



Interview: Rainer Seele, board member Wintershall ‘Scandinavian countries should show solidarity’

On the sidelines of the Berlin conference, Rainer Seele, board member at Wintershall and the spokesman of the executive board at Wingas, a subsidiary of Wintershall and Gazprom, tells the EER about Nord Stream’s latest problems.

Valery Yezov announced at the conference yet another delay of Nord Stream, also because of environmental concerns put forward by Sweden and Finland. How are you going to solve this problem?

We are about to file our environmental study, which we had to adapt and complement. But we have taken the concerns put forward to us very seriously. We now want to finalise the package as quickly as possible to launch the permission process. I believe we have taken an important step by deciding not to build a maintenance platform in Scandinavian waters and we do expect that taking up this major Swedish concern will help bring the permission process on a positive course.

What about Finnish objections?

Of course we have to wait for a decision there but we are engaged in constructive dialogue with officials on the ground, and we are also involved in the larger political dialogue. I believe we need a larger European support. Even if the Scandinavian countries don’t directly get gas from Nord Stream, they should show European solidarity to help get enough gas for Europe as a whole.

‘I expect Gazprom to fill this pipeline as quickly as possible’

Do the Russians have enough gas to fill the pipeline? The development of Shtokman is dangerously behind schedule.

Gazprom has an interest in using the 55 bcm of this pipeline until the last molecule of methane. Making such a large investment here in Europe and thus having a key interest to fill this investment with energy – that’s the strongest commitment you can get from a producer. That’s why I expect Gazprom to fill this pipeline as quickly as possible.

The Baltic States and Poland have repeatedly criticised Nord Stream, which is a bilateral project between Germany and Russia. Does Germany’s close energy relationship with Russia undermine the EU’s overall position in dealing with Moscow?

I think Europe should use exactly those excellent relations with Russia to come up with a new European concept. Germany can take on a mediator role in that process because of the longstanding cultural, political and economic ties it has fostered with Russia over the past years. German-Russian business ties are coined by a strong level of mutual trust, which is missing in Europe as a whole. Europe and Russia have thrown things at each other that make a constructive dialogue very hard. But I am optimistic because there is a fresh start in Russia now, and Europe should use it to restart its dialogue with Russia. ■



Interview: Vladimir Litvinenko, Putin's energy whisperer 'The EU lacks transparency and coordination'

Vladimir Litvinenko, rector of the St. Petersburg State Mine Institute, was one of the key shapers of Putin's energy strategy. The two men have been friends for years. Kremlin-watchers say Putin consulted him often. EER spoke to him in Berlin.

As one of the key architects of Mr. Putin's energy policy, how would you assess it over the past years?

Putin's main achievement was to prevent Russia's disintegration and create a market-oriented economy. High energy prices have supported this transformation, but Putin implemented the urgently needed reforms which helped to stabilise the state economically and politically.

Do you have a similarly close connection to the new president and do you expect continuity in Russia's policy?

We are well aware that the Russian economy is not 100% market-driven. We are worried about the enhanced role of the state and the limited role civil society plays in checking the executive. I know President Medvedev very well as a politician. There is no reason for me to assume there will be any decisive change in Russia's domestic or foreign policy. However, the new administration seems to have a new perspective on the development of a genuine civil society, the consolidation of the rule of law, and the strengthening of market forces.

What about the energy sector?

We consider the trend towards the renationalisation of the energy sector legitimate. Putin has rightly helped to enhance the visibility and competitiveness of Russian energy companies

on global markets, and thus protected Russia's competitive advantage. Medvedev most certainly will not change this. But the protection by the state does not limit the rights of foreign investors. This would not be in Russia's interests.

You mentioned relations between the EU and Russia are at a 'dead end'. Do you believe energy efficiency can be an issue where the two can come back together?

The efficiency problem has to be solved internally. I do not think the EU can have an impact on this. We feel the EU lacks transparency and coordination. The relationship between member states and Brussels is moulded by national self-interest. Whenever it suits a member state, Brussels becomes irrelevant; when problems are encountered, responsibility is delegated to Brussels. In energy, we see that the EU is trying to regulate the national markets. This curtails the market forces approach favoured by Russia. Therefore, we prefer to strengthen our ties with the individual member states.

There has been much talk of an Opec for gas. What do you think of this?

I consider Opec as an instrument to exploit unregulated market conditions and to earn good money. However, due to a lack of reliable data, no respected academic can predict any developments in this area. ■