

Russia attempts to block alternative deliveries of crude oil to Belarus

At the end of November, Russia took action to block the supply of alternative oil deliveries to Belarus. On 25 November the Latvian-Russian company LatRosTrans, which owns the Ventspils-Navapolatsk pipeline, started emptying technological crude oil from it; this prevents oil from being delivered via this route to the Belarusian refinery in Navapolatsk. On 22 November Transneft, the Russian oil pipeline monopolist, stated that transporting oil from Odessa via Brody to refineries in Mazyr could lead to problems in supplying Russian oil to Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Russia's actions show that Moscow wants to prevent the supply to Belarus of oil from non-Russian sources; it cannot be ruled out that it may even temporarily restrict transit via the southern section of the Druzhba pipeline.

The decision by LatRosTrans (34% of whose shares are controlled by Transneft through the Transnefteprodukt company) to empty technological oil from the Ventspils-Navapolatsk pipeline, which had been disused since 2006, has written off the Belarusian-Latvian negotiations on importing crude oil via this route, which had been proceeding for several months. Belneftekhim, the Belarusian petroleum group, has already announced that it will appeal against the decision in court. A few days previously, Transneft had warned that, in connection with the reversal of one of the two sections of the southern Druzhba pipeline (between Brody and Mazyr), the second section of that pipeline, which supplies Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, has been forced to work at the limits of its tolerance, which puts it in danger of breaking down. However, these concerns have not been confirmed by Belarusian and Ukrainian specialists, who have argued that the trial transmission of oil has proven that reversing the direction in one section of pipeline will not have any negative impact on the transport of oil to these countries. <WojK>