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## **FOCUS ON EUROPE, COMMISSIONER TELLS GERMANY AS SPYMASTER SAGA DRAGS ON**

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BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany's government needs to refocus its energies on tackling European problems rather than minor domestic ones, the country's EU Commissioner said, as a political crisis over the future of its scandal-tainted spymaster drags on.

The fate of Chancellor Angela Merkel's six-month-old coalition hangs in the balance as its three parties seek to resolve differences concerning spy chief Hans-Georg Maassen.

They said on Tuesday he would be replaced in that role after he faced accusations of harbouring far-right views but, in a move that prompted public outrage, also granted him a transfer to a better paid job at the interior ministry.

That compromise came unstuck on Friday when Andrea Nahles - leader of the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD), junior partner in the conservative-led alliance - said it was a mistake.

EU Budget Commissioner Guenther Oettinger, a member of Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), said her government was acting like a "wrecking ball for Europe" rather than helping the region progress.

"It is getting ever harder to explain to European partners ... why the grand coalition keeps getting entangled in new conflicts which are actually of little significance," he told the Funke newspaper group in an interview published on Sunday.

The dispute over Maassen comes two months after Merkel ended a painful row with her Bavarian CSU allies over immigration, related to her decision in 2015 to open Germany's borders to hundreds of thousands of migrants.

Oettinger said that, since its national election last September, Germany had done little to help solve European problems, meaning a year in Europe had gone wasted.

"Here in Brussels we expect the German government to finally deal with European issues," he said.

The dispute over Maassen started when the spy chief questioned the authenticity of video footage showing radicals hounding migrants in the eastern city of Chemnitz.

Wolfgang Kubicki, deputy leader of the opposition Free Democrats, said the saga showed the alliance had deeper problems, and new elections should be called.

CSU leader and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer told Bild am Sonntag newspaper the leaders of the

three coalition parties would only meet once he knew what the SPD's demands were and how the conservatives could reach an agreement with Nahles.

Coalition sources said it was unclear whether they would meet on Sunday.

CDU general secretary Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer earlier wrote to party members to say it thought the talks should be used to clarify whether the coalition partners "can continue to unite together behind the common mission".

(Reporting by Michelle Martin; additional reporting by Holger Hansen and Andreas Rinke; editing by John Stonestreet)

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