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Transnistria Says It Has Less Than a Month of Gas Left

By AFP

January 08, 2025



EPA

The breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria will run out of gas used for limited cooking and heating in less than a month, authorities warned Wednesday, as a shutdown in Russian supplies plunges the separatist state into crisis.

The tiny self-proclaimed republic bordering Ukraine has been unable to provide heating and hot water to residents since Jan. 1, when Moscow cut off gas supplies to Moldova.

"The country is not only in a state of energy crisis, but also a humanitarian one," the region's deputy prime minister, Sergei Obolonik, was quoted as saying in a statement on a government website.

“The 13 million cubic meters of gas in reserve make it possible to supply some social facilities and other vital infrastructure, as well as multi-story residential buildings for cooking... The

resource will be enough for another 24 days from today," the statement said.

With temperatures dropping below freezing, people have been forced to burn wood or rely on plug-in electric heaters.

The resulting surge in electricity demand has heaped pressure onto the Soviet-era energy grid, prompting authorities to order blackouts to conserve power.

Transnistria's largest power station switched to burning coal on Jan. 1 but only has enough reserves for 50-52 days of electricity, according to authorities.

Operating the plant at its maximum capacity with coal is "extremely risky" due to its aging equipment, the statement added.

"They tested the generation of 170 megawatts per hour. But constantly working in this mode is fraught with [the possibility of] emergencies, a complete shutdown of the station and a collapse of the energy system," it said.

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Some of the few factories still open may be forced to operate at night to avoid overloading the grid, officials said.

Authorities have made free firewood available while telling residents to dress warmly, gather in a single room and seal windows with blankets.

Russia's Gazprom halted gas to Moldova on Jan. 1 over what it said were longstanding debts with Chisinau, the same day a major gas transit agreement between Moscow and Kyiv to pipe gas across Ukraine came to an end.

Moscow says Moldova and Ukraine are at fault, alleging that Chisinau has ignored its debts and that Kyiv "cynically" ended gas transit and fueled the crisis.

Moldova says Russia is blowing its debts out of proportion for political reasons.

Internationally recognized as part of Moldova, Transnistria declared independence at the end of the USSR and has since relied on Moscow's support.

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