The Cold Winter: Gas Crisis 2009 Simulation General Factsheet

Positions in this scenario are fictionalised for educational purposes and inspired by, but not identical to, publicly reported positions. Roles are institutional functions, never named living individuals.

Background

In the winter of 2008–2009 a commercial dispute between Russia's state gas company **Gazprom** and Ukraine's national gas company **Naftogaz** escalated into the most severe energy supply disruption in modern European history. The two sides could not agree on the price Ukraine would pay for Russian gas in 2009, on hundreds of millions of dollars in alleged unpaid debts and penalties, or on the future of **RosUkrEnergo**, the intermediary company that had controlled the gas trade between the two countries for years.

On 1 January 2009 Gazprom stopped deliveries to Ukraine. Transit gas for Europe kept flowing at first, but roughly four-fifths of Russia's gas exports to the European Union crossed Ukraine, and within a week that transit had stopped completely. Bulgaria, Slovakia and the non-EU Balkan states, almost entirely dependent on Russian gas delivered through Ukraine, ran out of options within days: factories shut, schools closed, district heating failed in sub-zero temperatures. Germany, France and the United Kingdom, with diversified supplies and full storage, were barely touched.

The European Union held no pipeline, no contract and (before the Lisbon Treaty) no real legal competence in energy. Its rotating Presidency had passed to the Czech Republic on the same day the gas stopped. This simulation puts you at the emergency conference the Czech Presidency convenes on **7 January 2009**, the day transit stops, and asks you to find a way out.

This factsheet provides only a high-level overview of the events: you must also study your personal role handout.

Educational purpose

This simulation does not attempt a one-to-one reconstruction of January 2009. Its goal is to illuminate the dynamics of EU crisis management when the Union's tools are weak, time pressure is real, and member states' interests diverge sharply. You will practise:

- **Coalition-building** across actors with fundamentally different levels of vulnerability and interest: inside your own delegation, among EU member states, and between the EU and the two parties who actually hold the pipeline and the contract.
- **Drafting under pressure:** the expected output is a concrete protocol with specific provisions, negotiated from a bracketed draft (annexed below), not a vague political statement.
- **Working within institutional constraints:** the EU cannot force anyone to do anything in this scenario. Whatever is achieved is achieved through persuasion, bargaining and creative problem-solving.

One more skill we want you to practise: orienting yourself quickly with only basic tools. The jump from "here is a briefing" to "we need to draft an actual agreement about this, how does that even work?" is the key move in real policy work. Being confused and having to figure things out within your delegation is a feature, not a bug.

Roles and delegations

Participants are divided into **eleven delegations**. Russia and Ukraine are full player delegations: they sit at the table, negotiate, argue and make demands like everyone else. The simulation is not "the EU decides what to do", it is "everyone in this room tries to find a solution, and not everyone wants the same thing."

Area	European Union	United Nations
Russian Federation	up to 5	The government and Gazprom: the supplier, holding the contract and the valve
Ukraine	up to 3	The government and Naftogaz: the transit state, holding the pipeline
Czech EU Council Presidency	up to 2	Chairs the conference and the Council; honest broker with no power of its own
European Commission	up to 3	Proposes, drafts, mediates; can deploy a monitoring mission and limited money
Bulgaria	up to 2	~96 % dependent, days of storage; freezing

Area	European Union	United Nations
Slovakia	up to 2	~100 % dependent, state of emergency declared
Germany	up to 2	Diversified, barely affected, Gazprom's biggest customer, Nord Stream partner
Italy	up to 2	Moderately affected, ENI's Gazprom partnership, South Stream partner
Poland	1	Moderately affected; has warned about this for years
France	1	Insulated (nuclear); no pipeline projects with Russia; the swing vote
United Kingdom	1	Barely affected; market-liberal; sceptical of new EU powers

Every participant receives an individual role handout with a **delegation section** (shared with the other members of your delegation) and an **individual brief** with your function's motivations, red lines and negotiating style, part of which is confidential to you alone, including from your own delegation. Play your role as a real stakeholder with those interests, even as you work toward an overall agreement. All roles are **functions, not named** individuals: you are "the Gazprom Commercial Director" or "Bulgaria's National Representative", never a real person.

How the protocol is adopted

The output of the simulation is a **protocol** on the monitoring of gas transit and the conditions for resuming supply: five articles, negotiated from the bracketed skeleton in Annex B. It is concluded only when all of the following happen:

1. **Russia signs.** The Russian delegation decides by simple majority (3 of 5).

2. **Ukraine signs.** The Ukrainian delegation decides by simple majority (2 of 3).

3. **The Council adopts a common position endorsing the text.** Each member state has one vote, cast by its National Representative. A common position needs a **simplified qualified majority: at least five of the seven member states, including at least two of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom** (the facilitator will state the numbers for the actual cast). If the threshold is met, the Presidency signs on the Council's behalf.

4. **The Commission votes last: support or sabotage.** The Commission does not vote during the negotiation; it drafts, brokers and may offer EU financing in one article of the protocol: only if all its members agree. After the others have declared, the Commission decides whether to **support** the protocol (it signs and deploys the monitoring mission) or to **sabotage** it (it declares it will not deploy or finance anything under this text). Keep the Commission on board; a protocol it disowns is signed paper without a mission.

The Presidency chairs and does not vote. Side agreements outside the protocol (bilateral or trilateral understandings) are allowed and can be kept secret and published only after the scenario. **If there is no agreement by the end of the second block, the simulation ends without a signed protocol. This is a valid and historically plausible outcome: the real protocol nearly collapsed more than once.**

Rules of diplomacy and etiquette

(Read aloud at the start of the session.)

- **Stay in character:** negotiate as your function, in a diplomatic register. Focus on positions and interests, never on the person playing the role. No personal remarks, insults or ad hominem comments, in-character sharpness must never land out of character.

- **Respect the floor:** in plenary, speak only when recognised by the chair (the Czech Presidency), who manages the speaking order so everyone is heard. No interruptions, no talking over others.

- **Time discipline:** opening statements are strictly **45 seconds** per delegation; the chair or facilitator will enforce limits, and being cut off is nothing personal. Plan your key points to fit.

- **Online decorum:** camera on, microphone muted when not speaking, profile renamed to your function with your delegation's flag or institution's logo before the session starts.

- **Chat:** the text chat is for procedural and technical issues, not side negotiations. Private coordination belongs in your delegation channel or a negotiation room.

- **The tap-out:** at any moment, any participant may pause or step out of the simulation, no questions asked. Message the facilitator or simply say "tap-out". Simulations run on pressure; the tap-out is what makes the pressure safe. You may also use the facilitator backchannel for a brief private consultation if you are lost and need to get back on track.

- **Rule zero: the** facilitator's ruling is final and follows the spirit of the rules, not their letter.

- **Stay in the simulation:** the activity runs for a limited time and is only meaningful if you bring energy to it. There is one break; either side of it, be present.

Technical logistics

The simulation runs entirely online (our platform: Discord, with a shared Google Doc for the protocol text).

- A **plenary room** hosts all chaired sessions; each delegation has a private **delegation channel;** separate **negotiation rooms** are open throughout both blocks. You may move between rooms freely: this freedom exists to make diplomacy fast, not to "listen in"; do not abuse it. Large delegations should spread out: five Russians in one room are four Russians wasted.

- **The shared document** holds the protocol skeleton from the start and is the single authoritative text. The Presidency's energy adviser might be the penholder who keeps the clean text, but every delegation may propose wording, strike or add options and flag issues directly in the document. If you agree on something verbally, it does not exist until it is in the text.

- **Time is managed by the facilitator**, with a visible timer and broadcast announcements. Appoint your own timekeeper in the rooms; if a room runs over, expect a broadcast or a forced return.

- Log in a few minutes early; have a backup connection ready if you can. If you disconnect, rejoin and catch up from the shared document — your delegation can brief you. Any supplementary documents you want to circulate must be cleared with the facilitator first. Avoid screen-sharing.

- Once the simulation starts, even the facilitators will not have full information about what is happening where — the negotiation is deliberately fractured. Managing that fog is part of the game.

Schedule

The exercise runs in **two 45-minute blocks with a 10-minute break between them**, preceded by an asynchronous briefing (this factsheet and your role handout, posted about a week ahead) and a short welcome, and followed by a first debrief; the full debrief continues in the next course session.

Block 1 The Disruption (45')

The Presidency opens with a situation report as of 7 January 2009; delegations huddle briefly to finalise their mandates; a plenary of **45-second opening statements**; then the negotiation rooms open for a first round: find your allies, understand what the other side actually wants (it may not be what they say publicly), and if you are on the EU side, start to see what a common position could look like and where it falls apart. The Presidency closes the block with a state-of-play summary.

The break

The Presidency and the Commission post the **Presidency text** — the protocol skeleton with options narrowed or extended from what they heard — as the starting point for the second block. Expect news from the outside world around this time.

Block 2 Negotiating the Protocol (45')

The Presidency frames the text; you work through the articles in the rooms, draft actual wording, and get it into the shared document under time pressure. The Presidency then enumerates the remaining conflicts and focuses the room on the decisive ones; side agreements are read into the record; the text goes to the vote under the adoption rules above; each delegation gives one closing sentence in role.

Before the simulation, do not communicate about the scenario with participants outside your delegation; your delegation channel is the place for preparation.

Key principles in brief

- **Mandates:** agree your delegation's minimum goals, red lines and division of labour early; adjust them consciously, not by accident. In multi-member delegations, expect that not everyone wants the same thing: that is realistic, and it is your delegation's problem to solve before it becomes the room's.
- **Nothing is agreed until it is written.** Verbal understandings in a side room are not binding until they are in the protocol text: or read into the record as a side agreement.
- **Think in packages, not single articles:** "if Gazprom moves on technical gas, will Ukraine move on debt?" Link provisions across articles; nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.
- **Credibility**: do not promise what your role could never deliver. If you represent a country that is 96 % dependent on Russian gas, you really need that gas or a tangible replacement.

- **External events**: the facilitator may inject news: breaking developments, leaks, statements from capitals. Treat them as real and respond in role.

- **Winning**: there is no win/lose state. There is the outcome your delegation wanted, the outcome the room produced, and the distance between them. We will debrief on those.

Recommended preparation

- Study the key numbers (Annex A) and the protocol skeleton (Annex B). The skeleton is the text you will be negotiating, so know which options your delegation can and cannot live with before you arrive.

- Look up basic facts about your delegation's country or institution and its energy situation in 2009; even fifteen minutes of research makes you noticeably more effective in the room.

- We recommend that you do your reading on the outcome and analysis of the crisis **after** the session, not before: the point is to find out what your room does with it.

Annex A - Key numbers (January 2009)

Figure	Value
Russian gas share of EU consumption	~25 %
Share of Russian gas exports to the EU transiting Ukraine	~80 % (~300 million m³/day in winter)
Technical gas needed to run Ukraine's compressor stations	~21 million m³/day
Price Ukraine paid in 2008	$179.50 per 1,000 m³
Gazprom's demand for 2009	$250 before the cut-off; $418–450 after
Ukraine's counter-offer	$201–235 per 1,000 m³
Gazprom's debt claim against Naftogaz	~$2 billion, of which some $600 million in penalties disputed by Naftogaz after a $1.5 billion payment on 30 December
Bulgaria — dependency on Russian gas / storage	~96 % / 2–3 days at winter demand
Slovakia — dependency / storage	~100 % / several weeks; state of emergency declared 6 January
Germany — dependency / actual supply cut	~36 % / ~10 % (alternative routes and storage)
Italy — dependency / cut	~25 % / moderate, alternatives available
Poland — dependency / cut	~47 % / about a third
France, United Kingdom — impact	Negligible
Estimated Gazprom revenue loss from the shutdown	~$100 million per day

One thing these numbers do not show: the price of gas in Europe differed from country to country and contract to contract, and often reflected political as much as commercial factors. Member states may therefore be tempted to negotiate their own bilateral arrangements — or to insist on a common European approach.

Annex B - The draft protocol skeleton

This is the text you will negotiate. Options in brackets are a starting menu, not a cage: delegations may strike options, add new ones, or leave an article "not addressed in this protocol". Only unbracketed text is voted on at the end.

DRAFT PROTOCOL on the monitoring of gas transit through Ukraine and conditions for the resumption of Russian gas supply to Europe

[Date] · Prague

The Parties — the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and the European Union (represented by the Czech Council Presidency and the European Commission) — hereby agree to the following:

Article 1 — Monitoring Mission. An independent monitoring team shall be deployed to gas metering stations on the Russia–Ukraine border and at the exit points to the European Union. The team shall be composed of [EU officials only / EU officials and industry experts from European gas companies / a mixed EU–Russian–Ukrainian team]. The monitors shall have [unrestricted / limited] access to flow data and technical installations at [all border metering stations / only the Sudzha entry point / multiple specified entry points]. The mission shall remain in place until [a long-term supply contract is signed / a fixed *date* / indefinitely].

Article 2 — Technical Gas. Ukraine requires approximately [volume] million cubic metres of gas per day to operate the compressor stations that pump transit gas through its pipeline network. Without this "technical gas", transit is physically impossible. This volume shall be [provided free of charge by Gazprom as a condition of using Ukrainian transit infrastructure / purchased by Naftogaz at a negotiated interim price of ___ per 1,000 m³ / offset against transit fees owed to Ukraine / financed by the European Union as part of the monitoring mission / purchased by a consortium of European gas companies / another arrangement: ___].

Article 3 — Conditions for Resumption. Gazprom shall resume gas deliveries to Ukraine and transit deliveries to EU member states within [24 hours / 48 hours / 7 days] of this protocol entering into force. Resumption [is unconditional / is conditional on Ukraine signing a preliminary pricing framework / is conditional on the monitoring mission being fully deployed / is conditional on Ukraine acknowledging outstanding debts].

Article 4 — Pricing Framework. The parties [commit to concluding a long-term supply and transit contract within ___ days / agree on an interim gas price of ___ per 1,000 m³ and an interim transit tariff of ___ for the duration of this protocol / defer all pricing matters to separate bilateral negotiations between Gazprom and Naftogaz, with no EU involvement / not addressed in this protocol].

Article 5 — Debt and Past Obligations. Ukraine's outstanding financial obligations to Gazprom are [acknowledged at a sum of ___ / disputed and referred to international arbitration (Stockholm) / settled as part of this protocol at a sum of ___ / not addressed in this protocol and left to bilateral negotiation].

Signatures

For the Russian Federation: _____

For Ukraine: _____

For the Council of the European Union (Czech Presidency):

_____

For the European Commission: _____

Side agreements read into the record (annex):

_____