

Russian gas transit to Europe via Ukraine ends

Jason Melanovski
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The transit of Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine has ended following the expiration of a five-year agreement on January 1. This marks the end of Ukraine's long-standing role as a key energy route to Europe.

Following the outbreak of the ongoing NATO proxy war against Moscow in February 2022, the EU—with the full backing of the United States—worked rapidly to lower its energy use from Russian sources.

According to a recent *Energynews* report, Russian gas to Europe through Ukraine had already dropped “from 117 billion cubic meters in 2008 to just 14.65 billion in 2023, underscoring the decline of this historical corridor for Russian gas to Europe.” The EU has reported that Russian sources have come to constitute just 10 percent of its gas imports compared to 40 percent in 2021 prior to the war.

While Brussels claims that its member states are prepared for the now total cutoff of Russian gas, Moldova, which is not part of the EU, is experiencing shortages following Gazprom's refusal to offer the country an alternate delivery route. The Russian energy company claims it did so due to Moldova's failure to make payments.

As a result of the energy conflict, 51,000 apartments and 1,500 buildings have been left without heat in the Russian-backed breakaway Transnistria region of Moldova. Moscow and Chisinau are trading accusations as the crisis unfolds.

President Maia Sandu, who won a controversial election last November after EU officials publicly intervened against the pro-Russian candidate Alexander Stoianoglo, accused Moscow of “blackmail.”

“To call things by their names, this is an opportunity for them to create an energy crisis in Moldova, she said, adding, “This is another lesson for us—not to have one source of energy supplies that blackmails us every time.”

Just prior to the end of the agreement, speculative

reports appeared in both Ukrainian and Western media suggesting that Azerbaijan would attempt to take up Russia's role as a gas supplier to Europe via Ukraine or that a last-minute extension would be negotiated between the EU and Moscow.

Despite Russia's assurances that it was more than willing to conclude a deal with the imperialist powers and continue sending gas to Europe, those reports have yet to come to fruition, as NATO moves forward with its long standing plans to decouple Russia from European energy markets.

In October of last year, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal publicly ruled out an extension of the now-expired gas transit agreement, when he met with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico in Western Ukraine. “Ukraine once again says it will not continue the transit agreement with Russia after it expires,” Shmyhal told reporters, adding, “Ukraine's strategic goal is to deprive the Kremlin of profits from the sale of hydrocarbons which the aggressor uses to finance the war.”

Previously, in 2020, Ukraine and Russia were able to reach a last-minute deal after “five days of non-stop bilateral talks in Vienna” led by European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič.

At that time, Russia supplied Europe with 40 percent of its natural gas and was nearing completion of the now-destroyed Nord Stream 2 pipeline but had momentarily paused the latter's construction due to the imposition of US sanctions included in the massive \$738 billion 2020 National Defense Authorization Act.

Without those sanctions, it is unlikely that the deal that has now ended between Russia and Ukraine would have ever been signed. Moscow was previously only willing to offer one-year agreements, while Ukraine sought one that would last for 10 years.

Under the terms of the old arrangement, Russia sent 65 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas through Ukraine in 2020

and 40 bcm of gas from 2021 to 2025. In exchange, a cash-strapped Ukraine received around \$7 billion in much-needed transit fees.

Prior to that deal, gas supplies to Europe had already been interrupted twice in the previous 13 years, as tensions escalated between Moscow and Western-backed governments in Kiev.

While the majority of EU countries have already significantly cut their use of Russian gas, the Ukrainian transit route still met 65 percent of demand in 2023 in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia, according to the European think tank, Bruegel.

In November of last year, Russia cut off its supplies to Austria, a move which the country's leader claimed would have no impact. "No home will go cold ... gas-storage facilities are sufficiently full," Karl Nehammer told reporters at the time.

Hungary no longer receives significant natural gas through Ukraine's pipeline and has shifted its Russian natural gas deliveries to the TurkStream pipeline that runs along the bed of the Black Sea.

Slovakia alone continued up to now to receive Russian gas via Ukraine, but has likewise switched to receiving Russian gas supplies via the TurkSteam pipeline. It has said, however, that it would prefer an alternate route through Germany that has yet to be used.

The fallout from the ending of the gas agreement continues to exacerbate already existing tensions between the Ukrainian government and neighboring Slovakia, which is both a NATO and EU member.

In addition to using Russian gas for its own needs, Slovakia also served as the main gas entry point to the EU from Ukraine and earned transit fees from sending the resource along to Hungary, Austria and Italy.

The Slovakian government, led by Prime Minister Robert Fico, has warned that the end of the agreement between Ukraine and Russia will have "drastic" consequences for EU countries. He has threatened to shut off electricity supplies to Ukraine, which is already suffering from rolling blackouts due to the war.

Earlier in December, Fico, one of the most vocal opponents of the Ukraine war within the EU, pledged that Ukraine would never be welcomed to NATO, a central goal of the Zelensky government. "Ukraine won't be invited to NATO. It will lose a third of its territory. There will be foreign military forces there," Fico said while addressing Slovakia's Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs.

He later made a surprise visit to Moscow to meet with

Russian President Vladimir Putin, contradicting the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, by which all member states are expected to abide.

Last year, Fico survived an assassination attempt by 71-year-old Juraj Cintula, who was angered over the leader's opposition to continued military aid to Ukraine.

In response to Fico's criticisms of the gas deal's termination, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Fico of "dragging Slovakia into Russia's attempts to cause more suffering for Ukrainians."

On the military front, the situation continues to be going poorly for Ukraine. The one remaining active metering station, located at Sudzha, of Russian gas to Ukrainian pipelines was taken by Ukrainian forces during Zelensky's incursion into Russia's Kursk incursion in August. However, Russian forces are continuing to advance in the Donbass, where the Ukrainian military is facing manpower and ammunition shortages.

Russia just claimed the strategically important town of Kurakhove in the Donetsk region. While Ukraine has yet to acknowledge the fact, a well-known right-wing Ukrainian military blogger, Yury Butusov, confirmed the town has been "effectively lost."

Aware of the impending loss in Kurakhove, on Sunday the Ukrainian army launched another offensive in the Kursk region. Russia reports that in response it has destroyed, four tanks, two infantry combat tanks, 16 armored combat vehicles and a mine clearance vehicle.

As is typical of the PR-driven Zelensky government, the attack on Russian territory was timed to coincide with and counter the breaking news of the loss of Kurakhove and demonstrate to incoming US President Donald Trump that Kiev can wage an offensive, no matter how minor to the overall trajectory of the war or how many of its own troops it loses.



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