

Should Europe wait for Russian gas?

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On September 16-22, representatives of the European Union announced the possibility of holding of the next trilateral ministerial meeting on the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine to the EU. This was reported by the official representative of the European Commission Anna-Kaisa Itkonen.

The parties must once again try to resolve a complex issue. If shortly, the essence of the problem is as follows: Europe wants a relatively inexpensive and high-quality Russian gas, Russia declares its readiness to discuss supplies, but subject to a competitive price from Naftogaz and the abolition of judicial claims by the Ukrainian side. Ukraine also declares its interest in receiving Russian money for the transit of gas through its territory. But, for some reason, for now, the question has not shifted from a dead point.

The current contract for gas transit through Ukraine expires on December 31, 2019. At the same time, Russia intends to launch the second string of the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline. The parties tried to sit at the negotiating table earlier, but this was hindered by political circumstances – elections the European Parliament, then in Ukraine. Now, apparently, negotiations will be conducted around two main options. At the end of July, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak called for an extension of the current contract for a period of one year. The head of the Ukrainian Naftogaz Yuriy Vitrenko suggested concluding an agreement on a gas swap. In this case, the Russian side will transfer to Ukraine a certain amount of gas at the border, and Naftogaz, in turn, will send the same amount to the EU. The EU insists on concluding a transit contract for 10 years.

At the same time, the option proposed by Russia more likely suggests that the Kremlin wants to hedge that case if the construction of Nord Stream-2 is not completed on time. The position of Ukraine is completely strange. It would seem that it is quite logical for Kiev to form a clear position on relations with the Russian Federation and enter into negotiations with Moscow to ensure Ukraine's energy security and profit from transit.

At the same time, Ukraine is establishing a route for gas imports from Romania through the territory of Moldova. It is planned that the transit of fuel will occur due to the system of trans-Balkan pipelines by reverse. In addition, the authorities suggest that the country's population take care of winter in advance and purchase gas for themselves at summer prices in advance.

Such steps by the Ukrainian leadership indicate that Kiev does not expect positive changes from the upcoming negotiations. Meanwhile, Europe is waiting for gas. And one gets the feeling that there is another side to this issue that is not participating in the negotiations, but is very unwilling to supply Russian gas to Europe. Perhaps the United States, which is actively promoting its LNG on international gas markets, could not have gotten aside from this issue?

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