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Russian, Ukrainian Energy Chiefs Meet as Gas Dispute Rumbles On

By The Moscow Times

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MILAN, Oct 17 — Energy bosses from Russia and Ukraine met Friday in Milan at the margins of a summit between leaders from Asia and Europe, who urged an end to a dispute between the countries that threatens winter gas supplies.

A Ukrainian official, who declined to be named, said the heads of Russian energy group Gazprom and Ukraine's Naftogaz met at a Milan hotel, and that Ukrainian Energy Minister Yuriy Prodan and Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak as well as officials from the European Union were scheduled to be present.

Gazprom Chief Executive Alexey Miller and Naftogaz CEO Andriy Kobolyev were both seen arriving at the hotel, not far from where Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko met European leaders earlier in the day.

A reporter saw both men enter the building before going upstairs. Asked whether he was

meeting Miller, Kobolyev said: "I can't comment." Miller declined to comment when he left the hotel about an hour later.

Gazprom, which controls the world's largest reserves of natural gas and Naftogaz, which produces about 90 percent of Ukraine's oil and gas, are at the centre of a dispute over gas supply triggered by the wider crisis between Moscow and Kiev.

With winter approaching, the crisis risks disrupting gas supplies to both Ukraine and Europe, which gets about one-third of its gas from Russia, half of which comes through Ukraine.

European Commissioner Jose Manuel Barroso said there would be a meeting between officials from Russia, Ukraine and the Commission in Brussels on energy next week.

"It's very important that we achieve further progress in Brussels next week between Russia and Ukraine on the energy issue," he told a news conference after the summit between Asian and European leaders in Milan.

The EU's executive hopes to broker a deal to resolve a stand-off that has prompted Moscow to shut off gas deliveries to Ukraine over what it says are more than $5 billion in unpaid bills.

There was little sign of a breakthrough at the meeting earlier between Putin, Poroshenko, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and British Prime Minister David Cameron.

Merkel confirmed after the meeting that although there had been progress on some issues of detail, the meeting had not achieved a significant breakthrough in resolving the crisis.

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