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OPINION

Together, we can blunt Russia's energy weapon

Ukraine and its allies need to move fast, as recent missile strikes have now crippled almost half of the country's energy system.



Moldovan electricians work on maintenance of energy infrastructure amid the Russian energy squeeze | Daniel Mihailescu/AFP via Privacy

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BY OLEKSIY CHERNYSHOV

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Oleksiy Chernyshov was appointed CEO of Naftogaz by the Ukrainian government on November 4, 2022.

In recent weeks, Russia has carried out its heaviest bombardment of Ukraine's energy infrastructure since the start of the full-scale invasion.

Meanwhile, investigators have discovered traces of explosives at the site of the damaged Nord Stream pipeline, confirming the use of sabotage to restrict gas flows to Europe. Russia's now also threatening to further reduce gas supplies to Moldova in an attempt to destabilize the pro-European government in Chişinău.

As the Russian invasion force struggles to hold its position against the Ukraine Army, the Kremlin has made energy its main weapon. By depriving Ukrainians of heat and power, Russia is trying to break the fighting spirit of our population and to persuade European governments to stop supporting us by utilizing energy blackmail.

Determined resistance by Ukraine and its Western partners has brought about the failure of Russia's military strategy — an outcome that few experts could foresee at the start of the full-scale invasion. We now need to work together to thwart Russia's brutal use of energy, and allow

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the Ukrainian Army to continue its advance and restore the country's territorial integrity. But to do so, we need to move fast, as Russia's recent missile strikes have crippled almost half of Ukraine's energy system.

On November 17, a massive attack targeted gas production facilities in eastern Ukraine, destroying some and damaging others. Since the start of the war, domestic gas production had made up the greater part of Ukraine's gas balance. We had enough gas in storage to meet the basic needs of our population this winter, but damage to our production facilities and other parts of the heating system creates the risk that millions of Ukrainian households will suffer gas shortages, or find their heating and electricity cut off.

It's essential that Ukraine continues producing gas to achieve a minimum level of energy security.

We're grateful for the equipment already supplied by some of our Western partners to help us cope with the damage caused by Russia's attacks. These have included generators to provide electricity for gas processing.

After the attacks on our gas fields, however, we urgently need replacement compressors and separators for gas treatment. We also need specialist equipment to carry out drilling operations in the absence of foreign service companies that have left Ukraine since the start of the war. And in some places, we are short of vehicles, which we've donated to the Ukrainian Army.

The recently announced loans and grants from our international partners — the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Norwegian government — will provide the

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first part of the much-needed liquidity support and trade finance that will secure heating for households, schools and offices, and produce electricity to keep the economy running.

The war has highlighted that we cannot rely on non-democratic countries to meet our energy needs without exposing ourselves to risk.

We are also developing strategic projects — including fuel switching in heat and power generation, energy efficiency measures, the development of biogases, as well as steps to increase gas production. Successful implementation of these projects will enhance Ukraine’s energy resilience and eliminate the need for gas imports. It will create the possibility for Ukraine to export competitively produced gas to the European market.

To achieve these goals, we must raise Naftogaz’s business performance and restore the trust of our partners.

On my first day as CEO, I asked the cabinet to start the process of selecting a new Supervisory Board. The appointment of a well-qualified board will strengthen Naftogaz’s corporate governance and improve our decision-making. However, Naftogaz will only be able to implement this strategy if Russia is forced to retreat and accept that it cannot extinguish Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence.

In recent months, we’ve succeeded against the odds in repelling Russia’s invasion and demonstrating, with the lives of our citizens that Ukraine is a European country, which cannot be forced to be part of Russia’s so-called “world.”

Of course, this couldn't have happened without the support of our Western partners, who quickly saw that Russia didn't only want to subjugate Ukraine but also saw an opportunity to upend the Euro-Atlantic and Pacific security systems. We were particularly encouraged by the G7's decision to introduce a price cap on Russia's oil exports, which came into force on December 5.

It is vitally important that the Russian war machine is no longer funded by Western purchases of Russia's energy exports.

As Russia increases its attacks on our energy sector, Ukraine and its Western partners must stand together and create the resilience achieved in the military sector.

Together, we can blunt Russia's energy weapon and force it to leave Ukraine in peace.

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