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Hungary Will Back EU on Ukraine If It Gets Help on Gas

By The Moscow Times

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Pipelines are pictured at the gas storage facility of Hungarian state-owned energy group MVM in Zsana on Nov. 3, 2014.

Hungary will stand by its European Union allies' decision to impose sanctions on Russia over Ukraine but will need help to safeguarding energy supplies put at risk by the dispute, its foreign minister said on Wednesday.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's talk of the need for a rethink on sanctions and his country's growing proximity with Moscow on energy policy have prompted concern that Budapest may be drifting into Moscow's orbit of influence. Hungary is heavily reliant on energy imports from Russia.

Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said in Berlin that Budapest wanted a "balanced, healthy and pragmatic" relationship with Moscow, while standing up for Ukraine's sovereignty.

"I told the German foreign minister that Hungary will always be loyal to decisions that Europe takes together — and that is also the case with Ukraine," he said at a joint news conference with his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

"I also asked for his understanding that central Europe's energy security is in a precarious situation," Szijjarto said, adding that Hungary had to diversify gas supplies and needed EU support to improve the infrastructure for gas transportation.

Hungary backs Gazprom's pipeline project to carry Russian gas to Europe, which the EU says undermines its drive to reduce reliance on Russian energy. Hungary has also stopped pumping natural gas to Ukraine and wants to sell a stake in Croatian energy firm INA to a Russian firm.

Steinmeier said EU states must respond to nearby conflicts by showing unity and setting an example "with our democracy, values and rule of law" — probably a reference to the EU's clashes with Orban on a wide range of civil rights issues.

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