to help the continent wean itself off Russian gas, which accounts for about 40% of Europe's needs.

"We're coming together to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy," US President Joe Biden said at a joint press conference with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who added that 15bn cubic metres this year "is a big step in that direction."

Europe is trying to diversify its energy sources in a bid to starve Russia of the revenues it needs to fund the war in Ukraine. But that's a mammoth task. Russia ships about 150bn cubic metres of gas to Europe via pipelines every year, and another 14bn to 18bn cubic metres of LNG. That means any disruptions to flows of pipeline gas from Russia would be hard to cope with.

"It's a start, but relatively small compared to the overall supplies from Russia," said Jonathan Stern, a research fellow at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. "All contributions will be welcome but the task is huge."

The issue is critical as Russia is the EU's biggest gas supplier. The EU also relies on the country for the biggest share of its coal and oil imports, and has struggled to shift its energy policy away from Moscow. The details of how the plan works is now in the hands of energy companies, with American LNG shippers and German buyers set to meet next week in Berlin to hash out possible deals.

The US has already been providing more LNG to Europe, with shipments doubling to record 4.4bn cubic metres in January and a similar level in February. Supplying another 15bn cubic metres could be feasible as long as Europe continues to pay a premium to cargoes compared to Asian buyers. A significant boost to global LNG supplies will only come from 2025, when new projects are scheduled to come online.

It's also unclear whether the supplies would be coming from

additional production or from cargoes being redirected from other regions. A senior US administration official who briefed reporters on the plan Friday couldn't say how much of the additional 15bn cubic metres would be provided by US suppliers versus suppliers in Asia or elsewhere.

Currently, European buyers are competing with Asian countries for the world's limited supply of LNG cargoes.

Germany also unveiled its own plan to dramatically reduce Russian fossil fuel imports and make the country almost completely independent of Russian gas by the middle of 2024. Critics say the plan is impossible to achieve as Germany is Europe's biggest buyer of Russian gas.

The US-EU aspirational pact is light on detail. The senior US administration official said permitted US projects can meet the 50bn cubic metres of demand, and added that Europe's pledge to try to meet that demand might nudge planned US facilities toward a final investment decision.

The US worked with partners in Asia this winter to secure supply but is now working to build up stocks for next winter. The effort will require a lot of diplomacy, another official told reporters.

The European Union wants to replace this year nearly two-thirds of its total gas imports from Russia after the war waged by President Vladimir Putin forced an unprecedented re-think of the bloc's energy strategy. The new energy strategy, outlined by the European commission earlier this month, aims to replace 101.5bn cubic metres of Russian gas in 2022 by tapping alternative supply sources, building up renewables and boosting energy security. It also seeks to ensure 50bn cubic metres in LNG from new suppliers.

Europe's ability to import more LNG is constrained by the current regassification capacity, number of terminals and interconnectors, according to an EU official, who asked not to be identified commenting on private talks.

Still, the continent is in a much better place than earlier this year, with mild weather and more LNG imports helping bring inventories level back within the 5-year range, after

falling to the lowest in more than a decade. European gas prices have fallen more than 60% since reaching a record earlier this month.

Qatar will stand in solidarity with Europe, won't divert gas contracts to other customers: Minister of State for Energy Affairs



Doha: Minister of State for Energy Affairs HE Saad bin Sherida Al Kaabi stressed that Qatar will stand “in solidarity with Europe” and will not divert gas contracts to other customers, even if it means losing on possible financial gains.

The Minister told CNN that even though Qatar’s LNG contracts

with Europe and the UK were divertible ones, Qatar's commitment to Europe means "we're not going to divert contracts and will keep them in Europe, even if there is financial gain for us to divert away, we would not do that," before adding "that's in solidarity with what's going on in Europe."

On the possibility for Europe to replace Russian gas, Al Kaabi said that replacing Russian gas is "not practically possible." He highlighted that Russia supplies 30 to 40 percent of Europe's gas needs, something the continent cannot replace.

The Minister of State rejected imposing sanctions on Russia's energy sector, adding that Qatar was not choosing sides in the Ukrainian crisis. He added that it was to keep the energy sector out of politics, due to the negative ramifications doing so would have on development. He added that doing so could affect prices the way it did and cause a lot of volatility.

He noted that the Ukrainian crisis had a negative impact on energy transition, highlighting that the use of coal has reached its highest levels ever, as all parties involved are prioritizing their energy security ahead of any long-term gains they are trying to reach. HE the Minister maintained however that the energy sector could do that in a responsible manner.

Commenting on the role the US could play in the future of energy production, he said that the US is certainly one of the biggest suppliers, given the abundance of LNG the country has.

On the prospects of Europe buying fuel jointly from large suppliers, the Minister said that he is yet to see a decision regarding that, noting that this never happened in the past. His Excellency added that many parties in Europe were speaking with Qatar and other large LNG producers because they want to diversify their supply.

On whether Qatar could turn its back on its Asian partners, the Minister of State for Energy Affairs said that QatarEnergy was the biggest company in terms of signing long-term contracts with partners in Asia, with many of those agreements signed over the past three years.

He also told CNN that there is a desire to diversify the buyers of Qatari gas, revealing that the plan is to have half of the customers of the Qatari gas be located to the East of the Suez Canal, with the other half to its West. Currently, 80-85% of Qatar gas buyers are in Asia, with 15-20% of customers located to the West of the Suez Canal.

الحرب بين روسيا وأوكرانيا وسعي أوروبا الخاطئ إلى أمنها في مجال الطاقة



بقلم: رودي بارودي

لقد كشف تردد أوروبا في استهداف قطاع الطاقة الروسية لمعاينة موسكو على غزوها لأوكرانيا مدى هشاشة إمدادات الطاقة للقارة، حيث تتطلب أفضل الحلول، فهماً أعمق لكيفية وصول الوضع الأوروبي إلى ما هو عليه اليوم.

التفسير البسيط هو أن ألمانيا والعديد من الدول الأوروبية الأخرى أصبحت تعتمد بشكل مفرط على واردات الغاز الطبيعي الروسي. لكن هذا ليس صحيحاً تماماً، لأن العديد من العوامل الأخرى تزيد من ضعف أوروبا، وبينما يلعب سوء التوقيت دوراً في بعضها، فإن البعض الآخر ينبع من إخفاقات كبيرة على مستوى صناعة القرار الاستراتيجي.

قررت حكومات أوروبا عدة إغلاق محطات الطاقة النووية والفحم في السنوات الأخيرة، الأمر الذي لم يؤد سوى إلى زيادة حاجة أوروبا للطاقة - وبالتالي الاعتماد على - الغاز الروسي. هذا لا يعني أنه لم تكن هناك أسباب مقنعة لهذه القرارات، وأن تزامن فترة ما بعد الاعتماد على الطاقة النووية مع الأزمة الروسية الأوكرانية يعد سوء طالع إلى حد ما، ومع ذلك لا يمكن إنكار حقيقة أن التخلي عن هذا الكم الهائل من مولدات الطاقة النووية قد ترك لأوروبا عددًا قليلاً من البدائل العملية والقابلة للتطبيق. لكن المشكلة الحقيقية لم تكن بالإغلاق التدريجي لوحدات التوليد النووية؛ بل الفشل المتمثل في عدم الاستعداد بشكل مناسب للعواقب من خلال تجهيز مصادر طاقة بديلة جديدة كافية، وخاصة مصادر الطاقة المتجددة.

في ألمانيا أيضاً، وإلى جانب سياسة التخلي عن الطاقة النووية نسبياً، تم تأجيل إنشاء محطتين جديدتين لاستقبال شحنات الغاز الطبيعي المسال المنقولة بحراً لأكثر من عقد. وهذا يعني أنه، حتى لو تمكنت أوروبا من تأمين ما يكفي من الغاز الطبيعي المسال لاستبدال الغاز الذي يُضخ إليها من روسيا عبر الأنابيب، فإنها تفتقر إلى القدرة الكافية على إعادة تحويل الغاز المسال إلى غاز جاهز للاستهلاك يمكن الاستفادة منه بالكامل.

وفي منحى مماثل، فإن خط أنابيب نابوكو المقترح - الذي كان سينقل الغاز الأذربيجاني والمصري والعراقي و / أو التركماني من تركيا إلى النمسا - تعرض أيضاً لعراقيل متكررة وإلغاء نهائي في عام 2013، مما زاد من أهمية اعتماد أوروبا على الغاز الروسي

وخطوط الأنابيب الروسية.

وبالرغم من ضياع هذه الفرص وغيرها على أوروبا والتي كانت ستؤمن لها المرونة في الاستفادة من مصادر طاقة متعددة من خلال تنويع مصادرها ووسائلها وطرق إمدادها، فإنه لا يزال أمام أوروبا الوقت لتحسين وضعها بشكل كبير، لا سيما على المدى المتوسط والويل. أحد الخيارات الواعدة هو ربط فرنسا وإسبانيا بالجزائر والمغرب بوسائط نقل الغاز بأنابيب تحت البحر مع امكانية كبيرة لإعادة تكرير الغاز المسال الى غاز قابل للاستهلاك، حيث يمكن بعد ذلك توزيع الإمداد بالغاز إلى دول اوروبية أخرى. إلا أن مسائل سياسية وعراقيل مختلفة قد أدت إلى إبطاء هذا الاقتراح أيضًا، لذلك لا يسعنا إلا أن نأمل أن تساعد الأزمة الأوكرانية في تسليط الضوء مجددًا في مدريد وباريس على هذا المقترح.

هناك خطوات أخرى يمكن أن تتخذها أوروبا أيضًا، بعضها مباشر وتتطلب تسهيل التعاون عبر الحدود وتجاوز تطبيق بنود الاتفاقيات التي يمكن أن تستغرق وقتًا طويلًا لتحقيق. يتمثل أحدها في تعزيز قدرة القارة على تحمل حالات انقطاع واردات الغاز من خلال زيادة قدرتها التخزينية، سواء للغاز التقليدي في كهوف الملح تحت الأرض أو للغاز المسال في مستودعات الغاز الطبيعي الجديدة أو الموسعة.

وهناك خطوة ثانية تتمثل في تأجيل الألمان والبلجيكيين وغيرهم إغلاق المحطات النووية المقرر إيقاف تشغيلها. والثالثة هو أن يقوم الهولنديون بتوسيع موانئهم الحالية لاستقبال الغاز الطبيعي المسال، أما الخطوة الرابعة فقد بدأت في الأيام القليلة الماضية حيث استهل الألمان العمل في مرافق الاستيراد الخاصة بهم. وقد تكون الخطوة الخامسة هي العمل فورًا على ربط حقل غاز شرق البحر الأبيض المتوسط عبر خط أنابيب إلى تركيا ومن بعدها إلى أوروبا.

يمكن أيضًا تحسين الوضع من خارج القارة. فقد ضاعفت الولايات المتحدة، على سبيل المثال، صادراتها من الغاز الطبيعي المسال إلى أوروبا، وينبغي أن تكون قطر - التي أوفت بكل التزام من التزامات التسليم على الرغم من الحصار غير القانوني لمدة عامين ونصف العام الذي فرضه عليها بعض جيرانها - قادرة على زيادة شحناتها أيضًا، الأمر الذي من شأنه أن يعيد الثقة بأسواق التوريد. أما إسبانيا فإلى جانب تلقيها الغاز عبر الأنابيب فهي أيضًا تتزود بالكهرباء

المولدة من مزارع الطاقة الشمسية في شمال إفريقيا، بالإضافة الى نطاق شبكات تعاون المشتركة الهائل على امتداد المنطقة الأورو متوسطة .

أخيرًا وبالتأكيد ليس آخرًا، يمكن لأوروبا أن تخدم مصالحها على أفضل وجه - بكل ما للكلمة من معنى - من خلال الموافقة على دعمها المالي لمشاريع النفط والغاز المستقبلية للسنوات القليلة المقبلة، وأن تصبح أكثر جدية بشأن مصادر الطاقة المتجددة. تمتلك دول الأورو متوسطًا وحدها إمكانات كافية من طاقة الرياح البحرية لتحل محل الصناعة النووية العالمية بأكملها، بالإضافة الى تقنيات أخرى، بما في ذلك الطاقة الشمسية والأمواج والمد والجزر والطاقة الحرارية الأرضية تحت سطح البحر.

كل هذا يجب أن يوفر الاستقلالية عن الغاز الروسي وأن يعبد الطريق نحو السلام وليس الحرب.