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Poland, Czech Republic Could Help Ukraine Pay Off Gas Debt

By The Moscow Times

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European Union member states on Tuesday agreed that Ukraine needs help paying for gas supplies from Russia as winter looms, but were hazy on which countries exactly would be the ones to open up their coffers.

The Russian and Ukrainian energy ministers flew to Brussels on Tuesday in hopes of clinching a preliminary gas deal that has been under discussion since June, when Russia cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine over a pricing and debt dispute.

"We will discuss this," European Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger replied curtly when a reporter asked whether the EU is considering giving Ukraine the short-term loan of 2 billion euros ($2.5 billion) that it has requested, news agency TASS reported.

Poland earlier offered to help Ukraine pay off its debt for previous gas deliveries and help finance future shipments, according to TASS. But no specifics were provided on the amount

Poland might offer and when the money would be handed over to crisis-stricken Ukraine.

Ukraine has agreed to pay off its $3.1 billion debt to Russia's Gazprom for previous deliveries by the end of the year. The two sides also agreed last week that Russia will supply up to 10 billion cubic meters of gas to Ukraine through March once the payment schedule is agreed on.

The Czech Foreign Ministry on Monday said it too could extend loans to Ukraine to help it deal with its gas debt and purchase new supplies, but added that aid would only come in exchange for reforms in the corruption-laden country.

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