

Le pétrole baisse, Russie et Arabie saoudite discutent d'une hausse de la production



Londres (awp/afp) – Les prix du pétrole reculaient nettement vendredi en cours d'échanges européens alors que la Russie et l'Arabie saoudite envisagent désormais d'augmenter les seuils de production de l'accord qui les engage, selon des déclarations des ministres de l'Energie des deux pays.

Vers 10H00 GMT (12H00 HEC), le baril de Brent de la mer du Nord pour livraison en juillet valait 77,19 dollars sur l'Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) de Londres, en baisse de 1,60 dollar par rapport à la clôture de jeudi.

Dans les échanges électroniques sur le New York Mercantile Exchange (Nymex), le baril de "light sweet crude" (WTI) pour la même échéance perdait 1,35 dollar à 69,36 dollars.

Face à la hausse marquée des prix ces derniers mois, l'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole (Opep) et ses partenaires pourraient assouplir leur accord de limitation de la production, ce qui pèse sur les prix vendredi.

Les deux meneurs de cet accord, le ministre russe de l'Energie Alexandre Novak et son homologue saoudien Khaled al-Faleh se sont rencontrés jeudi soir à Saint-Petersbourg et ils envisagent désormais d'augmenter les seuils de production.

“Il est probable qu'il y ait une remontée progressive de la production au deuxième semestre”, a affirmé vendredi le ministre saoudien, selon des propos rapportés par l'agence Bloomberg.

L'Arabie saoudite, premier exportateur mondial, est particulièrement observée par les marchés alors que l'offre mondiale est entravée par les baisses de production au Venezuela et pourrait l'être encore plus par les sanctions américaines contre ce pays et contre l'Iran.

“Le déclin de la production de l'Opep nous pousse à penser que les réserves mondiales vont décliner au deuxième et au troisième trimestre 2018”, ont jugé les analystes de Société Générale, qui ont revu à la hausse leurs prévisions de prix pour le Brent, à 80 dollars au troisième trimestre.

L'avenir de l'accord de limitation de la production devrait être au cœur de la prochaine réunion de l'Opep et de ses partenaires, fin juin à Vienne.

Le ministre saoudien a affirmé qu'il rencontrerait ses homologues de l'Opep, et qu'il aurait l'occasion de se réunir avec M. Novak une ou deux fois avant la réunion de Vienne.

L'Arabie saoudite et la Russie sont deux des trois plus grands producteurs de pétrole au monde, avec les Etats-Unis.

“L'Arabie saoudite veut garder les prix sous contrôle mais éviter qu'ils plongent complètement”, a résumé Oliver Jakob, analyste chez Petromatrix, qui estime que l'Opep pourrait augmenter sa production de 500.000 barils par jour (alors que l'accord prévoit une baisse de 1,8 million de barils par jour).

The Europeans: Gas War is Behind Washington Quitting the Iranian Nuclear Deal



“It is clear that the upcoming investments will not happen, I do not know which of the major international companies will risk it,” he predicted in an interview with Agence France-Presse.

Washington, ignoring the Europeans’ warnings that it would reimpose the sanctions imposed under the multilateral agreement in 2015, has been back on Iran in return for a pledge to freeze its nuclear program.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned that European companies, which would continue to deal with Iran in sectors banned under US sanctions, would “be held responsible.”

The United States launched a strategy to search for markets to sell its natural gas and exported 17.2 billion cubic meters in 2017 to EU ports.

According to EHSMarket, the total capacity to import natural gas in Europe will increase by 20% by 2020.

Lower gas on horizon as Gazprom agrees to market approach



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Saudi Aramco



ROSNEFT

Millions of consumers and industries could stand to win after the world's biggest natural gas exporter agreed to match prices in central and eastern Europe with markets in the west. As part of an accord to settle a seven-year-old antitrust case with European regulators, Gazprom agreed to remove restrictions on pipeline flows, and give customers the right to resell, swap and check their rates against markets in the Netherlands and Germany.

The agreement brings customers in the east more in line with the conditions western utilities from RWE to Eni have sought from Gazprom through negotiations or via the courts.

"I expect to see lower gas prices in southeast Europe as Gazprom brings them closer to those paid by the buyers in western Europe," said Elchin Mammadov, a utilities analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence in London.

The settlement will speed up the transformation of how Gazprom runs its business in Europe, said Simone Tagliapietra, analyst at the Bruegel think-tank in Brussels. "Gazprom is aware that the European gas market is changing," she said. "They are simply adapting to the new market conditions."

The agreement is more effective than immediately slapping Russia's state-run export monopoly with a fine because it includes binding pledges to enable the free flow of gas at competitive prices in Central and Eastern Europe, the European Commission said on Thursday.

"These obligations will significantly change the way Gazprom operates in central and eastern Europe to the benefit of millions of European consumers when they heat their houses, when they cook their food and to the benefit of European businesses who rely on gas for their production," EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager told reporters in Brussels on Thursday.

Because of Gazprom's "monopolistic" position in eastern Europe, it's those nations that will benefit the most from the agreement and help cut prices, said Geoffroy Hureau, the secretary-general of Cedigaz, a Paris-based industry research group. Meanwhile, the company's biggest client in Europe is just happy that the case is coming to an end.

"These things dragged on for too long – they are a burden to discussions on other topics," Uniper's chief executive officer Klaus Schaefer said in an interview in St Petersburg.

"Therefore to get clarity on this in due course is important."

Uniper was spun off from EON SE two years ago. EON was among the first utilities to seek more flexible terms from Gazprom back in 2009. The financial crisis had damped demand for the fuel and made market rates, which utilities use to sell the fuel to their own clients, cheaper than fuel from Gazprom.

The settlement comes as Russia faces UK accusations it poisoned a double agent that sparked the largest collective expulsion of Russian intelligence officers. Still, a thaw in relations with Europe – an opportunity for rapprochement – came this month when the US pulled out of the Iran nuclear

deal, angering other world powers. The EU's antitrust case has been a thorn in Gazprom's side since regulators conducted raids in 2011. But geopolitics crept into the antitrust case from the start after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree in 2012 that gave the government the right to protect Gazprom from EU inquiries, but the commission stuck with its case.

Customers that bought gas originally for delivery to Hungary, Poland or Slovakia, can choose to have Gazprom deliver all or part of it to Bulgaria or the Baltic States instead and vice versa against a fee, the EU said.

But despite the outlook for better deals in the region, Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Konrad Szymanski told state newswire PAP he was disappointed that there were no penalties or compensation for years of higher prices than their western competitors. Lithuania doesn't rule out appealing the decision of the European Commission not to fine Gazprom, Interfax reported, citing Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis. "I know that some would have liked to see us fine Gazprom instead, no matter the solution on the table," Vestager told reporters. "But a fine would not have achieved all of our competition objectives." The Commissioner also underlined that if Gazprom breaks any of these obligations, it can impose a fine of as much as 10% of the company's worldwide sales, without having to prove an infringement of EU antitrust rules. The EU obligations will be in place for eight years. "It is the enforcement of the Gazprom obligations that begins today," Vestager said.

Deputy chief executive officer Alexander Medvedev said that Gazprom is "satisfied" with the settlement.

"We were always committed to cooperate in good faith in order to find a constructive, mutually acceptable solution in accordance with the established procedure," he said in a statement.

"We believe that today's decision is the most reasonable outcome for the well-functioning of the entire European gas market."

Oil Drop Below \$80 Vindicates Cautious Investors Trimming Bets



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Saudi Aramco



- Hedge funds cut Brent wagers by most since June 2017
- Saudi Arabia signals OPEC and allies may boost production

Money managers' reluctance to get behind the oil rally is finally paying off.

Hedge funds trimmed their net-long position – the difference between bets on a price increase and wagers on a drop – in Brent crude by the most in almost a year. The cuts came as the global benchmark capped its first weekly drop since early April, sliding below \$80 a barrel after Saudi Arabia and Russia said OPEC and its allies may boost oil output in the second half of the year.

“Traders thought that the market was in the process of topping out,” John Kilduff, a partner at Again Capital LLC, a New York-based hedge fund, said by telephone Friday. Oil prices had a “swift reaction today to the musings by OPEC to potentially add more supply to the market. We will be very headline-driven over the next few weeks.”



Oil retreated from the highest prices in almost four years as Russian and Saudi energy ministers signaled that the coalition led by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries may gradually raise oil production to assuage consumer anxiety about higher prices. Their comments mark a major shift in strategy for the historic alliance forged in 2016 to erase a global crude glut.

“I think in the near future there will be time to release

supply" smoothly to avoid shocking the market, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in Russia. When OPEC, Russia and other major producers meet in June "we will do what is necessary" to reassure buyers, the minister said.

He spoke after talks with his Russian counterpart Alexander Novak, who said the output boost would start in the third quarter, if it's approved by other members of the group. Both men said the size of the increase was still subject to negotiation.

Hedge funds lowered their Brent net-long position by 8.6 percent in the week ended May 22 to 501,634 contracts, according to ICE Futures Europe data on futures and options released Friday. That was the biggest decline since June 2017.

Money managers' net-long position in West Texas Intermediate crude fell by 2 percent to 377,520 futures and options, the lowest since November, according to U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission released Friday. Longs slipped less than 0.1 percent, while shorts climbed 23 percent, the biggest jump since April.

"You want to get out of the long positions if you are expecting that OPEC is going to increase production," James Williams, president of London, Arkansas-based energy researcher WTRG Economics, said by phone. "It makes perfect sense for the folks that are long to say, 'How much longer can this thing continue to grow?'"

Disruption Threat

Crude had rallied earlier this month on the dual threat of supply disruptions from Iran and Venezuela, which together account for about 14 percent of OPEC's production. Still, the coalition is weighing the possibility of easing output limits at a time when drillers are pumping record amounts of crude

from American shale basins.

"The market kind of overextended itself, " Gene McGillian, manager of market research for Tradition Energy in Stamford, Connecticut, said by phone. "With the Saudis now saying they're limiting their production cuts and geopolitical risk already priced in, there is going to be some uncertainty."

A dearth of pipelines in West Texas' Permian Basin, the most prolific U.S. oil play, is leaving supplies trapped in the region. That's expanding the nation's surplus of the fuel as American production tops 10 million barrels a day.

U.S. inventories climbed by 5.78 million barrels to about 438 million barrels in the week ended May 18, data from the Energy Information Administration showed. That was a surprise increase compared with the 2 million-barrel decline predicted in a Bloomberg survey.

But analysts and traders predict that stockpiles may decline in the coming weeks, bolstering prices. Data provider Genscape Inc. was said to report that inventories fell by about 475,000 barrels between May 18 and May 22 at the key pipeline hub in Cushing, Oklahoma.

Oil prices have "been extremely extended for a long period of time," Kyle Cooper, a consultant at brokerage Ion Energy Group LLC, said by phone Friday. The "EIA report was bearish with a nearly 6 million-barrel build in total petroleum. The more important thing is how that was followed up today with OPEC and Russia regarding the possibility of removing some of those supply constraints."

Saudi Arabia and Russia Discuss Scaling Back Global Oil Cuts



- Easing output curbs “on the table”; no decision yet: Al-Falih
- OPEC, allies to discuss loosening supply caps in June: Novak

Saudi Arabia and Russia, the oil producers who led the effort to shrink a global glut, said they are discussing easing output curbs for the first time.³⁰

While scaling back the supply caps is “on the table,” no decision has been made, Saudi Arabian Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said in an interview early Friday morning in St. Petersburg. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its partners will in June discuss loosening the curbs that began in 2017, Russian counterpart Alexander Novak said at the same interview after a meeting between the two officials.

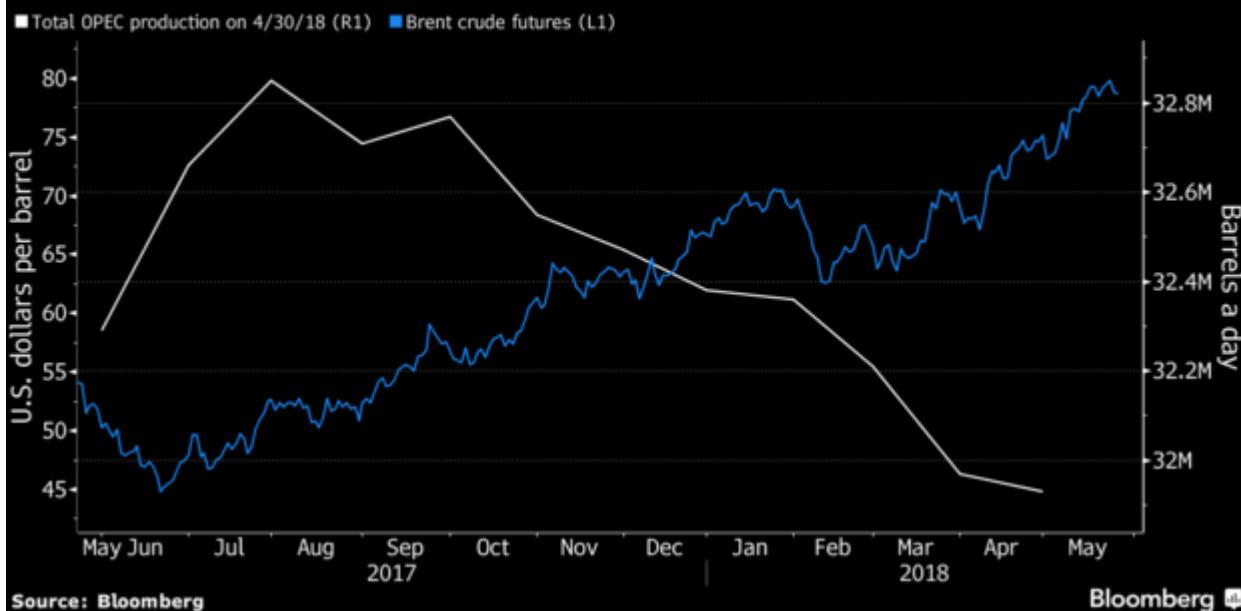
Speculation is swirling over when and by how much the producers will scale back cuts after they eliminated an inventory surplus that had sparked a price crash about four years ago. Market uncertainty has risen following renewed U.S. sanctions on Iran that may curb the Islamic Republic’s exports, and as economic turmoil in Venezuela drives a collapse of the OPEC member’s oil industry. Crude’s rebound is also spurring concern that demand may falter.

Russia and Saudi Arabia share a common view on “consuming countries’ anxiety and concerns over potential supply shortages,” Al-Falih said. “We will ensure that the market remains in its trajectory towards rebalancing, but at the same time we will not overcorrect.” The two nations will meet at least two more times before OPEC and its partners gather in Vienna next month, he said.

While Saudi Arabia has shown a desire for higher prices to bankroll domestic economic reforms and underpin the valuation of its state oil company in a planned initial public offering, the top OPEC member and its allies are facing pressure from consuming nations as well as crude producing companies.

OPEC Impact

The group's output cuts have helped drive oil prices higher



High Enough

Indian Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said earlier this month that he expressed concern about rising crude and its impact on consumers to Al-Falih. He added that the Saudi energy minister had assured him that the Middle East nation and other producers would ensure that adequate supplies are available and that prices remain reasonable. In developing countries from Brazil to the Philippines, drivers are complaining about high fuel costs.

In Russia, some of the largest oil producers called for more flexibility after almost 17 months of output curbs. The cuts have achieved their goal and crude prices near \$80 a barrel are high enough, according to the bosses of Lukoil PJSC and Gazprom Neft PJSC. Novak said that he will hold talks with the nation's crude producers next week or the week after to discuss the deal with OPEC.

"Earlier we said that we will monitor the market situation, now we can say that we are looking into the issue" of a smooth recovery in output to meet growing demand, Novak said in the interview on Friday. He added that he and Al-Falih discussed prices and the market situation, including Venezuelan

production and risks related to Iran.

The Saudi minister said he'll meet Novak again in Moscow on June 14, adding that another meeting between the two is possible before that.

U.S. Supply

In Washington, Democrats are using high gasoline prices, approaching \$3 a gallon for the first time since 2014, as a political tool, accusing the White House of not doing enough to shield consumers.

Recent price gains have been driven by American actions such as President Donald Trump's withdrawal from a 2015 deal between Iran and world powers that had eased sanctions on the Persian Gulf state in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. Earlier this month, Al-Falih and United Arab Emirates Energy Minister Suhail Al Mazrouei said recent moves in oil prices have been driven by geopolitics and that global supply remains ample.

Additionally, record production in the U.S., which is not part of the deal among global producers to cut output, is a key issue that's complicating strategy for OPEC and its allies.

Brent crude, the benchmark for more than half the world's oil, was down 0.4 percent at \$78.49 a barrel at 7:31 a.m. in London. Earlier this month, prices had traded above \$80 a barrel for the first time since November 2014. U.S. West Texas Intermediate futures were at \$70.49 a barrel in New York.

"We will be coordinating closely, monitoring the market almost on a daily basis," Al-Falih said on Friday. "We'll consult with other countries. Each of them has a voice and their voices matter to us."

Sanctions aren't stopping Russia's LNG ambitions



Despite the imposition of US and EU sanctions in the energy sector, new projects continue to flourish in Russia. Already the world's largest exporter of traditional natural gas, the country is gaining a foothold in the liquefied natural gas market. For the last 3 years, Russia's LNG capacity has been growing substantially.

Competition from Qatar, Australia, and the US, the world leaders in LNG exports, coupled with the impact of political tensions after the Ukraine crisis, have made Russia reconsider its traditional pipeline exports. After Lithuania and Poland built their own LNG terminals with gas from Norway, Qatar and most recently the US, Gazprom's conventional gas intake was

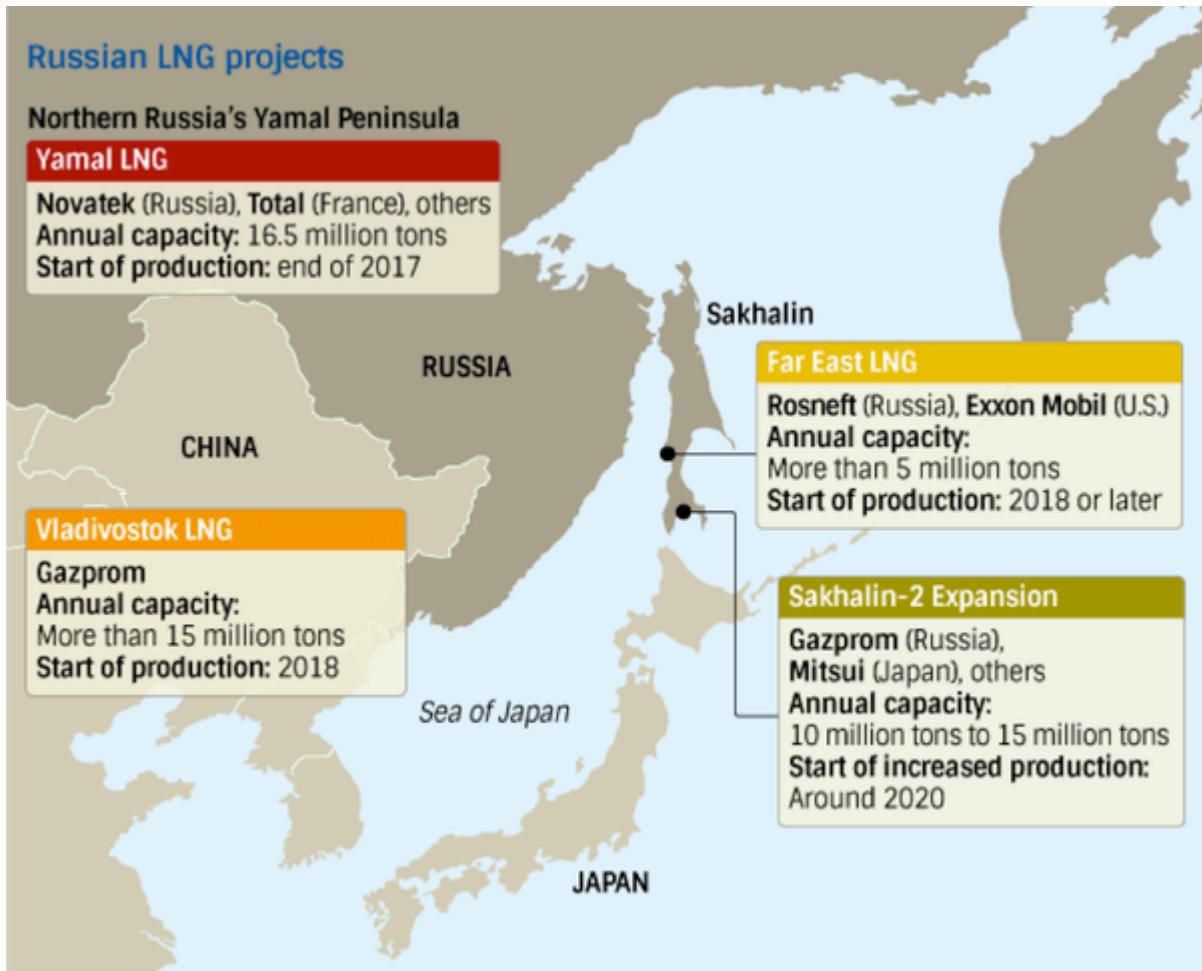
significantly diminished in both countries. Despite Gazprom's cheaper price, Lithuania and Poland preferred to pay a premium for their LNG to reduce the dependency on Russia's energy resources.

Gaining a foothold

Novatek, Rosneft and Gazprom each set out to develop their own unconventional gas resources. Novatek's Yamal LNG is Russia's most ambitious project. Based on the Kara Sea in the Arctic Circle, gas extraction is conducted under the permafrost, which makes it incredibly challenging. Funded by Russia's Novatek, France's Total, China National Petroleum Corporation, and China's Silk Road Fund, Yamal LNG is a \$27 billion facility that will start full operation in 2018. It will produce 16.5 million tonnes of LNG per year. Yamal LNG's gas plant will be finished in November. As a symbolic gesture, Russia will send the first shipments to China, which supported the project. Another four shipments will follow in December.

Rosneft is developing its Far East LNG project in Sakhalin, which aims to produce 5 million tonnes of LNG gas. Its goal is to deliver supplies to the Asia-Pacific region, in particular to Japan and South Korea.

Gazprom is pushing LNG as in-house transport fuels. Russia's gas giant signed agreements with Avtodor, the Russian highways state company, and Gazprom Gazomotornoye Toplivo, a Gazprom subsidiary, to grow a network of LNG and compressed natural gas filling stations for locomotives and trucks. Expanding its reach, Gazprom also launched small-scale LNG projects abroad in places like Vietnam, Belarus, Ghana and Bolivia.



Bypassing Western sanctions

The impact of Western sanctions on Russia's LNG development proved to be rather limited. Despite the restrictions on financial borrowing and export of Western technologies (e.g. drilling and hydraulic fracturing), Russia managed to keep its LNG projects afloat. Loopholes in the sanctions regime and new partners allowed Russia to bypass legal implications and to find new funding.

While both oil and gas exploration projects were prohibited under US sanctions, the EU sanctions exempted gas projects. This allowed European investors to further participate in the development of Russia's LNG gas plants. Both French Total and Dutch Shell preserved their 20% and 27% shares in the Yamal and Sakhalin projects, respectively.

Despite Western restrictions on capital, Russian energy companies still manage to attract European investments.

Italy's Saipem is set to be a subcontractor for Arctic LNG 2, Novatek's second gas plant on the Kara Sea. In 2015, Shell agreed to invest in the expansion of Gazprom's Sakhalin II, while in 2017, a Dutch company set up a joint venture with Gazprom to design and construct the Baltic LNG project in the Leningrad Region. However, Rosneft's Far East and Gazprom's Vladivostok LNG projects were delayed until 2020 due to a lack of funds and low fuel prices. Partnered with ExxonMobil in 2014, the Far East project was stalled due to looming Western sanctions over the Ukraine crisis. Recently, Rosneft announced that it may build the LNG plant using its own resources exclusively.

Russia's pivot to Asia and the Middle East lessened the country's dependence on Western lending. In March 2017, having difficulties raising funds from Western banks, Novatek sold a 9.9% stake to China's Silk Road Fund. Similarly, Rosneft turned to Chinese investors after Glencore and the Qatar Investment Authority cut their stakes. A 14% stake of Rosneft was bought by CEFC, China's Energy conglomerate, for \$9 billion. Recently, investors from Japan and the Middle East showed interest in Gazprom's Baltic and Novatek's Arctic 2 LNG projects.

Making strides in the LNG market

With the latest reports predicting 13% growth in the LNG market by 2025 and an overall 53% share in long-distance gas trade by 2040, Russia is under further pressure to develop its LNG projects on time. Currently, Russia exports 10.8 million tonnes and has a 4.2% market share.

Following the completion of the Arctic 2 LNG project, the country might challenge the dominance of Qatar, which currently occupies 30% of the market. By building the second gas plant on the Gydan peninsula, Russia could produce up to 70 million tonnes of LNG annually, just below Qatar's 77 million. The construction of Arctic 2 is slated to commence in 2019, with the first shipments due on the market in 2023.

Challenging Qatar's dominance in the LNG market would make Russia not only the world's largest exporter of conventional natural gas, but also of liquefied gas. The conditions for that are favourable. With funding from China and Saudi Arabia, Russia can bypass Western restrictions on capital. Russia's LNG exploration sites are strategically close to the Asian market. Located in the Far East, LNG would be easy to transport via sea to Japan and South Korea, the world's largest LNG importers.

Russian Oil Giants Get Record Prices, But Not Profits to Match



The price of crude in rubles has surged to an all-time high, but Russian oil producers will miss out on record first-quarter profit because of a rising tax burden.

Investors in Lukoil PJSC or Rosneft PJSC – which is due to publish earnings on May 14 – will probably have to wait until later in the year to see the full benefit of the surge in crude. So far, Russia's government has done a better job of translating record prices into revenues, said Denis Borisov, a director at the Ernst & Young Oil and Gas Center in Moscow.

"The golden rain will likely fall on the companies in the second quarter if key conditions – the oil price and ruble exchange rate – remain in place," Borisov said on Thursday.

The price of international benchmark Brent crude averaged 3,823 rubles a barrel (\$67.23) in the first quarter, just a hair away from the previous quarterly record in 2014. It's risen further to as high as 4,881 rubles this month. Yet the price of Urals crude in Russia's currency, net of taxes, was 3 percent lower from January to March compared with the fourth quarter due to higher oil-extraction levies, according to Deutsche Bank AG.

Tighter Burden

Tax costs of Russia's producers have been rising since last year

The industry also faced a jump in petroleum-product excise tax – an additional support to the state budget to fund road construction that may reach 40 billion rubles this year, according to Finance Ministry's estimates made last year. However, Russia's domestic gasoline price increases lagged crude in the first quarter, possibly showing that companies were holding back from shifting part of this burden onto consumers ahead of presidential elections in March, said Ildar Davletshin, an energy analyst at Wood & Co.

The revenue of state-run Rosneft, which pumps more than 40 percent of Russia's oil, could have hit a record of 1.73 trillion rubles in the first quarter, according to Renaissance Capital. However, it expects net income to drop 19 percent from the fourth quarter to 81 billion rubles.

Rosneft plans to start its first-ever share buyback program this quarter, spending \$2 billion over three years. That means investors will also be closely watching cash flow. Renaissance Capital expects the company to generate 75 billion rubles in the first quarter, almost 16 percent lower than a year ago, Bloomberg calculations show.

Several of Rosneft's peers are planning or implementing buybacks as a way to share the rewards from rising crude prices with investors. Lukoil announced a five-year repurchase scheme worth as much as \$3 billion back in January – four months before Rosneft. The move boosted the stock's appeal to investors and helped close the gap in the market value of the rivals.

For 2018 as a whole, Lukoil and Gazprom Neft PJSC are expected to post big gains in net income, according to analysts surveyed by Bloomberg. Rosneft's cash flow should more than double to some 550 billion rubles, which is enough to cover interest payments, dividends and as much as half of the planned share purchases, Davletshin said. Another Rosneft plan – to cut its debt by 500 billion rubles this year – may need proceeds from selling non-core assets, he said, a move the company is already considering.

Still, the size of the tax burden remains a risk, particularly as Russia forms a new government. President Vladimir Putin's administration will soon lay out targets for the economy and budget for his fourth term. While the state has promised to avoid significant changes in oil taxes this year, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said this week that Russia will need at least 8 trillion rubles in additional spending to fulfill

its plans