

Germans protest soaring energy prices as EU warns of dark winter

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People rally in Berlin, Germany to protest soaring energy prices on October 4, 2022.

Berlin, October 5 (RHC)-- People have gathered in the German capital to protest soaring energy and commodity prices, and denounce their government's stance on the war in Ukraine. Germans took to the streets in Berlin for the second time in three days on Monday, saying the government's policies on the war in Ukraine had led to an energy crisis, a stagnant economy and soaring prices.

"People can't afford to heat their homes and, what's more, the situation is still worsening," said one protester. The protesters also called on U.S.-led NATO to immediately stop sending arms to Ukraine and to work to resolve the crisis peacefully through diplomacy.

Since the start of Russia's military offensive in Ukraine in late February, Germany has offered substantial support to Ukraine, sending the country billions of dollars in military aid and heavy weaponry. Russia has in turn cut off gas supplies to Europe, causing a worsening energy crisis.

Germany, along with other European Union countries, is scrambling to support homes and industries burdened by a further surge in energy prices. Berlin accuses Russia of wielding energy as a weapon. Russia blames Western sanctions for the delay of necessary repairs to supply pipelines.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz recently announced a 200-billion-euro (\$194-billion) plan to protect companies and households from the impact of soaring energy prices. Under the planned measures, to run until spring 2024, Berlin will introduce an emergency price brake on gas.

The plan, however, was criticized by other EU member states, including France, which said Berlin's plan went beyond those of its European neighbors. Scholz pushed back against the criticism, saying other countries were also taking steps to shield citizens from price shocks. "The measures we are taking are not unique but are also being taken elsewhere and rightly so," he said at a press conference.

EU Crisis Management Commissioner Janez Lenarcic, meanwhile, warned that the continent could face widespread and long lasting blackouts this winter amid the crisis. Asked by Germany's RND media network if EU countries would possibly need disaster relief due to the energy crisis, Lenarcic responded, "Yes, that is quite possible." The commissioner said the EU is more generally preparing for a winter of crises.

In a related development, Portugal's Economy Minister Antonio Costa Silva said that the EU wouldn't have been in this situation if it had had a single market. Not establishing a single market, he said, "was a huge strategic error."

He also warned that it was "highly likely" that with the Ukraine war and the EU sanctions on Moscow continuing, Russian President Vladimir Putin would fully cut off gas exports to Europe in "the depths of this winter." Costa Silva further said Europe would need to develop a solid plan to deal with this situation.

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