

Angela Merkel Under Pressure: EU Countries Resisting Extension of Economic Sanctions against Russia

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The EU is in the surprising situation of needing to deal, at its upcoming summit meeting at the end of this week, with the question of whether to extend sanctions against Russia. It had been expected to be an automatic continuation on account of Angela Merkel's routinely doing whatever Washington says. But some European nations are clenching their fists and resisting her leadership on this particular matter.

The EU summit this Thursday and Friday is consequently surprised to have to deal with the extension of economic sanctions against Russia. The EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, on Monday the 14th, at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels, [stunned people by placing this question onto the agenda](#). She tried to downplay the matter by saying that doing this is routine in cases where any Member State might dissent from a consensus. Last week, Italy, in particular, said that [it was opposed to extending sanctions, and therefore any extension would require high-level talks](#).

The sanctions are hated by many states: sanctions have increased European unemployment. However, economic reasons may not be formally stated as a reason for pressuring national politicians; but, suddenly, the EU now resists paying the economic price for its bondage to the U.S., and for doing the bidding of America's key European agent Angela Merkel. Most EU member states had, in fact, already rejected these sanctions at the outset. US Vice President Joe Biden publicly admitted that the United States needed to force the EU to cooperate.

In fact, some European capitals clench fists in their pockets, because the penalties the individual economies suffer from the sanctions impose a significant competitive disadvantage: In Italy, the former [EU President Romano Prodi](#) warned early on, that they'd produce an economic disaster. The Greeks were always against the sanctions, and could bide time stalling for an extra deal on the bailouts. Justification now: The bankrupt state [must now spend additional billions for refugee measures](#). Hungary is fighting against the EU because of the [energy](#) policy [especially gas]. Austria has taken serious damage, which even incited the prudent [President of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce to a tantrum](#). The French have taken a two-pronged approach: They carry the sanctions officially, but deal unofficially with the Russians. Recently there was a French

agreement with an [aircraft carrier](#), and in Syria there is an unofficial Russian-French partnership. Even the German economy dares discreetly to be rambunctious against Angela Merkel: the [Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations](#) stands strictly against the sanctions. However, its chairman Ekkehard Cordes has resigned. Whether the resignation in connection with his criticism of Merkel stands is unclear.

The EU had imposed economic sanctions against Russia in 2014 after the downing of the passenger plane MH17 above Ukraine in July of last year. The sanctions depend on measures against Russian state-owned banks, the import and export of arms, as well as major Russian oil and gas firms.

According to the current situation, sanctions expire at the end of January 2016. The cited reason for the sanctions has been that Russia had shot down the MH17 plane. However, everything indicates that it was instead likely to have been an erroneous firing by the rebels in Ukraine's east. That's the basis for having imposed the sanctions. The EU-funded government in Kiev is at least partly to blame, however: They were obligated to close the airspace over the Donbass for civilian flights because of the fighting, but they didn't do that. And yet the sanctions are only against Russia.

Then, the EU required that a full implementation of the Minsk Agreement would be needed before sanctions would end. This was supposed to occur by 31 December 2015. But recently, among other things the agreed ceasefire had become brittle and the preparations of regional elections that are also required under the Minsk agreement are several months in arrears. Ukraine has launched several provocations, such as the interruption of power supply in the Crimea by neo-Nazi attacks, but this has been ignored by the EU. Also not considered is that Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the rebels vigorously in the early summer, to cease hostilities [despite continuation of attacks by the other side, which the EU also ignores].

Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni is determined that despite the obvious resistance in individual EU member states, the **Russian sanctions must be "on the table" at the summit on Thursday and Friday.** He expects "no big discussion," he said, according to AFP. Nobody was against the "punitive measures," he said. But the summit was to assess where the issue of Minsk stands. If certain countries have additional needs for discussion, it was not a problem. These are rather "technical" issues.

Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) will inform his colleagues, according to diplomats on Monday, on the progress in the implementation of Minsk. After there had been in recent weeks, "significant setbacks" in securing the ceasefire, it was again quiet, he said in Brussels. "We are now focused on the preparation of the legal basis for elections, which will take place next spring." That is clear, however, "very, very tedious work is ahead". **The sanctions issue was ignored by Steinmeier.**

Basically, any EU country could block the sanctions with a veto. But this will probably not happen: **In all EU member states either massive economic pressure is exerted, because they are net recipients;** or else the states have very weak governments, such as Austria, whose Chancellor Faymann has his back up against the wall because of Austria's embarrassing crisis management in the refugee issue. All other States will keep themselves covered so as not to fall into Angela Merkel's firing-line. She is responsible for the renewal of sanctions.

The EU plays in this process an awkward role: it does what the US demands. This week, a [traveling extraordinary commissioner is being sent through Europe](#) to “help” persuade recalcitrant members of the EU.

EU President Jean-Claude Juncker lives up to his reputation yet again: using falsehoods as a legitimate weapon: A few weeks ago Juncker had said that the EU should aim for a normalization of relations with Russia. Probably he wanted, by this trick, to win time and lull his critics into a false sense of security.

The timing was chosen deliberately: **A few days before Christmas, there are no revolutions in European** politics. On several occasions important decisions have been made so that no more time for consultations would be available. Next Monday, the politicians in the EU and in the Member States say goodbye, closed for business during the Christmas holidays.

Concluding Remarks by Eric Zuesse

The December 31st deadline is thus pushed forward to December 18th. And, if there still remains a holdout, a veto, by Italy or any other nation, then something will be worked out, some price will be paid, someone will be bought off. The American aristocracy’s war against Russia will not tolerate resistance within the alliance. The members of the gang always stick together. No matter how much the real blame might happen to be [on the U.S. and its Ukrainian stooges](#), and no matter how much Russia might actually be simply responding to their infractions, the gang will hold together. Because, if one member steps out, he’ll be shot. So, the European people are being impoverished, and even attacked by terrorists and flooded with refugees from America’s serial invasions, but Europe’s ‘leaders’ want above all to be ‘leaders’; so, they comply. And that’s the way the world works: it works top-down, nowadays.

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