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Ukraine Repairs Druzhba Pipeline, Clearing Way for Russian Oil Flows to Europe

By AFP

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The Druzhba oil pipeline. **Andrei Liankevich / EPA / TASS**

Ukraine said Tuesday that it completed repairs to the damaged Druzhba pipeline and is ready to resume pumping Russian oil to Europe, a move that officials in Kyiv hope will unblock a long-delayed EU aid package.

The pipeline, which carries crude to Hungary and Slovakia, has been at the center of a monthslong diplomatic standoff. Ukraine said Russian strikes damaged the line in late January, but Hungary and Slovakia accused it of stalling repairs to pressure on them.

"Ukraine has completed repair work on the section of the Druzhba oil pipeline that was damaged by a Russian strike," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on social media. "The pipeline can resume operation."

The repair likely marks a significant breakthrough for Ukraine's battered budget.

Outgoing Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had used his veto power to hold up an EU loan of 90 billion euros ($96 billion) until Ukraine repaired Druzhba and allowed oil to resume flowing.

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EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas told reporters in Luxembourg that an agreement on the funds is expected within 24 hours. "I hope that everything goes well," she said. "Hopefully, all the obstacles are removed."

A source in Kyiv told AFP that Ukraine can start pumping oil to Hungary and Slovakia as soon as it receives a formal request.

Despite clearing the way for Russian oil to flow again, Zelensky remains a staunch critic of EU members that continue to buy Russian energy.

"We must continue systematic sanctions pressure on Russia over this war and work on further diversifying energy supplies to Europe," Zelensky said.

"Europe must be independent from those who seek to destroy or weaken it," he added.

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