

Merkel: No One Should Doubt EU Resolve on Russia Sanctions

April 05, 2014

The  **Moscow Times**

No one should doubt Europe's willingness to introduce tougher sanctions against Russia if it takes further steps to destabilize Ukraine, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Saturday.

Merkel acknowledged differences among European Union countries in the Ukraine crisis but said this would not get in the way of a united approach.

"If the territorial integrity of Ukraine continues to be violated, then we will have to introduce economic sanctions," Merkel told a congress of her Christian Democratic Union, or CDU, kicking off its campaign for European Parliament elections next month.

"Nobody should doubt this. We are all different in Europe, but we have the good fortune of being united, and together we will take this decision," said the leader of Europe's biggest economy which has close ties to Russia and has played an influential role in shaping the West's response to the crisis.

The EU and the U.S. have responded to Russia's annexation of Crimea by imposing targeted

visa bans and asset freezes against Russian and Ukrainian individuals.

But some commentators and analysts doubt Europe's readiness to follow through on threats to pursue punitive economic measures given the dependence of some EU countries, particularly those in Eastern Europe, on Russian gas and trade.

German business, which also has close ties to Russia, has publicly criticized the West for taking what some executives have described as an overly confrontational approach with Russia.

The chief executive of German conglomerate Siemens went as far as meeting President Vladimir Putin in Moscow late last month to reaffirm his company's commitment to Russia, a move that was denounced by several senior German politicians.

Merkel's comments echoed those of British Foreign Secretary William Hague, who urged his EU partners on Friday to press ahead with preparing economic sanctions, saying large numbers of Russian troops remained on Ukraine's eastern border.

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