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## AT KYIV SUMMIT, EU PLEDGES MORE AID FOR WAR-TORN EAST UKRAINE

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European Union leaders Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker pledged support and financial assistance to conflict-riven Ukraine during a visit to Kyiv on Monday while urging Russia to do more to bring peace to the Donbass region.

The EU has stood by Ukraine against Russia following the 2014 Maidan street protests that ousted a Kremlin-backed president and brought in pro-Western leaders who want Ukraine eventually to join the 28-member bloc.

Conflict between Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed forces in the eastern Donbass region has killed 13,000 people in the past five years, despite a notional ceasefire agreed in the Belarus capital Minsk in 2015.

The EU imposed economic sanctions on Russia following its 2014 annexation of Crimea, while giving billions of euros in aid to Ukraine. It has also been pressing Kyiv to implement reforms and tackle entrenched corruption.

On what is likely to be their last visit in office before a changing of the guard in Brussels later this year, President of the European Council Tusk and President of the European Commission Juncker said sanctions on Moscow would remain.

Tusk and Juncker met President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who took power in May promising to achieve a lasting peace with Russia.

### **Pro-European spirit**

At a time of political transitions in both Ukraine and the EU, our challenge is to defend the pro-European spirit in Ukraine and the pro-Ukrainian spirit in Europe, said Tusk, a former Polish prime minister.

Only a few days ago, the EU unanimously extended the economic sanctions against Russia for another six months. The sanctions will remain in place until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented, he said.

The EU announced  million in new assistance, including help for small businesses in the Azov Sea region, which became a flashpoint in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia last year.

The EU has given 10 billion in macrofinancial assistance to Ukraine since 2014 – the largest amount to any non-EU country. A further 500 million is conditional on Ukraine implementing reforms.

The idea is to keep the focus on Ukraine, we are trying to keep the new president as close as possible, an EU diplomat told Reuters ahead of the talks between Tusk, Juncker and Zelenskiy, a former comic actor with no previous political experience.

(Zelenskiy) says the right things but we still don't know him well enough, he still needs to prove himself, confirm in practice his determination to remain on the path of reforms.

At a press briefing, Zelenskiy said a special court to try corruption cases – a reform backed by Western donors – would start hearing cases in early September.

He also said Kyiv would like to hold talks with Moscow in September about the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine.

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Kaynak/Source: