



## Hungary Blocks EU's New Round of Sanctions on Russia

Hungary blocked the EU's 13th package of sanctions against Russia during a meeting of the bloc's ambassadors on February 14 the Financial Times (FT) reported. This veto means that the country is the only bloc member to object to the new round of restrictions.

For some time, the EU has been trying to get a new sanctions package passed, which needs support from all member states, before February 24, the second anniversary of the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine.

The proposed restrictions would reportedly target 200 individuals and entities, mostly from Russia. Nonetheless, Asian firms — three Chinese and one Indian — have been included on the list.

Brussels is accusing the four Asian companies of helping Moscow to bypass EU sanctions, mainly by supplying it with components that can be repurposed for use in drones and other weapons systems.

Hungary, which had been a longstanding critic of restrictions on Russia and of EU military aid to Ukraine, "didn't agree [with the new sanctions package] due to Chinese companies" being targeted by it, an unnamed official told FT on February 15.

Another source who talked to the FT claimed that the EU ambassadors actually had "a very fruitful exchange" regarding the sanctions. Hungary blocked the package by saying it needed "a bit more time to analyze the content of the proposals," the quoted official underscored.

Discussions will continue next week, the sources said.

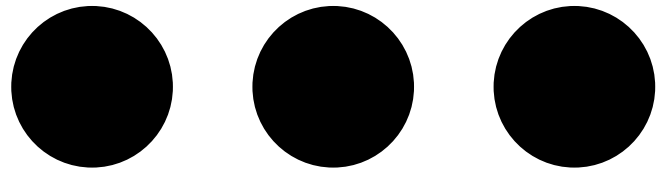
Per Reuters, EU foreign ministers will address the sanctions at their meeting on February 19, with their ambassadors returning to the issue on February 21.

In response to news of Chinese firms facing sanctions, China said it rejects "illegal sanctions" and promised to protect the interests of Chinese companies.

For its part, Hungary has adopted a neutral stance since the February 2022 escalation.

Budapest denounced Moscow's military operation but has not supplied weapons to Ukraine. It also called for a diplomatic solution to the crisis and repeatedly said the sanctions imperil the EU itself more than Russia.

For months, Hungarian authorities have withstood pressure from Brussels and continued to veto the



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EU's move to provide Kyiv with another €50 billion (\$54 billion) in aid, citing a lack of mechanisms to control how Ukraine would use the money. The package was ultimately agreed upon by member states earlier this month and is poised to be approved by the European Parliament by month's end.

On February 11, during a debate with former Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schussel, excerpts from which were published by Austria's *Die Presse* newspaper, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán claimed Russia does not take the EU seriously because the bloc is not assertive enough.

If Brussels can improve its standing, Moscow would consider negotiating with it on the Ukraine conflict, he added.

Hungary's conservative government has long slammed the way the EU operates, blasting it for infringing on the rights of member states. Budapest has also repeatedly lambasted the bloc's policies toward Kyiv and Moscow as misguided since the Ukraine conflict erupted almost two years ago.

Also, Orbán maintained that the EU is "lacking strengths."

"We are not strong enough to be taken seriously by the Russians," he stated, adding that the bloc should communicate clearly to Moscow that it has its own interests. The Hungarian prime minister argued that meaningful understanding between the EU and Russia can only be attained with the mutual recognition of interests.

He warned, however, that unless Brussels changes course, Russia and the United States might eventually agree to a new security architecture on the continent, over the heads of Europeans.

Orbán also criticized the "growing tendency toward centralization that undermines the sovereignty of [EU] member states," while claiming that the European Parliament in its current form "doesn't work" and "is a madhouse." He suggested reverting to an earlier arrangement, whereby member states' national parliaments sent representatives to the body, instead of conducting direct elections.

Furthermore, Orbán suggested that the European Commission should remember it represents the will of member states, instead of being a "political" entity.

On broader global developments, the Hungarian leader claimed that the "West's dominant position is over," arguing that the "gravitational center of the global economy ... is shifting from the West back to Asia." Ukraine's best geopolitical bet would be to become a "buffer zone" between Russia and the West, under arrangements made to guarantee the country's future security, Orbán added.

In any other case, Orbán said, "Ukraine will lose its land," and "the Russians will destroy Ukraine again and again." He stressed that Moscow would "never accept an EU and NATO member like Ukraine on its doorstep."

He also disagreed with Schussel's claim that the Ukraine crisis could be solved only if negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO coincide with the start of ceasefire talks.

To boot, Orbán rebuffed claims by officials in Brussels and Kyiv that Ukraine is "defending" Europe. "Ukraine offers Europeans no additional security because most of us are already members of NATO, which is much stronger than Russia," he stated, adding that there is "no risk" that Russia could attack a bloc member.

He also pushed back against Schussel's argument that a ceasefire would mean a de facto defeat for Ukraine, saying that this depends on how a person sees the future as Kiev could potentially lose more territory.



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Orbán posited that the EU is also in no position to provide Ukraine with a sufficient amount of weapons and money, adding that the bloc's citizens are "dissatisfied because their governments are giving Ukraine more and more financial support."

A chief advisor to Viktor Orbán, Balazs Orbán (no relation), last week claimed that "Europe has been basically brought to its knees due to the attitude of the U.S. toward the conflict between Russia and Ukraine."



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