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Kremlin Accuses Trump of Trying to Bully Europe to Buy American Energy

By Reuters

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Kremlin

The Kremlin on Thursday rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's description of Germany as a "captive" of Russia due to its energy reliance, saying his statement was part of a U.S. campaign to bully Europe into buying American energy supplies.

Trump told Germany at a NATO summit in Brussels on Wednesday that it was wrong to support an $11 billion Baltic Sea pipeline to import even more Russian gas while being slow to meet NATO targets for defence spending.

Trump's comments came ahead of his summit on Monday with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, though the Kremlin said they were unlikely to have an impact on what was always going to be a difficult meeting due to the number of disagreements between the two countries.

Russia is keen to press ahead with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline since it has the potential to double its gas exports under the Baltic Sea to Germany, bypassing traditional routes through Ukraine with which it has poor relations.

However Washington opposes the project, and a spokesman for the U.S. State Department told Reuters on Wednesday that Western firms invested in the pipeline were at risk of sanctions.

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Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Trump's statement marked an escalation of a U.S. campaign to talk down Russian gas supplies to Europe in an attempt to push the U.S. energy sector instead.

"As for Germany's dependence [on Russia] as a major gas buyer we cannot agree with this premise," Peskov told reporters on a conference call.

"Supplies of pipeline gas do not lead to dependence of one country on another but to complete mutual dependence. That is a guarantee of stability and future development."

Peskov said Moscow regarded U.S. objections to the new pipeline as "unfair competition" aimed at trying to force European countries to buy costlier U.S. liquefied natural gas.

"We consider that it's a question of economic competition and that ... the buyers must take their own decision," he said.

Washington believes the pipeline would give Russia another tool for the political coercion of European countries, especially Ukraine, and is using the project to divide Europe.

Peskov said the pipeline was a purely commercial project and that Russia had proven it was a reliable energy supplier to Europe over decades.

Five Western firms have invested in Nord Stream 2 — Wintershall (BASFn.DE) and Uniper (UN01.DE) of Germany, Austria's OMV (OMVV.VI), Anglo-Dutch Shell (RDSa.L), and France's Engie (ENGIE.PA).

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