

## **As Sharp As a Blade**

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*Both autonomous boiler-houses, and other problems within the Moldovan thermal power complex, give rise to contradictory discussions. This is because many consumers and even some specialists advocate these systems, whereas the rest believe that under conditions of impetuous technical advance only a centralized thermal power is the most efficient one with a positive and stable future.*

In fact, specialists support their arguments on house and apartment block heating with thorough studies of experiences from developed countries. This experience shows that centralized heating is still the best system for provision of heating services to the housing sector. Even in Russia, where the centralized heating system has been in use for a century now, no one attempts to boycott it. Barring observance of sanitary conditions, this type of system is less encroaching on the environment, and provides a high degree of security during operation. The most convincing argument is that centralized heating is the cheapest method. This fact is also proven in the international experience. This is indeed so as outside Moldova the fuel prices are so high, and no one will try to “nail up” autonomous heating. It is particularly true for the apartment-blocks containing hundreds of apartments.

Certainly, to praise centralized heating system and autonomous boiler-houses, without talking about equipment, about boilers produced and offered to consumers on the world's markets, would mean to disregard the sore spots in this issue. Truthfully, enterprises which manufacture and supply these goods do not send such to deposits, but directly to the markets, where there is demand. Sellers are interested in praising such equipment, assuring the advocates of autonomous heating that this equipment will be used not only by them, but also by their descendants, implying the everlasting quality of this equipment which does not need any care or repair throughout the course of operation. In this situation, the consumer should remember that nothing is everlasting in this world, even a boiler – be it Italian, German, or American. What's more, this customer should take into account that this equipment goes together with a complicated automatic regulation system, which can break down accidentally. If the shut-off mechanism works, it is OK. And if not? In this case, the consequences could be lamentable for neighbors, too, or perhaps for the entire apartment-block. This type of situation should not be overlooked.

And the story does not end here. The issue of price issue leads to explosion anyway. The supporters of autonomous generation maintain that their heat is cheaper than, for instance, the heat supplied to Chisinau by Termocom. It's OK with them, because they do not count the considerable cost of bringing the heat to the doors of the final consumer. But it is undisputable that before the heat is supplied to their doors, it goes through a large network of pipes, which are apt to rust, deteriorate, and become out of use. Consumers of heat from the centralized system pay, through the tariffs, for rehabilitation of distribution networks, whereas the so-called private owners comfortably escape such

payments. Do you find anything equitable in this situation? No comments. Because if we do comment, we will ask ourselves, “Why do those who enjoy comforts freeload off the majority?”

Yet, we can notice that calculations made by allies of autonomous heating system are not quite accurate. If the heating equipment plus installation thereof add up to about \$1500, then the monthly savings from gas consumption (as compared to the centralized consumer) do not provide a real scenario because the investment should be divided proportionally for each month of the heating season. If we divide the sum into three cold seasons, with the warranty period of the boiler being 3 years, we see that the “autonomous” do not at all pay less than the “centralized”. Say nothing of environmental pollution and the risk of exploitation of autonomous installations.

In different European countries, there are various controls of the installation process for autonomous boilers. For example, if one wants to install autonomous heating in Poland, he will need to receive consent of all inhabitants of the apartment block in question— from above, beneath, from the left and right... It’s hardly probable there will be any willing to breathe harmful gas in the atmosphere. This is why the issue of autonomous heating in apartment-blocks has disappeared. People understood what perils are in store.

There are other nuances, too. Apartment blocks are equipped with the thermal supply system, hot water supply system, which heat the stairs and halls of the buildings. Those who have autonomous system installed think they have nothing to do with these systems. This is not so. They walk the same stairs and use the same halls. This is why the European Union recommends that they should pay monthly contribution in proportion of 40-60% of the amount of the sum paid by centralized consumers. The procedure has a large educational effect: even if we privatize apartments we should understand we do not live in isolation and should observe the common rules.

This is done in civilized countries. But what is done in Chisinau, for instance? Currently, there are approximately 8,000 block apartments in Chisinau, which are disconnected from the centralized heating system. Nothing special, as it may seem. But the situation is becoming complex. Termocom maintains a complicated thermal system comprising thousands of kilometers; it has maintenance personnel rigorously calculated for each distance. If we decentralize several thousands of apartments, the nominal functions of maintenance personnel will be reduced, whereas the costs will remain the same, because the distance will not be reduced. Simultaneously, a conventional thermal unit will be more expensive.

There are other difficulties as well. By now, gas pipelines (certain sections) and distribution pipes inside the buildings have been replaced about 30 times. Moldova-Gaz fulfilled these requests and included the costs in the tariff. In this case those who installed autonomous heating did not pay, whereas the rest of the apartment-blocks’ residents did. This turns out not be equitable.

Autonomous heating equipment requires a special discussion. It is clear that the majority of people try to install cheaper equipment. Regardless of the brand, the service life of such capital does not exceed 3-5 years. Those who installed such systems 5 years ago need to replace them now.

Certainly, there are cases in which autonomous systems are recommended. For example, for buildings with just several apartments, which are isolated and are far away from the centralized heating. But even in this case the boiler-house is one for all apartments and functions in other conditions. Also, the envisaged construction norms are not violated. Autonomous heating systems are also recommended for towns, and in other situations. Thus, decentralization is not rejected. It has to be used where it is rational.

But we have to distinguish clearly between rational and irrational use of autonomous heating because senseless decentralization within the heat supply system can be just as good as cutting the branch on which one sits. Moreover, Chisinau is expected to have 1 million residents in several years. This is why Termocom, which has significantly improved the quality of services offered to consumers, should be supported in all ways, and not vice versa.