
KREMLIN SAYS NEW SANCTIONS ARE SAD NEWS FOR US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

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Proposed new US sanctions against Russia are an extremely unfriendly act and sad news for Russia-US relations, the Kremlin has said.

France, Germany and the EU also criticised the sanctions amid concerns that the measures could affect European businesses. Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European commission, warned the EU would hit back within a matter of days if the sanctions damaged European economic interests.

Juncker expressed his fury at the failure of Washington to work with the EU on the issue, saying: America first cannot mean that Europe's interests come last.

The House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly in favour of imposing new sanctions on Moscow and requiring Donald Trump to obtain lawmakers permission before easing any sanctions on Russia.

The sanctions package, which also targets Iran and North Korea, tightens the screws on our most dangerous adversaries in order to keep Americans safe, the House Speaker, Paul Ryan, said after the bill passed on Tuesday by 419 votes to three.

It will go before the Senate before Trump faces the tricky choice of whether to veto the bill, which has been opposed by the White House.

Right now we can say that this is rather sad news from the point of view of Russia-US ties and their further development, Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesman, told a conference call with reporters. This is no less disheartening from the point of view of international law and international trade relations. But let's now wait until it becomes a law.

On Wednesday, the Russian deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, told the Interfax news agency that the latest US sanctions move left no room to improve relations in the near future and will take relations between the two countries into uncharted territory.

This is already having an extremely negative impact on the process of normalising our relations, Ryabkov said. US-Russia relations were entering uncharted territory in a political and diplomatic sense, he added.

Moscow had initially hoped Trump would work to repair a relationship that has slumped to a post-cold war low, but has watched with frustration as allegations that it interfered with last year's US

presidential election and concerns over Trump associates Russia ties have killed off hopes of detente. Russia denies the meddling accusations.

Moscow has repeatedly warned the US it will retaliate against what it sees as hostile moves, and Ryabkov made clear Russia was growing tired of showing restraint.

The Russian foreign ministry said this month that too many US spies operated in the country under diplomatic cover and that it might expel some of them in retaliation for Washingtons expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats last year.

That warning reflected rising frustration in Moscow over the Trump administrations refusal to hand back two Russian diplomatic compounds that were seized at the same time as the diplomats were sent home.

The particular concern in Brussels, however, is that the measures could affect a pipeline project to transport Russian gas into Germany. There are also fears that European companies would be hit for their involvement in the maintenance and upgrade of pipelines in Russia that feed the Ukraine gas transit system.

Under the proposed law, sanctions would be imposed on any company contributing to the development, maintenance, modernisation of the Russian Federations energy infrastructure.

Juncker said: The EU is fully committed to the Russia sanctions regime. However, G7 unity on sanctions and close coordination among allies are at the heart of ensuring the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

This is a core objective that the EU and the US share. The US bill could have unintended unilateral effects that impact the EUs energy security interests. This is why the commission concluded today that if our concerns are not taken into account sufficiently, we stand ready to act appropriately within a matter of days.

If the US fails to take the EUs interests into account, and declare that the discretionary powers would not be used against European companies, the commission is likely to either seek arbitration at the WTO or rule the US laws as unenforceable on EU territory.

The EUs executive said it was raising its concerns via all diplomatic channels with the US and its counterparts.

Many Russian politicians believe Trumps political opponents and Congress have reduced the US presidents room for manoeuvre on Russia to almost nil. Ryabkov told Interfax the new sanctions bill was the brainchild of US congressmen who hated Russia and wanted to box in Trump.

Despite initially opposing the bill, Trump appears to have few options in the face of near-total consensus in Congress. His spokeswoman, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said the White House was reviewing the House legislation and awaits a final legislative package for the presidents desk.

Trump has faced accusations that his administration sought to reassure Moscow that sanctions imposed by the Obama administration dating back to the Moscows 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine could be lifted.

The bill also includes fresh sanctions against Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which

stands accused of supporting terrorism, and North Korea, for its missile tests.

Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, said Tehran would respond in kind to any breach by the US of the 2015 nuclear deal. If the enemy steps over part of the agreement, we will do the same, and if they step over the entire deal, we will do the same too, Rouhani said at a televised meeting.

The Iranian parliament's national security and foreign affairs committee said it would hold an extraordinary session on Saturday to discuss its response.

Kaynak/Source: