
EU PREPARES TO RENEW RUSSIA SANCTIONS

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European sanctions against Russia over its interference in Ukraine are set to be renewed next month as diplomats question whether Donald Trumps election will result in pressure within the EU to dilute the penalties after he takes office in January.

EU foreign ministers have been called to a special dinner on Sunday to discuss the consequences of Mr Trumps unexpected victory, which has cast doubt on core strands of Europes foreign policy alignment with Washington.

Under outgoing President Barack Obama, the US has worked closely with European allies on Russia, Iran and Syria.

After Mr Trump called into question central tenets of American foreign policy during his campaign, European diplomats are examining how they would respond if, as president, he follows through on his rhetoric. At a general level, people assumed this would not happen, said a senior diplomat of Mr Trumps victory.

Federica Mogherini, EU foreign policy chief, has asked foreign ministers to gather in Brussels for informal talks to take stock of Mr Trumps election.

No policy conclusions are expected but a second senior diplomat said the objective of the gathering was to ensure that ministers maintained their common stance on policies before Mr Trump assumes power. He should know exactly what we expect from him, the diplomat said.

At issue even before Mr Trump takes office is whether EU leaders roll over sanctions against Russia, which are due to lapse at the end of the year. These penalties have been aligned with the USs sanctions against Moscow but Mr Trump has said he favours a rapprochement with Vladimir Putin, Russias president.

The second diplomat said that Germany and France will insist on the EU sanctions continuing beyond December if, as expected, Russian makes no moves to implement the Minsk agreement. The pact in 2015 between France, Germany, Russia and the Ukraine was supposed to ease the conflict in Ukraine.

However EU sanctions against Russia remain contentious within the bloc, with Italy, Hungary and Greece pushing for dilution. Only last month, Matteo Renzi, Italian prime minister, forced a retreat from further sanctions against Russia over the bombardment of Aleppo in Syria, after such a step had been sought by Germany, France and Britain.

In question now is whether any move by Mr Trump to engage with Mr Putin leads to a weakening of US sanctions and prompts a push for similar easing in Europe by some EU members. Any such change in US policy could have an impact on the unity of member states on the Ukraine question, diplomats said.

European diplomats are also examining the prospect of Mr Trump backing away from the agreement with Iran, which seeks to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons. Such a move by the next US president could lead to a renewal of American sanctions against the Islamic republic, raising questions over European moves to unwind sanctions in return for Iran's participation in the agreement.

Kaynak/Source: