

Gazprom Refuses to Name and Shame Russian Authorities Falling Behind on Bills

March 29, 2017



Andrei Makhonin / Vedomosti

Russian energy giant Gazprom has refused to name and shame regional governments for falling behind on their gas bills.

Previous press releases by the company had turned the spotlight on authorities who refused to pay up.

Gazprom's last debt report in 2016 slammed local governments in Russia's North Caucasus, reporting that officials in the region owed more than 48 billion rubles (\$845 million) — more than 80 percent of all money owned to the company across Russia as a whole.

This year, the company took a less-confrontational approach, declining to name its main debtors despite a rise in outstanding payments. "Overdue payments remain an urgent problem," the company said in a press release. "In 2016, it grew by about 6 percent,

amounting to 161 billion rubles (\$2.84 billion) as of January 1, 2017."

Some have seen the change as part of a bid to appease Chechen leader Kadyrov after he locked horns with the energy company last month.

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Kadyrov, whose government forms a vital part of Russia's North Caucasus region, accused Gazprom of using "worn-out" equipment. He said that the company's "bad management" forced the Chechen people to live in "19th century conditions."

"People pay for light, for gas, but the money just doesn't get there," Kadyrov said.

The Chechen government has long waged a campaign to see local energy assets handed over to Kadyrov's safekeeping.

The *Kommersant* newspaper reported in February that Russian oil giant Rosneft could sell its assets to the Chechen republic in a multi-billion dollar deal.

The Chechen government also took control of property belonging to Chechenneftekhimprom — the state-owned company that controls the republic's oil-refining and petrochemical industry — in December 2015 after repeated requests to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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