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Germany's Russian LNG Imports Surge Over 500% in 2024

By Ben Aris for bne IntelliNews

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Tanker at the LNG jetty of the Sakhalin-2 LNG project. **Gazprom**

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Germany's imports of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) soared by 500% in 2024 year-on-year, reaching a total value of 7.32 billion euros, the Financial Times reported, citing a report by Belgian, German and Ukrainian NGOs.

Though Berlin has officially banned direct imports of Russian LNG to its new facilities on the north coast, it has been receiving Russian liquified gas via face-saving intermediary ports elsewhere in Europe.

The German state-owned energy company Sefe, formerly part of Gazprom and nationalized in 2022, purchased 58 cargos of LNG via the French port of Dunkirk last year — marking a more than 500% increase from the previous year, FT cited the report as saying.

Between 3% and 9.2% of Germany's gas supply still originates from Russia, reaching the country through other EU members, according to the data.

Previously, Germany was heavily dependent on Russian piped gas to power its economy and had not yet built LNG terminals. This made the country almost entirely dependent on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines carrying gas from Russia's giant Yamal gas fields to Lubmin, a coastal town in northeastern Germany.

Following Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Berlin banned direct imports of Russian gas but continued to import it via third parties. However, with reduced volumes and soaring costs, the end of cheap imported Russian gas has led to the deindustrialization of the German economy and sent the former powerhouse of Europe into a two-year recession.

A significant portion of Russian LNG arrives at Belgian ports, where it is re-gasified and transported via pipelines across Europe. Once in Germany, also home to the largest gas storage tanks in the EU, the gas is typically recorded as Belgian in official energy statistics, despite Belgium having no domestic LNG production.

Belgium is among the largest importers of Russian LNG, alongside Spain and France. In 2024, Russian LNG supplies to Europe reached a record 17.2 billion cubic meters, with a portion of these shipments bound by long-term contracts that companies are unable to terminate.

Europe remains hooked on Russian gas and has been unable to find alternative sources of energy.

The EU is currently preparing a 16th package of sanctions on Russia that will be released on the third anniversary of the start of the war in Ukraine. Despite recent calls by 10 EU members to ban Russian LNG imports, LNG will not be included in the upcoming sanctions package.

Related article: European Imports of Russian LNG Hit 'Record Levels' in 2024

According to the Kpler global trade intelligence firm, Russia exported a record 33.6 million tons (45.7 billion cubic meters) of LNG to Europe in 2024, up 4% compared to 2023, equivalent to a third of Russia's pre-war exports of gas to Europe. And piped gas exports to Europe, largely to Hungary, Turkey and Slovakia, were up a hefty 20%.

More than half (52%) of Russian LNG exports went to Europe, which remains Russia's most important market. China imported another 31 bcm via the Power of Siberia pipeline, more than doubling the volume of imports since the war in Ukraine started. The pipeline is designed to deliver up to 38 bcm of natural gas annually to China and the Power of Siberia 2 will add another 50 bcm if it is eventually built.

Discussions are also ongoing regarding a potential new route through Kazakhstan capable of delivering up to 35 bcm annually. Russia reversed the flow of Soviet-era pipelines to Central Asia last year and is already sending about 5 bcm of gas to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Despite the energy dearth, EU leaders are still calling for a ban on Russian gas imports, a call repeated last week by German Christian Democratic Union leader Friedrich Merz, who is widely expected to succeed Chancellor Olaf Scholz following February's general election.

The EU recently published a roadmap for abandoning Russian LNG by 2027 but its members are deeply divided on the issue.

The largest buyers of Russian LNG in the EU in 2024 were France (6.3 million tons), Spain (4.8 million tons), Belgium (4.4 million tons) and the Netherlands (1.3 million tons).

But this distorts the true picture of consumption: the same Germany that banned the reception of gas carriers with Russian LNG at its terminals imports gas through France. As a result, even now 3-9% of the gas consumed in Germany is of Russian origin. The total share of Russian LNG in EU imports approached 20% in 2024, up from 15% a year earlier.

The main buyers in Asia — China and Japan — overtook the European leaders only slightly, having received 7 million tons and 5.7 million tons respectively.

Two-thirds of the LNG for export (21.1 million tons) was shipped by the Russian company Novatek from its plant in the Yamal gas fields.

Russia’s total share of the EU gas market, taking into account the cessation of pipeline gas supplies since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has fallen from 40% to 6%.

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