

Kiev refuses to accept Russian gas intended for Europe-Gazprom

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MOSCOW, January 14 (RIA Novosti) – For a second day Ukraine’s national energy company Naftogaz refused to accept Russian gas due to be transited to Europe, Russia’s gas monopoly Gazprom said on Wednesday.

Gazprom said it submitted another application with Naftogaz on Wednesday for the transit of 98.8 million cubic meters of gas, including 13.9 million intended for Moldova, 62.7 billion for the Balkan states, and 22.2 million for Slovakia.

Russia, which has accused Ukraine of tapping gas bound for Europe, resumed shipments after a weeklong cutoff on Tuesday after a team led by EU monitors was deployed at gas metering stations in Ukraine. However, Gazprom later said that Kiev was blocking the gas shipments.

The monopoly said on Wednesday it had requested that gas be transited via the Sudzha entry point on the Russian border, an export pipeline with direct access to the nations affected by the dispute, including Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

Gazprom also said that Naftogaz was demanding that the gas be sent via other transit stations, used mainly for gas intended for Ukraine’s domestic use, and that they receive 140 million cu m in order to be able to resume supplies.

Ukraine has claimed that Russia has not provided enough “technical gas” necessary to maintain pipeline pressure and pump the required volumes to Europe. Kiev also said that Moscow had demanded a complicated transit route be used that would force Ukraine to cut its domestic supplies.

“Naftogaz’s repeated refusals demonstrate that Ukraine is unable to replenish the gas reserves it has siphoned off and resume transits.

Gazprom is prepared to restart supplies for European consumers at any moment,” the Russian energy giant said.

The Naftogaz chief rejected on Wednesday Russia’s claims that Ukraine had illegally siphoned off its gas, saying the company had transited 1.2 billion cubic meters of gas to Moldova.

Oleh Dubyna also said gas transits were “technically” not possible at the moment.

“We cannot reactivate the [transit] network for such insignificant amounts [of gas] and for

an indefinite time," Dubyna said, urging a provisional agreement with Russia that stipulated transit volumes and routes.

Ukraine's energy minister, Yury Prodan, urged EU officials on Wednesday to pressure Moscow over the delays in transits.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso was reported to have called the crisis "unacceptable and incredible" and warned the EU could advise energy firms to sue Russian and Ukrainian energy companies unless gas supplies were restored quickly.

The crisis has hit about 20 EU countries in the height of winter, forcing them to close schools, factories and leaving householders without heating.

The prime ministers of Slovakia, which has said it could reactivate its aging nuclear power plant to make up for the shortfalls in energy supplies, Bulgaria and Moldova are due to meet with their Russian counterpart in Moscow on Wednesday to discuss the situation.

Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine on January 1 after talks on debt and a gas price for 2009 broke down. On January 7, Moscow cut off shipments to Europe, accusing Ukraine of siphoning off gas in transit for European consumers.

U.S. role

Gazprom's deputy CEO, Alexander Medvedev, has called Ukraine's behavior in the dispute "unbelievable" and suggested the United States could be behind the row.

"It looks like the entire musical show underway in Ukraine is being orchestrated from outside the country," he said.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack rejected the claim as "totally without foundation" .

A popular Russian daily said on Wednesday that under a cooperation agreement Kiev and Washington signed in December, the U.S. would modernize Ukraine's crumbling transit pipelines and could receive control of the vast network.

"This may explain Kiev's 'bravery,'" in the dispute, Izvestia said.

The paper also said "America could well use the current tensions in Ukraine as a pretext for one of its campaigns 'to protect democracy.'"

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has in turn accused Russia of using the dispute to try to seize control of Ukraine's pipelines.

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