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OPINION | REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Nord Stream 2 Sanctions in the Senate

A vote on the natural-gas pipeline would override Biden's waiver favor to Putin.

By [The Editorial Board](#)

Jan. 10, 2022 6:37 pm ET



The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project at the Chelyabinsk pipe rolling plant in Chelyabinsk, Russia, Feb. 26, 2020.

PHOTO: MAXIM SHEMETOV/REUTERS

It's a policy that's hard to figure. While [Vladimir Putin](#) threatens to invade Ukraine, Europe and the Biden Administration are acquiescing in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that will make Europe vulnerable to Russian energy coercion. This week the U.S. will have a chance to send a different message to the Kremlin.

The opening is a deal between Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Ted Cruz. In exchange for ending Mr. Cruz's blockade on 32 nominees, Mr. Schumer agreed to hold a vote by Jan. 14 on the Texas Senator's Nord Stream 2 bill. The legislation would impose pipeline sanctions within 15 days, and a presidential move to lift or waive them would be subject to a Congressional vote.

Nord Stream 2 was built to move gas from Russia to Germany, and both Democrats and Republicans have supported sanctions in recent years targeting the pipeline. Nord Stream

2 would make Europe more dependent on Russian energy and marginalize Ukraine by ensuring it is no longer an essential transit point for Russian natural gas.

Presidents Trump and Biden opposed the pipeline. But Mr. Biden changed his mind after a request by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel as she prepared to leave office last year. The Biden Administration waived the U.S. sanctions in May, citing “national interests.”

Mr. Cruz’s bill requires 60 votes, and Democrats who have long opposed Nord Stream 2 are suddenly skittish. Mr. Cruz’s bill is “ill-timed,” says Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a New Hampshire Democrat who co-sponsored Nord Stream 2 sanctions in the past. “At this point it’s very important, as we’re looking at potential Russian action in Ukraine, for us to work very closely with our allies, and Germany is one of those very important allies.”

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy told Politico that “this is a moment where we need to be in solidarity with the Administration as they try to use a carrot-stick approach with the Russians to prevent an invasion” and that “sending a wedge into the trans-Atlantic relationship right now would not be productive.”

We’re all for alliance solidarity, but the collapse of Western opposition to the pipeline has emboldened Mr. Putin into believing he’ll face few consequences if he does invade. Nord Stream 2 is nearly complete, and when the gas starts flowing it will make Europe even less likely to stand up to Russian aggression.

Democrats may try to side-step their dilemma by offering an alternative from Sen. Robert Menendez that would leave sanctions discretion to the President. Under his proposal the U.S. would impose Nord Stream 2 sanctions only after a presidential determination of a “significant escalation in hostilities or hostile action in or against Ukraine.” This essentially endorses Mr. Biden’s sanctions waiver.

Mr. Biden no doubt hoped that dropping Nord Stream sanctions would encourage better Russian behavior. The result has been the opposite. As U.S. and Russian officials meet this week to discuss Ukraine, a show of Senate resolve on the pipeline would strengthen the U.S. hand. A failed sanctions vote would be one more reason for Mr. Putin not to take U.S. sanctions threats seriously.

Appeared in the January 11, 2022, print edition as 'Nord Stream 2 in the Senate.'