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Belarus Accuses Russia of Withholding Oil to Boost Gas Prices

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Sergei Grits / AP

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has accused Russia of attempting to "put pressure" on his country by withholding supplies of oil.

Lukashenko claimed that the move was designed to ensure Minsk made concessions in long-running price negotiations on Russian gas.

"We [Belarus and Russia] have been dragging our feet for several months now, unable to agree on the price of gas," Lukashenko said at a meeting in the Belarussian capital of Minsk on Tuesday. "This is why Russia has reduced its oil supplies to Belarus."

"We perceive this as pressure on Belarus — but I will not stand for it, and neither will the Belarussian people," he said.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak denied the claims, maintaining that the amount

of oil supplied to Belarus had decreased due to unpaid debts.

He also said that Belarus would have to pay more for Russian gas and oil. "Our Belarussian partners are not paying enough for gas," he said. "Gazprom is a major taxpayer in Russia. When Gazprom loses money, so does the Treasury. We are forced to seek different forms of compensation."

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