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## Letter to the Editor



### Nuclear energy

\* Your article on the Chernobyl explosion 30 years ago did not address the new nuclear safety risks emanating from Ukraine's large and rapidly ageing nuclear sector ("[Soviet apocalypse](#)", April 30th). Of the current 15 operating reactors, six will reach the end of their design lives by 2020. Amid acute power shortages, the demand pressure on nuclear generation is growing by the day. Ukraine is forced to import electricity from Russia with which it is in a proxy war. The coal-fired power plants are hamstrung by inadequate fuel supplies from the coal mines controlled by pro-Russian separatists. Natural gas supplies from Russia have been reduced to a trickle. The aging nuclear plants have thus become the lifeline of the economy and a guarantor of Ukraine's energy security.

Amid this heavy demand pressure, there is a high risk that nuclear units with compromised safety are allowed to operate indefinitely and without proper maintenance. Current efforts, with help from Euratom and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, are focused on short-term safety upgrades, not on long-term life-time extensions. More ominously, Energoatom, the nuclear utility and market monopolist, is financially bankrupt due its huge debts and a poorly functioning, over-centralised power market with rampant non-payment. A financially weak nuclear utility is bad for nuclear safety. The company is beset by a flurry of corruption charges—the last thing you want to hear about a nuclear utility. These new security risks posed by the aging nuclear plants should be addressed now both by Ukraine and the international community before again it's too late.

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