

# Europe's gas dilemma



**THE BALTIC SEA** is always a hot topic of discussion in this part of the world. Add energy to it, and it gets even hotter.

Nine coastal states surround the Baltic Sea: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia.

We love the Baltic Sea and it's important to us for at least three reasons: the environment, money and security.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that a deal – struck between then-Russian president Vladimir Putin and German chancellor Gerhard Schröder in 2005 – on the Nord Stream gas pipeline has caused many ripples in the harmonious waters of the Baltic Sea.

**Let me begin** by taking the wind out of the sails: I am rather neutral about the Nord Stream project, the planned natural gas offshore pipeline from Russia to Germany, with construction slated to begin next year. I am not for the project or against it. For me, it's largely an environmental issue.

I do, however, understand those who focus on the economic angle of the pipeline. Our Baltic and Polish friends, for instance, would have benefited from a land-based pipeline with easy access and countless construction projects.

I also understand those who worry about security aspects. It's no easy feat to lay a pipeline on the bottom of the sea. Security in the Baltic Sea, however, is not only about the pipeline. Numerous

**Alexander Stubb is Finland's minister of foreign affairs. He was recently voted the country's most positive person.**

oil tankers ply the area's waters and they require close attention as well.

Much of the mayhem could have been avoided with better preparation. Some feel that the project was launched without consultation with all the countries from around the sea.

At the same time it's clear that Europe needs more gas. Nord Stream will provide only ten per cent of the gas consumed by the European Union (EU). In addition to Nord Stream, we will probably need other pipeline

projects such as South Stream (the proposed natural gas pipeline to the Black Sea, Bulgaria, Italy and Austria) and Nabucco (the planned natural gas pipeline from Turkey to Austria).

**What** can we learn from all of this? Well, one thing is for sure – the EU needs a common energy policy. We need to talk about different kinds of energy solutions together.

It's also clear that energy has become one of the most important foreign policy issues on the international agenda. The debate about resources and distribution will continue to pre-occupy the minds of politicians and foreign policy buffs alike.

Call me an idealist, but next time we decide on a big energy project, we should do it together. Our beloved Baltic Sea is too important to all of us. Let's focus our energy on taking care of it, enjoying it, and not fighting over it.

**Let's focus our energy on taking care of the Baltic Sea, not fighting over it.**