

On New Year's Eve Ukraine Imposes a Blockade on Crimea

By [ITAR-TASS](#)

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On New Year's Eve Ukraine has in fact imposed an economic blockade on the Crimean Peninsula, which last March re-unified with Russia. Last week Ukraine cancelled all train and bus services to and from Crimea. Apart from the passenger traffic suspension all cargo shipments have been banned. The local people have to put up not just with transport blockade, but also with many other challenges, such as repeated blackouts and water supply disruptions. Crimea is 80% dependent on Ukraine's water and electricity.

The international payment systems VISA and MasterCard have stopped servicing the cards of Russian banks in Crimea. The United States' sanctions against the peninsula are the reason, MasterCard's press-service has explained. This circumstance will greatly complicate life not so much for local residents as for the crowds of tourists, arriving in Crimea for New Year and winter holidays. "Some 200,000 vacationers will be celebrating New Year in Crimea," the republic's minister of health resources and tourism, Yelena Yurchenko, has said.

The authorities in Kiev have explained the cancellation of transport links with Crimea by security reasons. Speaking at a news conference on Monday Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, when asked about the blockade of Crimea, said: "There is no blockade, but just measures to protect Ukraine." The speaker for the headquarters running the crackdown on restive south-eastern regions, which Ukraine has all the way described as anti-terrorist operation, Andrey Lysenko, claimed there were risks of some groups of saboteurs penetrating into Ukraine from Crimea. At the customs checkpoints Ukrainian border guards have been searching all private cars and trucks of commodity providers bound for Crimea, which have to wait in long lines on the border for 24 hours and more.

Experts suspect that Crimea's blockade by Ukraine is a gesture of blackmail addressed to Russia. "One may assume that this is related with the problems of coal and electricity supply from Russia to Ukraine," senior analyst at the International Centre for Advanced Studies, Alexander Zhelud, told Gazeta.ru.

Last week Ukraine several times shut down power supply for Crimea. Russia agreed to make concessions and take certain steps in order to ease power shortages in Ukraine itself, which is experiencing a dire need for coal, as a majority of its mines are located in the territories of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk republics. In the near future Ukraine hopes to conclude a power supply agreement with Russia. In fact, the electricity is already being provided, President Petro Poroshenko said on Monday.

Russia will be supplying electricity to Ukraine at its domestic prices, and also up to one

million tons of coal a month in order to ease energy problems, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak said on December 27. The decision in favour of energy supplies was made in exchange for Kiev's word of honour. It is to be hoped it will resolve problems with regular blackouts in Crimea.

Ukraine's Energy and Coal Mining Ministry has said that his country is prepared to purchase electricity at Russia's internal prices.

Ukrainian political scientist Igor Semivolos has told the daily Nezavisimaya Gazeta that by blocking Crimea in various ways Kiev gets trump cards at negotiations on a settlement of the situation in Donbas. "Crimea is a very sensitive spot for Russia. It's winter time and the weather is stormy ... Those who wish to provide essential services and conveniences to the peninsula should be prepared to compromise on a wide range of issues, such as power supply, exchange of prisoners of war, ceasefire, etc." Semivolos said.

An ex-speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, former Ukrainian parliament member Leonid Grach believes that the transport blockade is the most painful measure. He speculated that the idea of cutting Crimea from the outside world was prompted to Kiev by its US patrons. It is not accidental that Crimea's transport and energy blockade happened alongside the termination of VISA and MasterCard payment services in the peninsula.

This is the sort of New Year gifts the West-backed authorities in Kiev have prepared for two million Crimeans - men and women, young and old. Too bad the gifts have very little to do with such universal values as humanism and tolerance.

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