

**In the event that Bulgaria and Hungary stop transporting Russian gas through their territory, dissatisfied with Moscow's decision to pay for this service in rubles, consumers in Serbia will be completely left without an alternative to supplying "blue energy", claims the domestic public. However, experts do not believe that Sofia and Budapest will decide on such an act and that they will find a way to agree with the Russian company Gazprom on the payment of mutual obligations.**

As a reminder, the Russian Federation has formed a list of "enemy countries" that have imposed sanctions on it due to military intervention in Ukraine, and all members of the European Union are on it.

Although Moscow does not intend to stop supplying gas to that country, Russian Ambassador to Bulgaria Eleonora Mitrofanova stated that "all payments to Bulgaria will be made in rubles." Although the official Sofia is silent on that topic, some non-governmental organizations in that country believe that the Bulgarian authorities should suspend the transit of the Russian "blue energy" if Gazprom pays its transport obligations in rubles instead of dollars. The expert for energy of the non-governmental organization Center for the Study of Democracy, Martin Vladimirov, claims that Bulgaria is threatened with a loss of one billion euros in case the Russian state giant pays for the transit of gas to Serbia in rubles.

By the way, Serbia is supplied with Russian gas from two directions. One is through Ukraine and the other through the "Turkish Stream", which enters Serbia from Bulgaria. Given that both Hungary and Bulgaria have imposed sanctions on Russia, both countries may face the payment of obligations to them in rubles.

The director of the public company "Srbijagas", Dusan Bajatovic, said the day before yesterday that it is unlikely that Bulgaria will stop the flow of gas to Serbia, that the fuel is a commodity and has value for money, and that Russia can pay compensation through that country.

Energy expert Velimir Gavrilovic told Danas that in the event of the refusal of Budapest and Sofia to charge Gazprom for transit in rubles, Serbia would be left without any alternative in supplying that energy.

- European countries do not have enough gas to be able to be supplied from the third direction on the continent if such a situation arises. As for liquefied natural gas, it cannot be a replacement for Russian gas at the moment, because there are no sea terminals that would enable its reception and conditions for further transport to consumers in European countries. Therefore, liquefied natural gas can be an alternative to Russian gas only in the future and not at this moment - states Gavrilović. Our interlocutor adds that such a scenario would be a real disaster for Serbia.

- Our industry uses gas throughout the year and would find itself in an unenviable situation, ie it would face a lack of that energy needed for its functioning. The matter could be bridged

by switching to the use of fuel oil and coal in production plants. However, the replacement of technology would cause great financial costs, and on the other hand, environmental pollution would increase – says Gavrilović.

However, our interlocutor believes that this rather unenviable situation for Serbia will not happen.

- I think that neither Bulgaria nor Hungary will decide to stop the transit of gas due to possible payments in rubles. Simply, if they buy Russian gas, they also have the obligation to transit it to other countries. Even if they are forced to pay for gas in rubles, the governments of those countries will agree to that, but it is possible that the information that the payment is not in dollars but in Russian currency will not be disclosed to the public. In other words, it is possible to reach an agreement on that topic behind “closed doors”, which means that the supply of consumers in Serbia will not be endangered – says Gavrilović.

The Secretary General of the Gas Association of Serbia, Vojislav Vuletić, states for Danas that there will be no suspension of the supply of Russian gas to Serbia, and as a reason for that he points out that the official Sofia did not announce such a possibility.

- The non-governmental sector in Bulgaria is agitating for this matter, and the statements on stopping the transit of gas are given by its members and not by the representatives of the administration in Bulgaria. That is why I am convinced that there is no danger of supply interruptions. Russia and Bulgaria will certainly find a solution through compensation in case Moscow insists on paying in rubles. There is room for that because Russia’s claims against Bulgaria and Hungary are much higher when it comes to gas trade than those two countries against Moscow. Therefore, some agreement will certainly be reached – Vuletic concludes, Danas writes.