THE BALTIC—2022: END OF GAS SUPPLIES AS A CONTINUATION OF RUSSIA'S HYBRID AGGRESSION AGAINST EUROPE

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The War in Europe

The phrase "war in Ukraine" is a misnomer when it comes to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and Europe. One way or another, this is a consequence of the systematic efforts of Russian propaganda to mask the multi-layered content of Russia's actions—the war against the West, which is being waged on different fronts and in multiple dimensions. In fact, there is a war in Europe, with Russia morphing its Ukrainian front from a hybrid war in 2014 into a full-scale armed invasion in 2022. In Europe, Moscow continues to use hybrid methods such as corruption, propaganda, cyberattacks, chemical weapons, **energy blackmail and sabotage**. However, the arsenal of methods and means of defeating Europe is not limited to this. Russia seeks war with the West, acting in a covert, low-budget and asymmetric manner, splitting the societies of Western countries.

Preparations of the ruling elite of Russia for a conflict with the West have been stepped up since 2013—at the peak of oil and gas prices. A non-public decision on the readiness for this confrontation was made within the framework of informal discussions of members of the "Politburo 2.0" (the circle of Vladimir Putin's confidants from among the security forces, senior officials of his administration and close oligarchs in the image and likeness of the narrow circle of the Politburo of the CC of the CPSU)[1]. This statement of pro-Kremlin analysts is quite plausible, since 2013 was the year of maximum revenues received by Russia from energy exports.

A retrospective analysis of the pro-Kremlin analysts' researches allows us to conclude that one of the main geostrategic goals of Russia is to destroy the system of transatlantic partnership and solidarity by stimulating isolationism in the United States and its greater focus

[1] http://www.intelros.ru/reports/24862-doklad-minchenko-konsalting-politbyuro-20-i-postkrymskaya-rossiya.html

on the Indo-Pacific region instead of Europe, which will naturally lead to its repositioning towards the Eurasian projects of Moscow and Beijing. That is why Putin's regime has been so actively increasing Russia's share in European energy markets, building new oil and gas transportation systems (BPS 1, BPS 2 oil pipelines, Nord Stream, South Stream, Nord Stream 2, TurkStream gas pipelines), counteracted the appearance of non-Russian energy carriers in Europe via non-Russian routes (Odesa-Brody-Plock oil pipeline, Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, White Stream) or slowed them down, such as Azerbaijani gas on the EU market through the South Caucasus and Türkiye.

In fact, Putin's regime has reincarnated and finalized the implementation of the Soviet-era strategy of making Europe dependent. Such intentions are recorded in the documents of that period. Here is just one illustrative fragment of the note of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs "On the political line and some practical steps of the USSR in connection with the formation of the government of Willy Brandt in Germany," which was presented to the CC of the CPSU on December 1, 1969: "It may be of great importance to reach an agreement on the supply of Soviet natural gas to the FRG. We mean the conclusion of a contract that would be valid for two decades and would make such an important sphere of the German national economy as energy dependent on the Soviet Union to a certain extent"[2].

Low oil prices in the period of 1985–1999 and the collapse of first the Warsaw Pact and CMEA, and then the USSR, led only to a certain pause in Moscow's energy expansion policy. It was revived in a new historical round—after Vladimir Putin's coming to power in Russia and the growth of demand for Russian oil and gas in the European market. **Oil and gas profits, which grew dynamically in proportion to the increase in oil prices on the global market, additionally stimulated the resurgence of Moscow's imperialism and great-powerness. As a consequence, the virus of revanchism infected not only the ruling elite, but also the society of the Russian Federation.**

However, the attempt to reintegrate the post-Soviet space in 2014 by force did not go according to the scenario imagined in the Kremlin. Neither Ukraine nor the West accepted the "return of Crimea to its native harbor", as well as the invasion of the Ukrainian Donbas in 2014. On the backdrop of imperial revanchism and hybrid aggression against Europe from within Europe, despite persistent efforts, Russia failed to ram the South Stream and Nord Stream 2 projects through Europe.

Realizing that the further transformation of Europe into an industrial and high-tech appendage of raw material-oriented Russia does not work, especially in the context of the EU's green transition, the Kremlin made a fundamental decision to change its strategy to deal with a wayward Europe. It decided to replace the energy "carrot" with a "stick". This was done through an artificial price escalation in the EU gas market, starting in the second half of 2021

[2] Mikhail Lipkin. "The Soviet Union and the Integration Processes in Europe: Mid-1940s Late 1960s" (in Russian). Moscow: Russian Foundation for Educational Assistance, 2016, ISBN 9785912441813, P. 457-458

after the well-known Biden-Merkel agreements on Nord Stream 2. But Russia's far-reaching intentions are not limited to playing on the market, which has been turned into a theater of war by Russia's clandestine activities. Especially since the **direct armed invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and the distancing of NATO and the EU from the policy of "forcing the aggressor to peace", following the false concept of "preventing escalation", has created new opportunities to defeat Europe as a weak link in the transatlantic West, as well as the United States, which, according to pro-Kremlin analysts, is no longer a dominant force in the globalized world.**

"If you cannot answer, then you are not a hegemon at all"—this is the assessment by Russian propaganda of the United States dating back to the Obama administration and the euphoria of "Crimea is ours" in 2014[3]. It remains relevant, though. This is confirmed by the statement contained in the latest analysis of the Valdai Club: "The peculiarity of the moment is that the superpower dominance of the United States and its allies is essentially no longer viable, but the entire global infrastructure that served it is still in place"[4].

Russia is seeking to create a state of disinformation, disruption and disorganization of the U.S. and EU governance systems during the H-hour—the time of decisive action—and to get a window of opportunity to geopolitically throw the West back. A striking example of how this is imagined in the Kremlin is last year's ultimatum to NATO to withdraw to the borders by 1997. Since the blitzkrieg failed either against Ukraine or NATO, the Kremlin is gradually switching to Plan B—a long-term "people's war"[5]. At that, a special role is given to damaging energy networks and telecommunications since they constitute the infrastructure that ensures the effective functioning of the economy, national governments and national security systems of the West. Dysfunction of energy and telecommunications networks automatically means chaos in public administration, defense and security, and, which is no less important, in national financial and international payment systems. This is what Russia strives for in order to defeat its existential enemy—the West—in a comprehensive and multidimensional way at the H-hour. Probably, this time is expected by the Kremlin to be in the winter of 2022-2023 or 2023-2024.

Hour of R.S. (Rishi Sunak)

Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Admiral James Stavridis, in 2015, against the background of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and intervention in Syria, stated that "under Putin, the Russians will reach for Cold War tools in an effort to prove their global relevance"[6]. In January 2022, the Commander of the British Armed Forces, Admiral

[3] http://www.odnako.org/blogs/holodnaya-voyna-20-kak-nadvigaetsya-novaya-realnost/
[4] https://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/43157/
[5] https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5631885
[6] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/new-cold-war-under-the-sea_b_8402020

Tony Radakin, noted that over the past 20 years there has been a "phenomenal increase in Russian submarine and underwater activity"[7].

"97% of global communications and $10 trillion of daily financial transactions are transmitted not through satellites in the sky, but through cables lying deep under the ocean. Undersea cables are the indispensable infrastructure of our time, essential to our modern life and digital economy, yet they are inadequately protected and highly vulnerable to attack at sea and on land, from both hostile states and terrorists"[8], said a special report of December 1, 2017, authored by Conservative MP Rishi Sunak, now Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. The author of the report warned that a successful attack on the network of submarine communication cables could cause devastating blows to the country's security and economy[9].

Also in December 2017, the British Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach warned that Russia could "immediately and potentially catastrophically"[10] affect the world's economies if the submarine cables totaling 545,018 miles in 213 autonomous systems were cut or damaged[11].

In a similar tone, U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Andrew Lennon, Commander of NATO Submarine Forces, said they are "now seeing Russian underwater activity in the vicinity of undersea cables that I don't believe we have ever seen"[12]. "Russia is clearly taking an interest in NATO and NATO nations' undersea infrastructure", he pointed out. It is known that Russia has a reconnaissance ship Yantar, which can carry two small submarines capable of destroying cables or tapping them for information. "We know that these auxiliary submarines are designed to work on the ocean floor, and they're transported by the mother ship, and we believe they may be equipped to manipulate objects on the ocean floor"[13], the American admiral evaluated.

The assessments of Rishi Sunak, Andrew Lennon, James Stavridis, Tony Radakin and Stuart Peach, expressed at different times, coincide in the main thing—**Russia has built up its underwater capabilities, and Western countries underestimate the threat posed by them in the deep sea**. Despite the pathos of the statement made on July 31 this year on the occasion of the celebration of the Day of the Russian Navy and the approval of the new Maritime Doctrine of Russia against the backdrop of the defeats inflicted by the Ukrainian Navy to the Russian Navy in the Black Sea, Putin's statement should not be underestimated: "The Fleet successfully and honorably performs strategic tasks on the borders of our country and in any part of the world ocean. It has high readiness for active actions of its coastal, surface, air and underwater **forces and means**. They are being constantly improved"[14].

[7] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/08/uk-military-chief-warns-of-russian-threat-to-vital-undersea-cables
[8] https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Undersea-Cables.pdf
[9] https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Undersea-Cables.pdf
[10] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42362500
[11] https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Undersea-Cables.pdf
[12] https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5208621/Russian-submarines-step-Atlantic-data-cables-activity.html
[13] Ibid.
[14] https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2022/07/31/15205148.shtml

One of the leading Western experts on the Russian submarine fleet, H I Sutton, editor of the Covert Shores portal, author of several books on submarines and underwater special forces, gave a fairly unambiguous assessment of the Kremlin's intentions back in 2018: "Russia would likely target the internet cables which pass under the Norwegian Sea, North Sea and North Atlantic. This would be of strategic importance"[15].

One should also pay attention to the fact that Russia uses the capabilities and has far-reaching plans for civilian energy infrastructure at sea to accomplish intelligence tasks. Former Commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (1998–2002) Vladimir Komoyedov indirectly confirmed in one of his interviews the expediency of "building larger underwater surveillance systems in the Baltic, North and Far East". **The one who has more "eyes and ears" in the sea, dominates it. Accordingly, the other side has blind spots and is more vulnerable to hybrid actions against underwater infrastructure.**

Back in 2015, Stavridis noted: "Our naval forces need to be ready to defend our submarine cables, exactly as we defend our electrical grid, industrial base and transportation networks"[16]. Stuart Peach emphasized in 2017 that it was critical for NATO to prioritize cable protection "in response to the threat posed by the modernisation of the Russian navy, both nuclear and conventional submarines and ships"[17].

Nevertheless, since these crucial estimates and calls were made, there has been little progress in protecting submarine communications. In continental Europe, attention to the issue of hybrid warfare at sea has been scant. Among the Western European think tanks, we can name only the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University, which drew attention to the problem of hybrid warfare at sea earlier than others[18]. Director of the Institute Joachim Krause emphasized that Russians are testing methods of underwater warfare, when submarines land divers who destroy underwater cables or pipelines by blowing them up[19].

"Recent attacks on Nord Stream 1 and 2 in the Baltic Sea have underscored the importance of the seabed as a zone of conflict in modern warfare. Unfortunately, t**he U.S. and its Western allies are ill-prepared to protect their vulnerable networks far beneath the waves**"[20], James Stavridis recently concluded.

Thus, the inaction or inadequate action of the leading Western countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France—and NATO as a whole has created a large zone of vulnerability, which Russia is already exploiting in its hybrid aggression (hybression) against the Alliance. **If Russia's overall weakness makes a conventional conflict with NATO not**

[15] https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/node/3381
[16] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/new-cold-war-under-the-sea_b_8402020
[17] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42362500
[18] https://www.ispk.uni-kiel.de/de/news-archiv/2022/downloads-2022/artikel-abendblatt
[19] https://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article236559181/gas-pipeline-ostsee-nord-stream-sabotage-russland-usa-ukraine.html
[20] https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-10-08/nord-stream-explosions-show-the-deep-sea-is-now-a-battleground?leadSource=uverify%20wall

appealing to the Kremlin, it automatically increases the attractiveness of asymmetric actions, such as the destruction of undersea telecommunications networks during the H-hour.

Is the H-Hour Coming?

The Baltic Sea is home to many submarine cables that connect energy and information flows between NATO and European Union countries and are essential to their economies. In addition to the FOCL network, the Baltic also has a network of power cables for the transmission of electricity. For example, SwePol Link between Sweden and Poland. One of the first cables in the world was Gotland, which connects the Swedish mainland with the island of Gotland. The Baltic Cable from Herrenwyk (Sweden) to Lübeck (Germany) is the longest electricity supply cable in the world with a length of 250 km[21].

The American maritime security expert Frank Hoffman in his paper "Assessing Baltic Sea Regional Maritime Security" modeled a possible scenario of a hybrid attack by Russia in the Baltic Sea region, which is a critical center of economic activity in Europe and which has numerous vulnerabilities. Among other things, he simulated damage to critical energy and telecommunications infrastructure, causing chaos in the business environment, uncertainty of NATO's position and actions, followed by Russia's invasion of Estonia[22].

"Creating energy insecurity is one method for Russia to destabilize the region... The main issue across Europe this winter is governments being able to keep lights and heat on for their citizens... By surreptitiously destroying key infrastructure, Russia can disrupt European governments by placing into question their ability to protect their people. For many Europeans, Ukraine or security concerns outside of national sovereignty issues will not matter when faced with energy insecurity"[23], says an excerpt from a recent report by the U.S.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies on Russia's ability to launch a covert strike against Europe.

The Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation, approved this year, indicates both the possibility of hybrid operations and legalizes the use of military force in the vital for Russia areas of the World Ocean:

"103. In order to realize and protect its national interests, the Russian Federation:

26) in vital areas (zones) of the World Ocean, along with political, diplomatic, economic and informational methods, fully uses military force methods, including naval presence, demonstration of flag and force, if necessary, **uses military force** in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation and universally recognized principles and norms of

[21] More details can be found in one of the previous papers of the Centre "Strategy XXI", which is available here: https://geostrategy.org.ua/
[22] https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Assessing-Baltic-Maritime-Security.pdf
[23] https://www.csis.org/analysis/baltic-conflict-russias-goal-distract-nato

international law"[24].

Both the units of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (maritime special forces of the Russian Navy) and the Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research are capable of carrying out hybrid maritime operations.

For reference: *military unit 45707, structurally related to the Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research, also known as GUGI, is one of the most classified military units of the Russian Ministry of Defense, which plans and conducts special underwater operations. The hydronauts of the GUGI are engaged in reconnaissance activities, such as listening to communication cables, installing various equipment on the seabed, as well as collecting wreckage of ships, aircraft and satellites—both their own, so that they do not fall into the wrong hands (NATO), and those of foreign countries in order to obtain information about the level of technological development of possible enemies (NATO). The GUGI also plans and prepares in advance large-scale sabotage of transatlantic fiber-optic communication lines (FOCLs) between Europe and North America for a certain H-hour, when Russia decides to launch a direct or hybrid strike against NATO.*

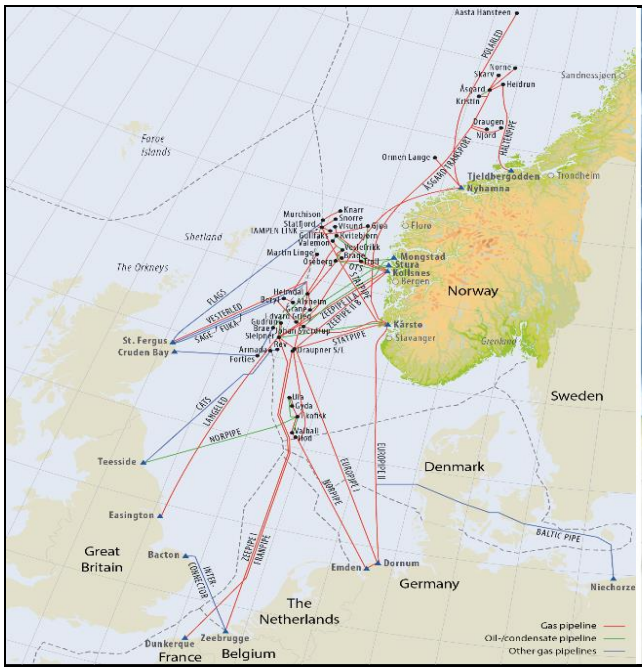
Until September 26, the Nord Stream infrastructure, which practically runs through almost the entire Baltic Sea from east to west, provided opportunities for acts of hidden interference and sabotage at strategically important maritime infrastructure of NATO and EU member states in the region. This concerns, first of all, naval bases of NATO member states, seaports, oil and LNG terminals, underwater gas and energy interconnectors. Actually, the sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline systems was a demonstration of how it can be.

Yet, Russian focus is not limited to the Baltic Sea. On the contrary, the activity in the Baltic Sea after September 26—the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines—may be a distraction from two important regions of Europe in terms of energy supply. The first is the North Sea region, where gas and oil are produced and transported to the UK and to Western European EU member states including Germany, France and Belgium, and more recently to Poland. The second is the Mediterranean Sea region, crossed by gas pipelines from Algeria to EU countries such as Spain and Italy.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that in August-September a Russian nuclear submarine, not properly identified, was secretly sailing in the Mediterranean Sea[25]. The Western press is most struck by old nuclear submarines that have been converted to small submarine carriers: "They are hard to detect and can place explosive charges on the ocean-floor ready for detonation months or years later"[26]. Also, we should keep in mind that two Russian submarines are permanently based in Tartus, Syria, performing certain tasks in the Mediterranean Sea.

[24] http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_423278/
[25] https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/09/new-intelligence-russia-sends-nuclear-submarine-to-mediterranean/
[26] https://www.ft.com/content/0ddc5b48-b255-401b-8e9f-8660f4eab37b

In recent years, the number of cases of damage to submarine FOCLs of unspecified nature has increased. It is usually believed that this is due to fishing activities of sea trawlers, dropping and lifting of ship's anchors, when they can hit and break cables. Nevertheless, it should not be ruled out that sabotage actions can be disguised as ordinary damage. In October, a break occurred on three fiber optic cables in France leading from Marseille to Lyon, Milan and Barcelona, causing communication problems[27]. Arthur Laudrain, a researcher at the University of Oxford's department of politics and international relations who studied the attacks, stated that such sabotage "implies a lot of coordination and a few teams"[28]. An unexplained break in the fiber optic cable also occurred in the Shetland Islands when communication with the United Kingdom was interrupted in mid-October. Due to the damage of the cable, telephone and Internet communication, payment systems stopped working on the islands. The official cause is unknown. However, at that time, the Russian reconnaissance vessel Boris Petrov was spotted passing by the islands with some undisclosed mission[29].



Scheme map 1: Underwater pipelines in the North Sea that bring energy resources from Norway to Western Europe and the United Kingdom.

Source:
https://www.norskpetroleum.no/en/?attachment_id=23621

Scheme map 2. Submarine pipelines in the Mediterranean Sea, which supply gas from Algeria to Spain and Italy.

Source:
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-existing-gas-pipeline-network-between-Europe-and-North-Africa-can-be-used-to_fig10_317138578

Western European countries—economic and political heavyweights of the EU—are traditionally seen in Russia as its most vulnerable link, with strong pro-Russian and anti-American sentiments. The latter are intensified due to high export prices for U.S. LNG for the EU. According to the Kremlin, the restriction or impossibility of obtaining gas from

[27] https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/saboteurs-cut-fiber-cables-in-france-in-second-incident-this-year/
[28] Ibid.
[29] https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-threat-to-britains-undersea-cables/

traditional sources will make the governments of the leading EU countries turn to Russia with a request to resume the supply of "cheap gas" in large volumes in order to avoid negative socio-economic and political consequences. And in this situation Russia will be able to dictate to the EU its terms of resumption of cooperation, including geopolitical requirements.

The Kremlin in every possible way shows its determination to force Europe to gas capitulation, threatening Moldova with the termination of supplies, and Ukraine with the termination of transit due to the "gas settling"[30]. This did not work through price escalation, so the bet is now placed on forceful actions, the essence of which ultimately boils down to the formula "Europe does not want to buy Russian gas, so Russia has no choice but to create a deadlock for it and force it to return to buying gas from Gazprom".

26 September 2022: Demonstration of Resolve

Leaving one of the four existing strings of the two Nord Stream gas pipelines in functional condition points to Russian responsibility for the sabotage. The remaining string of NS2 should serve as a "temptation" for Europe during the winter seasons of 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 to take advantage of gas supplies from Russia, which Gazprom will be able to begin in order to "save" Europeans from the cold. Especially in circumstances when underwater gas pipelines—from the North or Mediterranean Sea—may be out of order due to "technical incidents".

The main factor behind subverting the flows is the possibility of declaring force majeure in order to avoid paying huge penalties, as "Gazprom" did not fulfill its obligations to supply gas under long-term contracts, as the former head of Naftogaz of Ukraine Andrii Koboliev rightly pointed out[31]. Gazprom stopped delivering on its commitments back in 2021, when, following instructions from the Kremlin, it resorted to price escalation in the EU gas market by limiting gas supplies. Importantly, the explosion of gas pipelines was not a momentary action in retaliation against Europe for the de-Russification of gas imports after February 24, but was part of an elaborate and preplanned special operation.

On October 12, 2021, at the First Conference on Maritime Security "Azov-2021," the Centre for Global Studies "Strategy XXI" presented a report "Concealed Activity of the Russian Navy in the Area of the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline at Completion Stage"[32]. It was devoted to the hidden intelligence capabilities that can be created by Russia using civilian gas transportation

[30] https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-economy/3620123-moldova-sprostuvala-zvinuvacenna-gazpromu-v-osidanni-gazu-v-ukraini.html
[31] https://biz.nv.ua/ukr/markets/vibuhivka-u-pivnichni-potoki-bula-zakladena-rosiyanami-shche-na-etapi-budivnictva-kobolyev-50274412.html
[32] The report is available on the website of the Centre "Strategy XXI": https://geostrategy.org.ua/analityka/dopovidi-ta-prezentaciyi/oglyad-concealed-activity-of-the-russian-navy-in-the-area-of-the-nord-stream-2-pipeline-at-completion-stage
Its main content is set out in the publication of the authors in the "Dzerkalo Tyzhnia": https://zn.ua/ukr/international/jak-rosija-planuje-vikoristovuvati-pivnichnij-potik-2-iz-rozviduvalnoju-metoju-.html

infrastructure. Another important aspect of the report was that in the course of the completion of NS2, servicemen of special military units of the Russian Navy appeared in the corridor of both gas pipelines, whose functionality does not correspond to the nature of the gas pipeline laying works and the performance of security functions.

Observations of the project activities in the construction zone showed that during the final stage of work on the completion of the gas pipeline NS2 (from April 10 to August 30, 2021), servicemen of certain special units of the Russian Navy were noticed and identified in the area of the construction, in particular:

- a group of 4 people of the Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, from the head unit based in Peterhof;
- a group of 7 people of the 313th Special-Purpose Detachment for Combating Underwater Sabotage of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Navy, based in Baltiysk, Kaliningrad region;
- a group of 7 people of the 342nd Rescue Detachment of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Navy from Baltiysk.

The mentioned servicemen in the amount of 18 persons formed a consolidated special purpose detachment, which was alternately on board civilian vessels—tugboat Kapitan Beklemishev and multifunctional rescue vessels Spasatel Karev and Bakhtemir. It was prohibited to record the fact of their stay in the onboard documents of the vessels. The use of WhatsApp and other Western messengers was strictly forbidden, only Telegram was used.

The monitoring group, using SIGINT and OSINT capabilities, identified only two persons from the command staff of the combined detachment, as they were the ones who kept in touch with the shore. These are Lieutenant-Captain Andrey Hrinko (codename Morgunovskyi) from the 342nd Rescue Detachment and the head of the diving station of the 313th Special-Purpose Detachment for Combating Underwater Sabotage, Aleksandr Ivanov (codename Gromov). These two identified individuals are the lead to Russia's chain of preparations for sabotage actions in the Baltic against critical underwater infrastructure of NATO and EU member states.

The chronology of works of unspecified nature performed by the combined detachment is as follows:

- April 10: a combined detachment of servicemen together with bulky luggage was delivered on board the Spasatel Karev multi-purpose rescue vessel by boat from Kaliningrad.
- April 14: the group began to perform underwater works of an undisclosed nature.
- April 21: at night, a group of 7 servicemen from Spasatel Karev was transferred to the

Bakhtemir multi-purpose rescue vessel using the boat Bercut L-DC Arctica together with a special cargo (boxes weighing more than 100 kg). In the afternoon they started underwater works of unspecified nature.

– May 8: The Bakhtemir multi-purpose rescue vessel is heading towards Kaliningrad and receives cargo of undetermined nature from the Baltic Fleet supply vessel Yasnyi at the port roadstead. The operation was carried out at night. It means that the shipper and the consignee tried to act as covertly as possible.

– June 24: the group moves from Bakhtemir to the Kapitan Beklemishev tugboat.

– At the end of July: another group of servicemen moves from the multi-purpose rescue vessel Spasatel Karev to the Kapitan Beklemishev tugboat.

Until the end of August, the combined detachment continued to carry out underwater works of an unspecified nature, which were performed exclusively under favorable weather conditions—sea state no more than 2 points on the Beaufort scale, and wind no more than 6 m/s with gusts up to 7 m/s. The work area was in the locations close to the intersection of the Baltica and Denmark-Poland-2 FOCLs. When vessels from Denmark and Germany showed up, the operations were immediately stopped.

It is noteworthy that during the stormy weather multi-purpose rescue vessel Bakhtemir, unlike other vessels of the technical fleet, which left the place of work to take shelter from the bad weather, remained in place and did not enter the territorial waters of Denmark near Bornholm Island[33].

As it turned out, the training of servicemen participating in the combined detachment was conducted in a number of special centers of the Russian Armed Forces:

– Military Educational and Scientific Center of the Navy of the Kuznetsov Naval Academy in St. Petersburg;

– Diving training complex “Shturm” at the Ryazan Margelov Higher Airborne School;

– Training Center for Special Forces “Senezh” in Solnechnogorsk, Moscow region (military unit 43292) (department of maritime special operations);

– Training Centre for Military Rescuers and Diving Specialists in Sevastopol, which is part of the Joint Training Centre of the Russian Navy (Kronstadt, military unit 56529).

The profile of the following centers indicates that the unit was composed of specialists trained

[33] Read more about the technical capabilities and equipment of multi-purpose rescue vessel here: https://geostrategy.org.ua/analityka/dopovidi-ta-prezentaciyi/oglyad-concealed-activity-of-the-russian-navy-in-the-area-of-the-nord-stream-2-pipeline-at-completion-stage

to execute underwater sabotage operations.

The use of civilian vessels of the technical fleet, which may, under the cover of certain works in the area of gas pipelines, at the same time have special equipment for installation and maintenance of both underwater hydroacoustic stations and equipment for taking information from FOCLs, as well as for installation of special explosive devices for underwater sabotage, is indicative. Such devices are manufactured in Russia by specialized enterprises.

The Russian concern Sea Underwater Weapons – Gidropribor within the Tactical Missiles Corporation produces sea bottom mines (MDM series), which are compatible with various carriers and have high flexibility of use[34]. The Concern's website clearly states that it "creates a full range of modern naval weapons, including bottom, anchor and self-propelled mines, mine and torpedo and mine and missile systems, which can be used for offensive and defensive purposes in solving tactical, **strategic and political tasks"[35].**

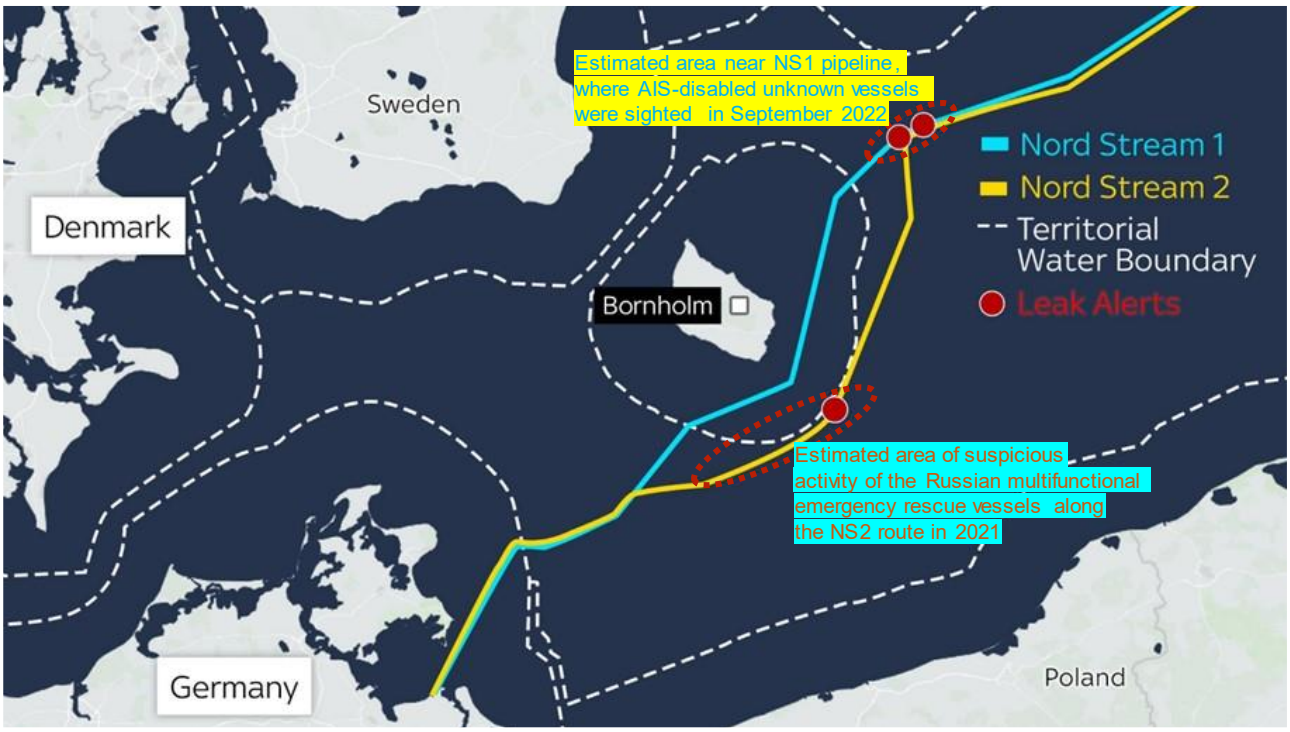
The investigation in Sweden showed that explosions occurred in the route of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines in the exclusive maritime economic zone, which resulted in significant damage[36]. Both pipelines of Nord Stream 1 were affected. As for Nord Stream 2, one of its two lines was blown up in the Danish exclusive maritime economic zone between Bornholm Island and the Polish coast.

Unfortunately, the Baltic Sea countries—Sweden, Denmark, Germany, which began to investigate the explosion of the gas pipelines, were unable to form a joint group of investigators. Each state conducts its own investigation in accordance with national procedures. It is critical that in the end the Russian authorship of the sabotage is proven de facto and de jure. This will open the prospect for multi-billion lawsuits demanding compensation for the damage and lost profits of European companies. Moreover, the largest claims will be filed by those companies that until recently were the most committed to doing business with Gazprom.

Analysts from SpaceKnow stated that on the eve of the explosions on the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea near the leakage site, two unknown large-sized vessels with muted transponders of the generally accepted international system of automatic identification of the vessel AIS were noticed. A few weeks before the incident, there were 25 vessels in the Nord Stream location, and only two of them had their AIS transponders switched off[37]. **It can be assumed that these vessels, at least one of them, could have carried mini-submarines, which were used to plant explosive devices in the pre-determined locations described above by the Russian maritime special forces unit.**

[34] https://topwar.ru/190442-sovremennye-rossijskie-morskie-donnye-miny.html
[35] https://gidropribor.ru/production/mines/
[36] https://sakerhetspolisen.se/ovriga-sidor/other-languages/english-engelska/press-room/news/news/2022-10-06-strengthened-suspicions-of-gross-sabotage-in-baltic-sea.html
[37] https://www.wired.co.uk/article/nord-stream-pipeline-explosion-dark-ships

The detonation point of NS2 is located in the barraging zone of the above-mentioned Russian multi-purpose rescue vessels during their concealed underwater technical works in 2021. This is also the zone where the Baltica (connecting Poland, Sweden, Denmark) and Denmark – Poland 2 (connecting Poland with Bornholm) underwater fibre-optic cables are located. Although the available information is not very accurate, it allows to schematically mark and connect the areas of suspicious clandestine activity along the routes of the pipelines NS1 and NS2 and to conclude that they encompass the sites of pipeline explosions.



Scheme nap 3: Approximate location of suspicious activity zones combined with the location of sabotage sites at NS1 and NS2
Based on: https://news.sky.com/story/powerful-explosions-behind-two-nord-stream-leaks-in-baltic-sea-danish-police-say-12723498

The Russian Navy has a fleet of specialized research and auxiliary vessels, which can also be carriers of unmanned underwater vehicles.

So, we can assume that **Russia has been preparing for a long time and is ready for the H-hour in the war against NATO at sea depths. The defeats suffered by the Russian surface fleet in the hostilities against Ukraine in the Black Sea should not give rise to undue illusions about its ineffectiveness in the deep sea.**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Continental Europe was less alert to the vulnerability of submarine communications. One of those who noticed this vulnerability early on was the then British MP Rishi Sunak. "Now he is prime minister and the risk has become a reality, will he invest in protective maritime and submarine capabilities as he recommended back then?"—the British Financial Times wonders[38].

European think tanks, unlike the American ones, began to pay increased attention to Russia's hybression at sea and in the deep sea only after September 26. Meanwhile, Ukraine has been drawing attention to this for the past 5 years, after Russia deployed radar and sonar stations on seized Ukrainian gas production infrastructure in the northwestern sector of the Black Sea[39].

Russia's destruction of critical energy and telecommunications infrastructure in Ukraine also serves to practice similar actions against Russia's neighbors on NATO's eastern flank.

The explosions at the bottom of the Baltic Sea have become a manifestation of the fact that Russia's high underwater activity in recent years has been not only reconnaissance, but also preparation for decisive actions, including sabotage, during the H-hour. The Russian trace can be seen not only in the doctrinal intentions and practice of using energy resources as a weapon.

Russia has mastered the technology of inconspicuous placement of explosive devices with delayed detonation time near critical infrastructure (pipelines, FOCLs, power cables). In addition to the above-mentioned special units of the Russian Navy in the Baltic, special attention should be paid to the activities of the 561st Separate Special-Purpose Naval Reconnaissance Point of the Russian Navy (military unit 10617), located in the village of Parusnoye in Kaliningrad region.

It is not excluded that a diversionary maneuver for the special operation of the Russian Navy on the underwater communications between America and Europe in the North Atlantic or in the Mediterranean Sea in the future may be the landing of troops on the Svalbard Arctic archipelago, which has a demilitarized status according to the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, but the sovereignty over which still belongs to Norway.

The use of civilian vessels with mixed crew to perform combat missions is one of the mechanisms of hybrid warfare at sea. A civilian vessel does not raise suspicions, while there is a military unit with a special mission on board, not declared in accordance with the international law of the sea.

It is the destruction of the Nord Stream infrastructure that has attracted the attention of European governments. "Neglected or underfunded maritime forces are now being charged

[38] https://www.ft.com/content/0ddc5b48-b255-401b-8e9f-8660f4eab37b
[39] https://geostrategy.org.ua/chornomorska-bezpeka/chornomorska-bezpeka-2-32-2018

with protecting critical maritime infrastructure, a mission very few countries can execute with current resources. NATO countries should have national maritime strategies with specific missions and tasks as well as adequate resources to develop capabilities" is the recommendation of the American CSIS[40].

NATO should reconsider outdated approaches to energy security and hybrid warfare at sea. Thus, the NATO Headquarters proposed the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence (NATO ENSEC COE) to develop a NATO Concept for the operational supply of energy during operations and exercises[41]. This means that NATO retains an outdated narrow understanding of energy security, which focuses only on the provision of the necessary types of energy to the armed forces and units to perform their tasks. The NATO Center of Excellence, which Ukraine has joined, apparently should, as a scientific and applied think tank, expand the scope of competence and formulate a new understanding of energy security for NATO, adequate to new challenges and threats. The Ukrainian side can offer relevant directions based on the experience of Russian aggression both on land and in the Black Sea.

NATO and political leaders of the Alliance should abandon the practice of avoiding public identification of Russian authorship of sabotage in order to avert escalation. Such practice only encourages Russia to further actions, as it is seen as a manifestation of the weakness of the West.

The Ukrainian side should draw the EU's attention to the expediency of establishing an international working group of lawyers and experts under the auspices of the European Commission in order to ensure that on the basis of the investigations into the facts of the submarine gas pipelines explosion the relevant claims against Russia are made and appropriate compensation is collected, and Russian state-owned companies are deprived of any access to the EU energy markets.

Ukrainian diplomacy together with the UK, Poland and the Baltic states should initiate a pan-European treaty to prevent malicious acts against critical energy and telecommunications infrastructure on the continent and in the seas adjacent to Europe.

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Russia's hybression against the West will not bring it victory, as the energy resources available in the bowels of Russia have not made this country rich and prosperous. Yet, Russia will stubbornly move towards its goal of global geopolitical revenge until it is stopped in Ukraine and Europe or the international community creates a scenario of "multiple crises" for Russia itself, as well as destroys Russian weapons and carriers, which it uses to strike at the territory of Europe in Ukraine.

[40] https://www.csis.org/analysis/baltic-conflict-russias-goal-distract-nato
[41] https://enseccoe.org/en/events-and-projects/268/nato-operational-energy-concept-development-63/details

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The information and views set out in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

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