Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 13.10.2022 www.osw.waw.pl

Denmark and Sweden investigate the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines

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An official investigation was launched by the Copenhagen Police in cooperation with the Danish Security and Intelligence Service and the Police of Denmark in connection with the damage to the Nord Stream 1 (NS1) and Nord Stream 2 (NS2) pipelines which occurred on 26 September in the Danish economic zone south and north-east of Bornholm. It only became possible to investigate the sites after the spillage had ceased on 2 October. The Danish Maritime Authority has imposed restrictions on shipping and air transport in the affected area; the Danish Navy secured the zone of the damage and collected evidence. Danish F-16 fighter jets and a search & rescue helicopter are patrolling the region around Bornholm, and each of the two sites has been secured by an Absalon-class frigate. Diving support & environmental monitoring vessels and a minesweeper are circling between the spills; given their specialised equipment, they are most likely responsible for investigating the sites.

The entire investigation is confidential, and the Danish government has not made any comment on its progress. On 6 October, it merely reported that the damaged NS2 gas pipeline south-east of Bornholm had been inspected, but no details were provided. On 30 September, the Danish justice minister, together with his German and Swedish counterparts, announced in a joint statement that the law enforcement agencies of the three countries were cooperating closely and had established a joint investigation team. On the same day, the Russian ambassador to Denmark announced that the Kremlin wanted to participate in determining the cause of the damage, but the Danish side did not respond.

In Sweden, in whose economic zone the two leaks occurred (north-east of Bornholm, on one line of NS1 and one line of NS2), the investigation into the suspected act of sabotage has been taken over by the Swedish Security Service. Evidence was collected at the site of the accident from 3 to 6 October with the help of the civilian Swedish Coast Guard (who contributed a rescue vessel), assisted by the Swedish Navy (a Visby corvette and a submarine rescue vessel), and is currently being analysed. For the time being, the Swedish Prosecution Authority has ordered access to the area of the damage to be closed. According to a statement from the Swedish security service on 6 October, the preliminary findings have reinforced suspicions that an act of sabotage led to two explosions.

On 10 October, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson visited the Swedish naval base in Karlskrona, where she inspected a coast guard vessel participating in the investigation. There Andersson said that due to the confidential nature of the Swedish investigation it was

not possible for Russia to join it (in a letter sent to PM Andersson on 7 October, the Russian prime minister demanded that the Russian authorities or Gazprom be allowed to participate). The Swedish prosecution authority lifted restrictions on access to the accident area on 6 October in order to allow interested parties to examine the damaged pipelines; however, on 10 October PM Andersson stated that Russia was not conducting any investigations at the site.

Commentary

- Danish and Swedish media have commented widely on the damage to the gas pipelines and the collection of evidence at the site of the explosions. In Denmark, however, Danish police, prosecutors and politicians have refused to comment on the investigation; nor is Sweden providing any details about its own investigation. The Swedish Security Service has only reported that suspicions of sabotage have been strengthened. The Danish and Swedish investigations are taking place in the midst of political changes in both countries. As a result of the so-called mink affair, on 5 October the Danish government resigned and announced early elections for 1 November. However, Denmark's sudden entry into an election campaign and the consequent intensification of the domestic political struggle should not affect the proceedings. Nonetheless, Denmark's Security and Intelligence Service, together with its Defence Intelligence Service, warned that Russia may attempt a limited campaign of influence in Denmark if there is a chance that it could deepen divisions among Danish society and political elites in the pre-election period. Sweden is in the process of forming a new government following the parliamentary elections held on 11 September, and so the incumbent Social Democratic cabinet is currently a caretaker administration. Nevertheless, despite its transitional nature, PM Andersson has proved ready to take decisive action regarding the pipeline explosions, as confirmed by her visit to the naval base in Karlskrona. The centre-right, which won the election and is currently negotiating the formation of a new coalition, will continue this line.
- In Denmark, explosions on Nord Stream pipelines and a number of sightings of unidentified drones around energy infrastructure installations have raised concerns about the possible sabotage of Danish oil and gas production & transmission facilities. Back on 27 September, Energinet (the national electricity and natural gas transmission system operator) raised the energy sector alert to the second-highest level. It is not only the security services and politicians who are now sensitive to the safety of the country's critical infrastructure; the media and the public are also taking an interest in this topic. So when electricity supplies were completely interrupted on Bornholm on the morning of 10 October, the national media and the public speculated about whether this was an act of potential sabotage. According to the Danish Energy Agency the outage was said to have occurred in the island's local electricity grid and was quickly rectified. Its cause was not disclosed.
- Sweden, on the other hand, fears an increase in the Russian military presence in the Baltic Sea, as well as possible provocations in its exclusive economic zone. Russia could formally justify such a move in terms of its wish to investigate the causes of the gas pipelines' leaks on the one hand, and the need to safeguard its economic interests (the undamaged NS2 line) on the other. For this reason – in order not to create potential

conflict situations – the Swedish Coast Guard and Navy collected the evidence quickly, and access to the explosion sites was opened up to all the interested parties (implicitly Russia). Moreover, the Swedish defence minister publicly warned last week that if the NS2 crisis continues, elements of the UK's Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), in which the Swedish Armed Forces participate, could be sent to the Baltic Sea. Stockholm is currently in the process of ratifying the accession protocols to NATO; it is not (yet) a member of the Alliance, and therefore does not have the opportunities (as Denmark does) to involve NATO in deterring Russia in the Baltic Sea during crisis situations. The UK was the only NATO state to sign 'political declarations of solidarity' with Sweden (and Finland) in May this year which contained provisions for British military support, which would implicitly apply during the two states' transitional accession period.