



July 23, 2014

On June 21, European Commissioner for Energy Gunther Oettinger said Russia should acknowledge breakdown of confidence in it as a reliable gas supplier. Oettinger's statement is quite a careful wording of the fact that first occurred in 2006 and repeated in 2009. However, what was said by the European Commissioner now indicates only one thing — in 2009 Brussels failed to make adequate conclusions from the second gas crisis. The most important conclusion is that Russia uses gas as a weapon as is clear from the events dated 2006 and 2009. In reality today's Brussels cannot understand the fact that the third gas crisis is an element of a hybrid war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine and... the European Union. The EU is also a Kremlin's target. In case of the EU, Russia is not holding any military campaign, but information (misinformation) and the use of energy influence on Brussels is obvious.

The European Commission does not understand that Russia's policy is aimed at systematic intensification of EU's dependence on Russian energy resources and blocking of alternative gas sources and routes towards Europe. The indicator of successfulness of the policy gradually implemented since 2003 (when Putin approved energy strategy of the Russian Federation and openly noted that energy resources and infrastructure of their delivery are the instrument of domestic and foreign policy) became the words of Oettinger, who said that Russian oil and gas should be at the end of the list of possible sanctions. Therefore, Kremlin clearly understood that the hydrocarbon instruments work!

Danger of application of such instruments has eventually become clear for NATO. Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Russia was mounting a sophisticated "disinformation campaign" aimed at undermining attempts to exploit alternative energy sources such as shale gas in an attempt to maintain Europe's dependence on energy imports from Moscow. It stands to mention that in May the leadership of so-called Donetsk people's republic (DPR) called for the ban on shale gas production re-spreading the myths of the Russian propaganda about the harm of hydraulic fracture caused for the environment. The fact that DPR is a cardboard structure of Kremlin confirms our February's suggestion that one of the motives of the Russian aggression against Ukraine was ousting of global corporations from Ukrainian territories in order to prevent them from exploration and extraction of conventional and alternative hydrocarbons (see: <http://geostrategy.org.ua/ua/analitika/item/323-gazovyie-podteksty-krizisa-v-kryimu>).

In view of the aforementioned, one should understand that military and energy elements of the Russia's aggression are interconnected. The events in the east of Ukraine is not a Ukrainian-Russian crisis as it is presented by Europe, which is trying to distance itself from the problem. In fact current Russia-Ukraine-EU relations are "systemic complex of heterogeneous preventive impacts of military and nonmilitary nature" or the hybrid war according to western terminology. As was said above the war is not only an anti-Ukrainian conflict, it is also directed against the EU. Absence of a military element in war against the EU misinforms Brussels and makes it get to inadequate conclusion that the events are only the Ukrainian-Russian crisis. In its hybrid war against the EU Russia aims at making the EU abandon its ideas to expand eastward and as well as at splitting the Union. According to the plan, it would lead to elimination of a strategic rival in the west, as in absence of the European Union Russia will a priori be stronger than any European state at the level of bilateral relations with EU member countries. According to close-to-Kremlin analysts, the objective to split the EU is being gradually achieved. The indicators of such success are the processes commenced in the European Union:

— discussion of EU-Ukraine association agreement issues between the European Commission and Russia, which had earlier been unacceptable for Brussels;

— top-level discussions in Brussels regarding possible EU split due to Ukrainian-Russian crisis;

— [Foreign Affairs Minister of Germany Walter] Steinmeier's statement saying that Ukraine is not regarded as a member of the western alliance in foreseeable future.

Among other indicators are the lack of any consensus in NATO as for granting MAP to Georgia. In fact that consensus is affected directly by western European countries-members of NATO and the European Union, which are the largest importers of Russian gas, oil and petroleum products (primarily Germany).

Essentially, all that symbolizes dangerous tendency for Europe, in particular, some reincarnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in a form of some incipient backdoor agreements between [Russian foreign affairs minister] Lavrov and Steinmeier.

Possible plan of Kremlin's actions against Ukraine and the EU in the near future:

— Moscow's "reserve" until June 27 — the day of EU summit and consideration of practical introduction of the third level of sanctions against Russia. Moscow is sure the sanction decision will not be passed and the West's reaction for the intrusion of regular forces in Ukraine will entail reaction similar to one in 2008 as for Georgia.

— After the EU summit Russia may intensify actions against Ukraine both in military and energy respects. The hybrid war may be added with a cyber component in order to disorganize state management systems, systems of country's military organization, and the system of energy infrastructure management. However, the final decision on intrusion of regular forces has not yet been approved in Kremlin (though the scenarios have been elaborated). That is why Putin declaratively supported President Petro Poroshenko's peace plan and simultaneously ordered the commencement of large-scale military drills of the Central Military Region.

— Disruption of gas supplies to Europe (as it was in 2009) with simultaneous blaming Ukraine of "transit problems." It was not accidental that Gazpromexport terminated the agreement with Ukrtransgas on balancing of peak fluctuations during gas supplies to Europe. Although the Russian company stated that "the termination of the said agreement by Gazpromexport does not affect reliability of gas transit via the territory of Ukraine," it is still an indicator of preparations for artificial blaming Ukraine of "gas stealing" as it was in 2009.

What does Russia want to achieve?

1. Further bleeding of Ukraine through the escalation of armed hostilities in the east of the country aimed at leading the country to the state of multi-crisis. The mechanism of achievement of that objective is the enhancement of interventional element of the hybrid war. Here is a fragment of one of the latest analyses rendered in Russia. In our view it reflects the tendency: "On the one hand we (Russia) cannot march the army in [Ukraine] — the risks are too high. On the other hand, we cannot help aiding — the risks are higher... Respectively there is only one acceptable solution for the problem. We need to act indirectly... First of all we have to send military and civil specialists, representatives of security services to build full government institutions on the territory of newly established republics [Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics]. We have to create all required conditions for organization of voluntary movement rendering comprehensive assistance in its training, provision with ammunition and military hardware, creation of camps on the territory of Russia, Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to train volunteers from Donbas [historical region that includes northern part of Donetsk region, and southern part of Luhansk region] itself, and not only Donbas. We have to provide South-East Resistance Movement with intelligence information, including satellite data, data of radio electronic intelligence, unmanned machinery for the purpose of tactical intelligence, secure communication tools... The ammunition should be of Ukrainian and foreign origin in order to avoid accusations against Russia of military support to 'separatists and terrorists'. We have to use our reconnaissance and diversion groups for sabotage at strategic facilities of the enemy (airports, military bases, columns of armored vehicles, diversions against accumulation of significant enemy forces, etc.), ensure provision of information from agents. This variant is optimal and the only possible." Therefore, Kremlin in fact intends to intensify incursion by irregular forces equipped with heavy armament. Practically this stage started after Normandy, when Putin felt that Europe would not introduce sector sanctions against Russia in no event, and actions of the United States would be limited to tougher statements due to focusing on Iraq.

2. Termination of gas supplies to the EU through Ukraine on some pretext or other (e.g. blaming Ukraine of stealing gas).

3. Ultimate "making" the EU believe that Ukraine is a zone of unacceptable transit risks for supplies of energy resources to Europe and agree for reception of the resources in detour of Ukraine. The mechanism and ways:

— Subversive operations at the Ukrainian gas transport system, the reflection of which could be the blast at the Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhhorod gas pipeline on June 18 (quite indicative are the Russia's assessment to the incident: "The most important was exploded today. In fact the blast occurred only in Poltava, which is not the most important section [of the gas pipeline], however, this fact is a hint...", "the attractiveness of South Stream is growing with occurrence of every new risk for gas transit through Ukraine");

— Agreement of frightened European Commission, which does not have a clue in the occurring, to exclude the OPAL gas pipeline from the third Energy Package, which opens an opportunity for full-scale commencement of North Stream and reduction in transit through the Ukrainian gas transport system by over than 1/3. Besides, Kremlin believes it will be able to almost automatically receive consent of the European Commission for exclusion of South Stream from the Third Energy Package basing on the principle "if you did it for OPAL why then it could not be done for South Stream?"

— Technical preparation of North Stream to transfer volumes of gas currently transited via Ukraine. Confirmation to this fact is a report saying "the gas pipeline will be fully stopped between June 24-28 and until July 4 only one of its trains will operate." It is referred to the implementation of a complex of works on diagnostics of the gas pipeline and required technical preparation of the Portovaya compressor station, as well as a gas treatment unit for further transportation. Apparently, following July 4 (but quite possible earlier) gas supplies to the EU may be terminated in order to stimulate the European Commission to speed up tackling of the OPAL issue, as Brussels should take a principled decision by mid-July.

Significant was the fact that on June 22 European Commissioner for Energy Gunther Oettinger did not rule out that gas infrastructure through which Russian gas is delivered to the EU countries may become an object of subversion on the part of pro-Russian separatists. But what conclusion will the European Commission come to basing on this statement? Will it decide to support Ukraine in protection of critical infrastructure and development of the gas transport system or will it decide to cede Russia in its claims to collapsing the Third Energy Package and making Ukraine in detour? The remark of the European Commissioner saying "should both parties in their gas dispute follow only economic logic, respective compromises would have already been found long ago" indicates that Brussels has not comprehensively acknowledged that economic logic is ignored only by a party that uses gas as an instrument of influence — in particular Russia.

Therefore, should the EU Council at its summit on July 27 fail to introduce unconditional and preventive sanctions of the third level against Russia, Kremlin would take it as "green light" for the next stage of escalation in Ukraine (but not only!), and during the forthcoming summer months will focus on:

— disorganization of Ukrainian gas sector operation in Kharkiv and Poltava regions (its most vulnerable spots) as together the two regions provide 4/5 of all gas production in Ukraine and are the transit hubs and the processing sites; as well as in the western part of the country (underground gas storage facilities and gas measuring stations). The disorganization would be aimed at limiting Ukrainian Government in use of strategic gas potential to survive during the forthcoming winter period (domestic gas, underground gas storage facilities, reverse flow supplies);

— making the European Commission "under circumstances of insuperable force" agree for OPAL and South Stream gas pipelines;

— disruption of reverse flow gas supplies to Ukraine from Slovakia;

— information and propaganda escalation of the situation in Moldova and Latvia in the context of preparation for the following stages of expansion in 2015;

— escalation of political crisis in Bulgaria aimed at country's following exit from the EU.

Therefore, on July 27 the EU will have a unique chance to overcome downward dynamics of events not only in Eastern Europe, but also for itself, if the European Council manages to get to preventive diplomacy (passing the decision on introduction of sanctions) from permanent oral declaration of "deep concerns" over Russia's behavior. Otherwise an already deep crack between Old and New Europe will become much deeper.