The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Why Is Ukraine Still Helping Fuel Russia's War Machine?

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September 16, 2024



Druzhba Pipeline in the Lviv region of Ukraine. **Vodnik (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

Would the USSR have allowed cargo from Hirohito's Japan or Hitler's Germany to pass through its lands during the Great Patriotic War? Obviously not, which makes it all the stranger that Kyiv is still allowing Russian fossil fuels to transit through Ukrainian territory.

In late August, an adviser to the head of the Ukrainian president's office, Mykhaylo Podolyak, announced that it would stop from Jan. 1 next year. But it soon turned out that his statement was premature when Prime Minister Denis Shmygal confirmed that the Ukrainian section of the Druzhba pipeline system would continue to carry Russian oil. Pro-government oil and gas analysts in Moscow have not hidden their satisfaction, saying that Podolyak's words were "for the sake of PR".

The Ukrainian authorities' position is perplexing even from the point of view of elementary arithmetic. According to the Ukrainians' own calculations, European purchases of oil and gas

delivered through Ukraine bring Russia $12 billion a year. Meanwhile, Kyiv only receives a poultry $230 million in return for transit fees.

Moreover, this scheme allows pro-Russian lobbies in Austria and Slovakia – who still purchase Russian oil and gas – to slow down European military support to Ukraine. European leaders like Slovakia's Robert Fico and Hungary's Viktor Orban use concerns over the economic impact on EU member states to justify their blatantly anti-Ukrainian stance on aid to Kyiv.

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However, by stopping the transit of oil and gas from Russia to Europe, Kyiv would benefit hugely from choking off a huge source of revenue for Russia's war machine at a relatively low cost to its own budget.

Second, the move would not result in legal issues for Russia's clients in Europe. Ukraine's decision would constitute a force majeure that would avoid the necessity of paying penalties for stopping purchases early.

Third, pro-Russian elements in Hungary, Austria, and Slovakia would lose their main argument against completely disconnecting Russian fossil fuels from the European market.

And finally, Kyiv's leaders would no longer face the difficult question of why it is facilitating the enrichment of the same country that is committing war crimes on its own soil.

There are forces in Kyiv that are in favor of stopping gas transit, but their opinion seems to have no influence on the decisions made. We can only wonder whether corruption is to blame, as there is no rational explanation for it, especially during wartime.

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