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Hungary and Slovakia in the Face of a Disruption to Crude Oil Supplies via the Druzhba Pipeline

The Druzhba pipeline constitutes a critical component of Central Europe's energy infrastructure, supplying Russian crude oil to refineries in Slovakia and Hungary. Following the suspension of deliveries through the southern branch on 27 January 2026, both countries found themselves facing a serious threat to energy security, as they remain among the last EU member states still heavily dependent on Russian crude. The supply disruption triggered a crisis response, including the release of strategic crude oil reserves, diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring deliveries, and retaliatory measures in the form of restrictions on liquid fuels exports to Ukraine.

Causes of the Suspension of Crude Oil Supplies via the Druzhba Pipeline. The immediate cause of the disruption to crude oil supplies was an incident on 27 January 2026, when a section of the Druzhba pipeline on Ukrainian territory was damaged as a result of a drone attack. The suspension directly affected the refineries operated by the Hungarian company MOL in Slovakia and Hungary, with a combined processing capacity of nearly 300,000 barrels per day (Százhalombatta – 161,000 barrels per day; Bratislava – 122,000 barrels per day). Ukraine indicated that the interruption had persisted at least since 27 January; however, the official statement from the Ukrainian side was issued only on 12 February 2026, after more than two weeks of disruptions. At the same time, Ukraine claimed that the incident resulted from a Russian attack on the Druzhba pipeline in the vicinity of Brody, while Hungary and Slovakia suggested that Ukraine was deliberately delaying the resumption of transit for political reasons. The absence of a clear position from infrastructure operators, combined with mutual accusations, may indicate that the disruption is linked to the Russian–Ukrainian conflict and its geopolitical ramifications rather than to purely technical factors (most likely damage to a pumping station). The disruption, which persisted for over two weeks, led to a complete halt in deliveries of Russian crude oil to Slovakia and Hungary. Initially, Ukraine signaled the possibility of a rapid resumption of transit; however, subsequent restart deadlines were repeatedly postponed. As a result, a situation of market uncertainty emerged, forcing end users to undertake extraordinary measures. The problem affects exclusively Hungary and Slovakia—countries that remain heavily dependent on Russian crude oil due to their geographical location (landlocked states), the technological configuration of their refineries (primarily adapted to processing Russian crude grade), the lower cost of Russian supplies, and the lack of political will to diversify sources of crude oil imports. Importantly, according to both Slovakia and Hungary, transit fees for the Adria pipeline are up to five times higher than those for the Druzhba pipeline, further undermining the competitiveness of alternative supply routes.

The Position of Hungary and Slovakia on the Resumption of Russian Crude Oil Supplies. Hungary and Slovakia are actively seeking the resumption of Russian crude oil supplies, viewing them as a key pillar of energy security and economic stability ([“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 1362](#)). Both countries have undertaken joint diplomatic efforts, including approaching Croatia to enable the transport of Russian crude oil via the Adria pipeline to the port of Omišalj, making use of an EU sanctions exemption that allows maritime imports of Russian crude oil in the event of disruptions to pipeline transit. MOL has already ordered deliveries of 500,000 tonnes of Russian crude oil via the Adria pipeline, demonstrating both the scale of demand and the determination to maintain access to Russian supplies. At the same time, Hungary had previously secured exemptions from U.S. sanctions, arguing that a sudden cutoff from Russian crude oil would pose a threat to the stability of its energy system. As a result, the authorities of Hungary and Slovakia have publicly accused Ukraine of deliberately delaying the resumption of transit, interpreting Kyiv's actions as an instrument of political pressure. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico described the situation as “blackmail”, while Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó stated that Ukraine is blocking the resumption of supplies for political reasons. Simultaneously, both countries emphasize

the importance of relatively cheap Russian crude oil for the functioning of their economies, particularly for the refining and transport sectors. In addition, Hungary and Slovakia have used the situation as leverage by threatening to oppose the adoption of a further, already 20th, EU sanctions package against Russia.

Consequences of the Disruption to Crude Oil Supplies. The most immediate consequence of the supply disruption was the activation of strategic crude oil reserves. Slovakia approved the release of 250,000 tonnes of crude oil, equivalent to approximately one month of operations at the Bratislava refinery (with these reserves to be drawn down gradually until September 2026). Hungary, in turn, decided to release reserves equivalent to three months of domestic consumption in order to safeguard the functioning of the economy.

In line with the requirements of the International Energy Agency (IEA) for its member states, both countries maintain strategic reserves corresponding to at least 90 days of net imports (Hungary holds reserves sufficient for 97 days, while Slovakia holds reserves for 87 days).

Another significant consequence was the restriction of liquid fuels exports to Ukraine. Hungary completely suspended exports of diesel, which had previously accounted for approximately 10% of Ukraine's imports of this product. In November 2025, Hungarian exports of diesel to Ukraine amounted to 38,700 tonnes, representing roughly 7.5% of Ukraine's annual demand. Slovakia also reduced its liquid fuels exports to a level of 2,800 tonnes per month (around 20% of the 2022 level).

A further consequence was the reduction in liquid fuels production in Slovakia. The Bratislava refinery was forced to operate below full capacity due to a shortage of crude oil. Under normal conditions, the facility produces approximately 56,000 barrels of diesel and 26,000 barrels of gasoline per day and plays a key role in supplying not only the domestic market, but also Czechia and Ukraine. The decline in output increased the risk of liquid fuels shortages among local consumers and contributed to upward pressure on prices across the region.

Importantly, the supply disruption also generated geopolitical and economic tensions. Hungary threatened to limit exports of electricity and natural gas to Ukraine, which had previously amounted to 9.1 million cubic metres of natural gas per day as well as significant volumes of electricity. At the same time, Slovakia threatened to restrict electricity supplies, which in 2025 amounted to approximately 2.6 TWh net.

Conclusions:

- The crisis unequivocally confirmed the high level of dependence of Hungary and Slovakia on Russian crude oil, resulting from the absence of meaningful diversification efforts. Both refineries remain heavily reliant on a single supply source, which points to a structural weakness in the energy systems of both countries. Although the alternative Adria pipeline has sufficient technical capacity, it remains significantly more expensive—transit fees are up to five times higher than those of the Druzhba pipeline. This demonstrates that economic considerations continue to play a decisive role in sustaining dependence on Russian crude.
- Strategic crude oil reserves have played an important role in stabilizing the situation; however, their use constitutes only a short-term solution. The release of reserves helped avert an immediate fuel crisis but does not provide a durable remedy. Strategic reserves function as a buffer, and their prolonged use increases the risk of more severe disruptions should the crisis persist.
- The disruption to crude oil supplies led to an escalation of political tensions and a reconfiguration of energy relations in Central Europe. The suspension of diesel exports, threats to limit supplies of natural gas and electricity, and mutual accusations indicate the instrumentalization of energy as a political tool. The crisis also confirmed the vulnerability of energy infrastructure to the consequences of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, thereby underscoring the growing importance of supply diversification.
- The crisis highlighted a growing asymmetry of interests between Hungary and Slovakia on the one hand and Ukraine on the other, with crude oil transit issues becoming an instrument of mutual political pressure. The dependence of Hungary and Slovakia on Russian crude oil contributes to escalating tensions with Ukraine and weakens prospects for building durable regional cooperation under conditions of war and infrastructure instability.