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Austria Cautions EU on More Russia Sanctions

By The Moscow Times

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VIENNA — The head of Austria's government criticized fellow European Union countries on Saturday that are calling for tougher sanctions against Moscow, warning against pushing the Russian economy towards collapse.

A day after an EU summit at which the Polish head of the European Council, Donald Tusk, called for continued strong action against Russia over its role in Ukraine, Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann struck a cautionary note.

"I cannot approve of the euphoria of many in the EU over the success of sanctions against Russia. I see absolutely no cause for celebration. I do not know why we should be pleased if the Russian economy collapses," Faymann told the Oesterreich newspaper.

"We would be sawing off the branch we are sitting on if we erected a new wall to Russia's economy," the Social Democrat who heads Austria's coalition government said in remarks

released ahead of publication on Sunday.

His spokeswoman confirmed the remarks.

Faymann justified the original sanctions as "a self-defense step," but added: "Our goal cannot be tightening the sanctions."

EU sanctions have struck as global oil prices slumped, delivering a double-blow to the Russian economy. But differences among EU members is making it difficult to keep a united front.

Faymann said he had called for peace talks over Ukraine when he spoke recently with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We have to step up using our neutral role in the year ahead and push for peace negotiations," he told Oesterreich.

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