
JAPAN SAYS NO DEALS WITH RUSSIA THAT UNDERMINE SANCTIONS

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Japan's Minister of Trade and Industry Hiroshige Seko speaks at a news conference at Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's official residence in Tokyo, Japan August 3, 2016. REUTERS/Kim Kyung-Hoon/File Photo

Japan's trade minister on Monday ruled out any economic cooperation with Russia that would undermine Group of Seven (G7) unity on sanctions imposed after Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region in 2014.

The minister, Hiroshige Seko, who holds the portfolio for economic cooperation with Russia, spelt out Japan's position ahead of summit meetings on Thursday and Friday between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The two leaders will meet in Japan to discuss economic cooperation and a decades-old territorial dispute.

"We will never hurt G7 solidarity over the Ukraine issue. That's a prerequisite," Seko told a news conference.

"We are making sure each item in the current cooperation plan is not infringing on sanctions."

The two sides have been working on about 30 projects, from medical technology to energy, but some Japanese companies have expressed concern about running afoul of the sanctions as well as Russia's uncertain investment environment.

The United States, the European Union and Japan imposed the sanctions to punish Russia it after its 2014 annexation of Crimea, and some Western countries have been worried about Japan breaking ranks.

With the Russian economy hit hard by low oil prices and the sanctions, Abe is betting the lure of Japanese investment and his close ties with Putin could help advance talks on a territorial row that has soured relations between Japan and Russia since the end of World War Two.

The dispute over a string of windswept western Pacific islands, seized by Soviet troops at the end of the war, has precluded a formal peace treaty between the two countries.

Officials on both sides, however, have recently played down expectations of a breakthrough on the dispute this week.

Abe told a representative of elderly Japanese former residents of the islands on Monday that he was determined to resolve the issue.

"I will make an all-out effort to make progress on the territorial issue, even if it is just a step closer toward a solution," he added, according to Kyodo news agency.

An opinion poll conducted by NHK public television on the weekend found that 74 percent of respondents said they did not expect progress on the issue at the meeting, while 11 percent said they did.

Kaynak/Source: