

Thirty Years After Chernobyl, Ukraine Doubles Down On Nuclear Power **Bus./Industry**

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Posted on : 2016/2/10 23:57:52

Unit 1 at the Rivne nuclear plant has been generating power since December 1980.

By Tony Wesolowsky for RFE/RL, Feb 8, 2016 Nearly 30 years after Chernobyl spewed nuclear dust across Europe and sparked fears of fallout around the globe, a strapped, war-torn Ukraine is opting for upgrades rather than shutdowns of its fleet of Soviet-era nuclear power reactors. Kyiv is planning to spend an estimated \$1.7 billion to bring the facilities, many of which are nearing the end of their planned life spans, up to current Western standards. Ukrainian officials hope to further their energy independence from Moscow and potentially export some of the resulting electricity to Western Europe as part of an EU-Ukraine Energy Bridge that can further cement Kyiv's ties with Brussels. But can they allay fears, in Ukraine and beyond, that the plans will put Europe at risk of another Chernobyl? The project has the backing of the West, including a \$600 million contribution split evenly between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and Euratom, the EU's nuclear agency. The project we support -- ourselves, the EBRD, and Euratom -- is actually about the country's energy independence, and essentially, survival. Because for the country, where nuclear power plants produce over 50 percent of electricity, this sector remains vital -- very, very important. This is a necessity, says Anton Usov, senior adviser for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus at the EBRD, an international institution funding projects in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. For Kyiv, keeping its nuclear power stations humming makes sense given the government's strategy to wean the country off Russian energy, namely gas. Ukraine is also making moves to end its dependence on Russia for the fuel powering the nuclear plants. Nuclear power accounts for around half of Ukrainian electricity. Enerhoatom, the state-run nuclear energy operator, runs 15 reactors at four nuclear power plants, including Europe's largest power plant at Zaporizhzhya, which houses five reactors. They are all equipped with pressurized reactors known by their Russian abbreviation, VVER, which are Russian-designed but an upgrade to the graphite-moderated RBMK reactors found at the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Most of the reactors came online in the 1980s, with the oldest -- Unit 1 at the Rivne nuclear plant -- generating power since December 1980, three years before the ill-fated reactor No. 4 at Chernobyl started churning out power. [hellip;] <http://www.rferl.org/content/thirty-y ... clear-power/27539152.html>