Russia Cannot Divide Europe Over Ukraine, Germany's Steinmeier Says

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German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (L) and Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja during a news conference in Helsinki April 16, 2015.

German Foreign Minister Frank–Walter Steinmeier said on Thursday that Russia could not succeed in breaking European Union unity on sanctions over Ukraine by using strategies such as offering to remove trade embargoes against individual EU member states.

"It might be that there are some attempts like this and there will be in future. There were such attempts and they were not successful," he said in Lithuania, where concern about neighboring Russia's intervention in Ukraine is especially acute.

Steinmeier said EU member states had debated the issue and it had proved controversial but unity had prevailed: "Our decision was taken, so I think the attempt to split Europe will fail."

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's visit to Moscow this month caused unease in the European Union, where he was warned not to break ranks over economic sanctions imposed on Russia.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, keen like many European leaders to secure Russian gas supplies, has accused some EU partners of trying to isolate Moscow.

The German minister said he and his Lithuanian counterpart, Linas Linkevicius, also discussed how to tackle "disinformation campaigns" related to the Ukrainian crisis, and said one solution was to help train Lithuanian journalists in Germany.

"I think one thing is clear — it would not be a democratic decision to answer propaganda with propaganda," Steinmeier told reporters.