

# Lukashenko's Threats to Cut Gas Supplies to Europe, Goes Also Against Russian Interests

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*Belarussian **President Alexander Lukashenko** threatened on November 11 to suspend gas shipments to Europe which would have the potential to trigger a new gas war, Polish news portal Defense24 reported. According to the author of the article, Minsk cannot allow such a declaration without the approval of Moscow, the country “responsible” for the current energy crisis in Europe.*

This suggests that Russian **President Vladimir Putin** somehow controls Lukashenko. This is often alluded in the West; however, it is a simplistic allegation that ignores the many times that the two leaders have clashed over many issues. It is recalled that before the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, Lukashenko was even somewhat pivoting towards Brussels at the expense of relations with Moscow.

According to the article, the current gas situation in Europe is in Russia's hands, especially since the operability of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline was sped up. At the same time, according to the Polish outlet, Moscow convinced EU countries to continue signing long-term gas supply contracts. Meanwhile, in the journalist's opinion, Minsk's threat to suspend gas flows could be another argument used by the Kremlin to present evidence of “the unreliability of transit countries” and the necessity of Nord Stream 2.

“Russia has long demonstrated that it knows how to use its energy resources to achieve political goals. The most recent large-scale incident of its kind occurred in 2009. At that time, the Russians reduced gas supplies through Ukraine, forcing the Europeans to use this strategy of storing fuel,” the author emphasized, noting that the current crisis could lead to a repetition of what happened 12 years ago.

What the article ignores though is that Ukraine has proven beyond doubt that it is not a reliable transit country to deliver Russian gas to European markets, hence the urgency and necessity of Nord Stream 2 as an alternative.

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline project is nearing full operational level, hence the diminishing of Ukraine's status as an important energy transit hub.

Kiev is desperately attempting to stop this reality from being reached as it will miss out on billions of dollars in transit fees that will further push the country into economic calamity. Kiev demonstrated beyond doubt that it is an unreliable partner to deliver Russian gas to European markets, and is now the ultimate loser as the EU is unwilling to offset all of its losses.



Earlier, Lukashenko advised the EU to think about transporting gas and goods through Belarus before imposing sanctions on Minsk. He reiterated that the export gas pipeline Yamal-Europe runs through Belarus and that the amount of gas transported from Russia to the West had increased significantly in recent times. Preliminary data from Gascade showed that Russian gas flows towards Germany via the Yamal-Europe pipeline rose over the weekend, with no signs of it being impacted by the political standoff between Belarus and the EU.

With gas flows increasing, Nord Stream 2 in operation and transit reliance on Ukraine reduced, the last thing Moscow wants is Belarus undermining the current gas situation. Putin made this much clear by saying on Saturday:

“I’ve recently spoken to [Lukashenko] twice and he didn’t mention this to me once, he didn’t even hint [it]. Of course, in theory, Lukashenko as president of a transit country could order our [gas] supplies to Europe to be cut. But this would mean a breach of our

gas transit contract and I hope this will not happen.”

Although there is no guarantee that Moscow will be able to deter Minsk from cutting gas supplies to Europe, Putin can certainly coerce Lukashenko to reconsider taking such a drastic action that does not only affect Central and Western Europe, but also Russia. Understanding Lukashenko’s often abrasive rhetoric, Putin said “I will raise this question with him in case this wasn’t something said in the heat of the moment.”

It should not be Putin’s responsibility to tame or confirm Lukashenko’s actions, but the Belarussian leader is under increasing pressure from Brussels for unleashing a migrant crisis on the Polish and Lithuanian borders and could act more brazenly, thus affecting the EU’s and Russia’s energy interests. The EU’s already existing sanctions against Belarus cannot be discounted for Lukashenko’s actions, especially since Colour Revolution-styled efforts against his government often originate from Poland and Lithuania. However, Russia too does not need Belarus undermining Europe’s energy interests, especially when the Nord Stream 2 project is already lambasted and heavily criticized by pro-US factions in the EU. In this way, Moscow will be doing what it can within its power to tame Lukashenko and ensure that energy flows to Europe continues, one way or another.

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