

## Russia begins to cut off gas to Belarus

Russia has begun to cut off gas supplies to its neighbour Belarus. On Monday it cut gas supplies by 15% amid claims Belarus owes £135m (US\$200m) in unpaid bills. On Tuesday it cut the gas supply by another 15%. This follows Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's order on Monday to Russian gas monopoly *Gazprom* to cut supplies from Monday. Russia has said the cuts will rise day by day to 85% if Belarus does not start paying off its debts, accrued when it failed to pay increased prices. This has raised fears in European countries in that deliveries to Europe might again be disrupted. Relations between Russia and Belarus have soured since they failed to agree on unified customs rules and Belarus gave refuse to ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Russia supplies a quarter of Europe's gas needs. It uses Belarus, which borders European Union member Poland, as one of the key transit routes for oil and gas to the continent. Previous pricing disputes with Minsk led to oil supply cuts, with Poland, Lithuania and Germany being affected most. A similar standoff with Kiev halted Russian gas supplies across Ukraine for two weeks in January 2009. This left many Europeans without heating and fuel during a harsh winter.

"Gazprom has warned the EU Commission about possible supply problems, as part of an early warning agreement," said Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov. The Russian gas transit route via Belarus amounts to one-tenth of Europe's needs, much smaller than the transit route via Ukraine. Belarus has now said it will settle the bill within two weeks. Originally it had proposed to pay the debt with machinery and equipment but Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told Gazprom: "Russia will accept only hard currency rather than goods which Belarus was apparently offering to barter in exchange." Mr Medvedev added, "We cannot accept anything else: not pies, not butter, not cheese." Minsk says however that Russia owes it £146m (US\$217m) in fees for transiting gas via its territory to Europe. Gazprom exports energy to 32 countries and provides 25% of EU gas. It controls 20% of the world's natural gas reserves and operates the world's largest pipeline network. In 'tit for tat' retaliation on Tuesday Minsk said it will suspend Russian transit gas deliveries to Europe. According to the Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko: "A new gas war has now started."

**Category: Energy / Belarus, Russia / Gas (\*\* see p8)**

**Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate**

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## EXERCISES

1. **Belarus-Russia gas dispute:** Briefly, what three things do you know about the recent Belarus Russia gas dispute? Go round the room swapping details.

2. **Geography: Belarus:** Where is Belarus? What is its capital? What countries surround it? Who is its president? Draw a map on the board or **look on Google maps** to help you.

3. **Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - we need to do some work!

4. **Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

5. **Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

6. **The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?
- c) **What's the latest on this story?**
- d) How important is gas?

7. **Let's think: Gas:** In pairs/ groups think of four places in the world where natural gas is found. Write your findings below. (Use the internet to help you) Which is the largest gas field in the world? Draw a map on the board to show your results.

1	3
2	4

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

8. **Let's think!** Swap partners. With your new partner on the board write as many words to do with '**gas**' as you can. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

9. **I am going to Belarus...** You are going to Belarus on holiday. Describe to the class what you might see.

10. **Let's talk! In a pub:** *In pairs:* Imagine you are in a pub. The conversation gets onto the recent **Russia-Belarus gas dispute**. Discuss. *5-minutes*.

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**11. Energy!** *In pairs/ teams* - Think of as many types of energy as you can. List them on the board. Which is the cleanest? Which is the dirtiest?

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

**12. Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

**Student A**

- 1) What happened in January 2009?
- 2) Who is the president of Russia?
- 3) Which countries were affected by the dispute?
- 4) What did the Russian president say?
- 5) Why did relations sour?

**Student B**

- 1) Who is the president of Belarus?
- 2) What did the Belarus president say?
- 3) Who owed what and to whom?
- 4) How much gas did Russia cut off in the first two days?
- 5) Name the Russian gas company.

**13. Presentation:** In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a 2-minute presentation on ***the Russian gas pipeline network***. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation. The class can vote on the best presentation. Class – After the presentations go through the strong and weak points on each presentation.

**14. A 'tit for tat' presidential day:** In pairs/groups. Look at the list below. Each person chooses to be one of the following. Think of three things that person might do or see during the recent 'gas war' dispute between Russia and Belarus. (Imagine!) Create a short story about it. Tell it to your partner/group. Try to make it interesting, funny, the experiences, the challenges etc... Students try to interlink student storylines! Remember – Russia cut the gas pressure first!

1 Russian president	3 Gazprom spokesman
2 Belarus president	4 Gas worker in Belarus/Russia

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to tell their stories in front of the class.

**15. Let's write! An e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **How important is Russian gas?** Your e-mail can be read out in class.

**16. Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) The gas dispute \_\_\_\_\_
- b) The 'tit for tat' \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Gas \_\_\_\_\_

## DISCUSSION

### Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) What three things have you learnt from this lesson?
- 3) Who is right in this dispute?
- 4) What three bits of advice would you give the Russian president?
- 5) What three bits of advice would you give the Belarus president?
- 6) What lessons have been learnt from this latest 'tit for tat' gas dispute?
- 7) Why did Russia start this dispute?
- 8) What was the economic impact of this dispute?
- 9) Why is Russia able to get away with holding Europe to ransom?
- 10) Should Russia have accepted machinery and equipment from Belarus in exchange for gas? Why? Why not?

### Student B questions

- 1) What alternative gas pipelines are there for EU countries?
- 2) Will gas bills in the EU increase because of this dispute?
- 3) Will gas bills in Belarus increase because of this dispute?
- 4) What is the EU doing about obtaining its energy?
- 5) Will diplomatic relations between Russia and Belarus improve now the dispute has been resolved?
- 6) What diplomatic lessons have been learnt from this dispute?
- 7) Would you barter gas for goods?
- 8) Would you like to work in the gas industry? Why? Why not?
- 9) How important is developing alternative gas networks across Europe?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

## SPEAKING

### Let's debate! The dominance of Russian gas and Gazprom

*Allow 10-15 minutes - Small groups / pairs / 1 to 1*

Look at the two statements below. After reading debate the statements. (Check the links on page 8 on the internet to help you!)

- 1) Western politicians have repeatedly accused Russia of using its energy might as a tool of intimidation against smaller neighbours and have called on the continent to diversify away from Russian deliveries.
- 2) Gazprom exports energy to 32 countries and provides 25% of EU gas. It controls 20% of the world's natural gas reserves and operates the world's largest pipeline network.

The teacher can moderate the session.

## GAP FILL: READING

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Russia has begun to cut off gas supplies to its (1)\_\_\_\_\_ Belarus. On Monday it cut (2)\_\_\_\_\_ supplies by 15% amid claims Belarus owes £135m (US\$200m) in unpaid bills. On Tuesday it cut the gas (3)\_\_\_\_\_ by another 15%. This follows Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's order on Monday to Russian gas monopoly *Gazprom* to cut supplies from Monday. Russia has said the cuts will rise day by day to 85% if Belarus does not start paying off its (4)\_\_\_\_\_, accrued when it failed to pay increased prices. This has raised fears in European countries in that deliveries to Europe might again be disrupted. Relations between Russia and Belarus have (5)\_\_\_\_\_ since they failed to agree on unified customs rules and Belarus gave refuse to ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Russia supplies a quarter of Europe's gas needs. It uses Belarus, which borders European Union member Poland, as one of the key (6)\_\_\_\_\_ routes for oil and gas to the continent. Previous pricing (7)\_\_\_\_\_ with Minsk led to oil supply cuts, with Poland, Lithuania and Germany being affected most. A similar standoff with Kiev halted Russian gas supplies across Ukraine for two weeks in January 2009. This left many Europeans without heating and fuel during a (8)\_\_\_\_\_ winter.

*debts*

*harsh*

*supply*

*neighbour*

*disputes*

*transit*

*soured*

*gas*

"Gazprom has warned the EU Commission about possible supply problems, as part of an early warning agreement," said Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov. The Russian gas transit route via Belarus amounts to one-tenth of Europe's needs, much smaller than the transit (1)\_\_\_\_\_ via Ukraine. Belarus has now said it will settle the (2)\_\_\_\_\_ within two weeks. Originally it had proposed to pay the debt with (3)\_\_\_\_\_ and equipment but Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told Gazprom: "Russia will accept only hard currency rather than goods which Belarus was apparently offering to (4)\_\_\_\_\_ in exchange." Mr Medvedev added, "We cannot accept anything else: not (5)\_\_\_\_\_, not butter, not cheese." Minsk says however that Russia owes it £146m (US\$217m) in fees for (6)\_\_\_\_\_ gas via its territory to Europe. Gazprom exports energy to 32 countries and provides 25% of EU gas. It controls 20% of the world's natural gas (7)\_\_\_\_\_ and operates the world's largest (8)\_\_\_\_\_ network.

*route*

*transiting*

*pipeline*

*bill*

*machinery*

*reserves*

*pies*

*barter*

## GAP FILL: LISTENING

*Listen and fill in the spaces.*

Russia has \_\_\_\_\_ supplies to its neighbour Belarus. On Monday it cut gas supplies by 15% amid claims Belarus owes £135m (US\$200m) in unpaid bills. On Tuesday it cut the gas supply by another 15%. \_\_\_\_\_ President Dmitry Medvedev's order on Monday to Russian gas monopoly *Gazprom* to cut supplies from Monday. Russia has said the cuts will rise day by day to 85% if Belarus does not start paying off its debts, accrued \_\_\_\_\_ increased prices. This has raised fears in European countries in that deliveries to Europe might again be disrupted. Relations between \_\_\_\_\_ have soured since they failed to agree on unified customs rules and Belarus gave refuse to ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Russia supplies a quarter of Europe's gas needs. It uses Belarus, which borders European Union member Poland, as one of the key transit routes \_\_\_\_\_ the continent. Previous pricing disputes with Minsk led to oil supply cuts, with Poland, Lithuania and Germany being affected most. A similar standoff with Kiev halted Russian gas supplies across Ukraine for two weeks in January 2009. This left many Europeans without heating and fuel \_\_\_\_\_.

"Gazprom has warned \_\_\_\_\_ about possible supply problems, as part of an early warning agreement," said Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov. The Russian gas transit route via Belarus amounts to one-tenth of Europe's needs, much smaller than \_\_\_\_\_ via Ukraine. Belarus has now said it will settle the bill within two weeks. Originally it had proposed \_\_\_\_\_ machinery and equipment but Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told Gazprom: "Russia will accept only hard currency rather than goods which Belarus was apparently offering to barter in exchange." Mr Medvedev added, "We cannot accept anything else: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, not cheese." Minsk says however that Russia owes it £146m (US\$217m) in fees for transiting gas via its territory to Europe. Gazprom exports energy to 32 countries and provides 25% of EU gas. It controls 20% of the world's \_\_\_\_\_ and operates the world's largest pipeline network. In 'tit for tat' retaliation on Tuesday Minsk said it will suspend Russian transit gas deliveries to Europe. According to the Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko: "\_\_\_\_\_ now started."

## GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Russia has begun to cut off gas supplies to its neighbour Belarus. On Monday it cut gas supplies by 15% amid claims Belarus owes £135m (US\$200m) in unpaid bills. On Tuesday it cut the gas supply by another 15%. This follows Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's order on Monday to Russian gas monopoly *Gazprom* to cut supplies (1)\_\_\_ Monday. Russia has said the cuts will rise day by day to 85% if Belarus does not start paying off its debts, accrued (2)\_\_\_ it failed to pay increased prices. This has raised fears in European countries in that deliveries to Europe (3)\_\_\_ again be disrupted. Relations between Russia and Belarus have soured (4)\_\_\_ they failed to agree on unified customs rules and Belarus gave refuse to ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Russia supplies a quarter of Europe's gas needs. It uses Belarus, (5)\_\_\_ borders European Union member Poland, as one of the key transit routes for oil and gas to the continent. Previous pricing disputes with Minsk led to oil supply cuts, (6)\_\_\_ Poland, Lithuania and Germany being affected most. A similar standoff with Kiev halted Russian gas supplies across Ukraine for two weeks in January 2009. (7)\_\_\_ left (8)\_\_\_ Europeans without heating and fuel during a harsh winter.

"Gazprom has warned (1)\_\_\_ EU Commission about possible supply problems, as part of an early warning agreement," said Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov. The Russian gas transit route via Belarus amounts to one-tenth of Europe's needs, much smaller than the transit route via Ukraine. Belarus has now said it will settle the bill within two weeks. Originally it had proposed to pay the debt with machinery and equipment (2)\_\_\_ Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told Gazprom: "Russia will accept only hard currency rather than goods which Belarus was apparently offering to barter in exchange." Mr Medvedev added, "(3)\_\_\_ cannot accept anything else: not pies, not butter, not cheese." Minsk says however that Russia owes (4)\_\_\_ £146m (US\$217m) in fees (5)\_\_\_ transiting gas via (6)\_\_\_ territory to Europe. Gazprom exports energy to 32 countries and provides 25% of EU gas. It controls 20% (7)\_\_\_ the world's natural gas reserves (8)\_\_\_ operates the world's largest pipeline network.

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## SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	monopoly	11	possible
2	disrupted	12	agreement
3	machinery	13	unified
4	neighbour	14	harsh
5	similar	15	countries
6	standoff	16	pipeline
7	equipment	17	deliveries
8	soured	18	originally
9	ousted	19	retaliation
10	previous	20	apparently

**LINKS** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/europe/10362731.stm>  
<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/06/24/russia.belarus.gas/index.html>  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/energy/gas/7849988/Belarus-threatens-to-cut-off-Europes-gas.html>

**UPDATE: From p1 \*\*\*** - The dispute was resolved within a few days once Belarus paid off the outstanding bill as it promised to do. Gazprom then paid the transit gas bill to Belarus. It remains to be seen whether the two sides were entirely satisfied with the payments. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said, "We regret that a conflict erupted." A spokesman for the Belarus Foreign Ministry: "We regret this dispute reached such a scale."

## ANSWERS

**GAP FILL:** Russia begins to cut off gas to Belarus: Russia has begun to cut off gas supplies to its **neighbour** Belarus. On Monday it cut **gas** supplies by 15% amid claims Belarus owes £135m (US\$200m) in unpaid bills. On Tuesday it cut the gas **supply** by another 15%. This follows Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's order on Monday to Russian gas monopoly *Gazprom* to cut supplies from Monday. Russia has said the cuts will rise day by day to 85% if Belarus does not start paying off its **debts**, accrued when it failed to pay increased prices. This has raised fears in European countries in that deliveries to Europe might again be disrupted. Relations between Russia and Belarus have **soured** since they failed to agree on unified customs rules and Belarus gave refuse to ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Russia supplies a quarter of Europe's gas needs. It uses Belarus, which borders European Union member Poland, as one of the key **transit** routes for oil and gas to the continent. Previous pricing **disputes** with Minsk led to oil supply cuts, with Poland, Lithuania and Germany being affected most. A similar standoff with Kiev halted Russian gas supplies across Ukraine for two weeks in January 2009. This left many Europeans without heating and fuel during a **harsh** winter. "Gazprom has warned the EU Commission about possible supply problems, as part of an early warning agreement," said Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov. The Russian gas transit route via Belarus amounts to one-tenth of Europe's needs, much smaller than the transit **route** via Ukraine. Belarus has now said it will settle the **bill** within two weeks. Originally it had proposed to pay the debt with **machinery** and equipment but Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told Gazprom: "Russia will accept only hard currency rather than goods which Belarus was apparently offering to **barter** in exchange." Mr Medvedev added, "We cannot accept anything else: not **pies**, not butter, not cheese." Minsk says however that Russia owes it £146m (US\$217m) in fees for **transiting** gas via its territory to Europe. Gazprom exports energy to 32 countries and provides 25% of EU gas. It controls 20% of the world's natural gas **reserves** and operates the world's largest **pipeline** network.

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