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EU Energy Commissioner Warns on Russian Policy

By The Moscow Times

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BERLIN — Germany must turn away from its go-it-alone energy shift and work more with the European Union to build a cost-efficient, secure and sustainable sector more independent of Russia, European Energy Commissioner Günther Öttinger said Tuesday.

"Germany has to make its energy transformation compatible with Europe," Öttinger said on the opening day of Germany's most prestigious energy gathering, the three-day annual Handelsblatt Conference.

"Germany will only succeed and we will only get the authority to speak for our energy interests worldwide when we and the EU act as partners," he added.

Regarding Germany's energy partnership with Russia, Öttinger said Berlin should not drop solidarity with other member states.

Germany receives far more oil and gas from Russia than the EU average, and it has nurtured a constructive relationship. It has attracted direct Russian investment, and it secured first access to gas arriving via the new North Stream gas pipeline.

Öttinger is a big proponent of the creation of a southern corridor for Caspian Sea gas to find its way to Europe independent of Russian pipelines, and he has often criticized Russia's use of energy as a geopolitical tool.

"If Russia continues its [strategy of] divide and rule ... the net effect will be losses for Europe on the whole," Öttinger said.

Öttinger, a German national, has often criticized the speed of Germany's shift away from nuclear energy after the 2011 Fukushima disaster. The shift entails support for renewable energy at ever-rising costs. That burdens consumers with higher prices and distorts market patterns through supply volatility.

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