

Post-referendum Sanctions Will Not Deter Russia From Uniting with New Territories

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Recently held referendums in the republics of Donetsk and Lugansk and in Zaporozhye and Kherson oblasts will affect the military operation in Ukraine as, besides the high degree of support for accession, any attack by the US or NATO on these territories would be a direct attack on the Russian Federation. Any Western attack against the new Russian territories could be considered a declaration of war and unleash an open conflagration, something that the US and its NATO allies are unlikely wanting to directly engage in.

The referendum, in this sense, has been a political instrument of great importance since it has allowed the Donbass region, the ancestral territory of the Cossacks, to return to Russia. The result of the elections was expected because historically the regions of the Don River basin have deep Slavic roots, speak the Russian language and profess the Orthodox Christian religion. It was only after the founding of the Soviet Union in 1922 that Moscow ceded those territories to Ukraine.

In addition, the annexation of these regions is a strategic step in the current confrontation between Russia and Ukraine. This is especially the case as a harsh winter is approaching and the political and energy crises in the European Union is seemingly leading to an economic recession.

According to official statistics, with 100% of the ballots counted, 99.23% of Donetsk voters voted in favour of joining Russia, and 98.42% of the Luhansk electorate also voted yes. In Zaporozhye, the yes vote received 93.11%, while the Kherson oblast was the only one with less than 90% of the votes favourable to joining Russia, with a massive 87.05% none-the-less.



Source: InfoBrics

These territories called for a referendum, considering them necessary for the “defence against terrorist acts” perpetrated by the Ukrainian government and the NATO members which supplies them. In turn, several countries and international organisations condemned the holding of the votes and made it clear that they will not recognize their results.

During all the days of voting, the Ukrainian military bombed the regions to try and prevent people from participating in the referendum. The authorities of these regions assure that with their integration into Russia, security will be guaranteed and a historical justice restored. They also stressed that it was necessary to take such a decision due to the permanent attacks by the nationalist regime in Kiev.

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that Russia will support the decision made by the inhabitants of Donbass, Zaporozhye and Kherson. The US, the EU, the OSCE and other countries and international organisations described the call as illegal, made it clear that they will not recognize the results and threatened new sanctions packages.

This comes as Russia’s ambassador to Washington, Anatoly Antonov, warned that the US and other “sponsors of Ukrainian neo-Nazi criminals” are approaching a red line by allowing Western weapons to be used to attack Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson.

“The sponsors of neo-Nazi criminals are approaching that dangerous line of which we clearly warned repeatedly. The United States becomes a party to the Ukrainian conflict,” the ambassador said in a statement.

Antonov warned that Washington is encouraging Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to continue attacking with the weapons that NATO countries have sent without measuring the consequences.

“Diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis cannot be effective as long as Western countries use the Zelensky regime as a mercenary against Russia,” he stressed, adding that Russia’s defensive response will be forceful.

Earlier, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken assured that the White House was not going to prevent Zelensky from attacking Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson with US weapons after these entities become a part of Russian territory. The US also announced that it will impose a raft of new sanctions against Russia, which is already the world’s most sanctioned country.

The European Union also seems poised to adopt new sanctions on Russia, though some EU members are questioning existing restrictions as economic pain is already hurting Europe more than Russia. The Biden administration, for its part, is looking to target government-linked Russian financial institutions, including the Russian Deposit Insurance Agency, which is intended to protect Russians bank accounts, and the National Payment Card System, or Mir, an electronic funds-transfer system.

However, further sanctions and encouraging Ukraine to continue attacking Russia’s new regions will not lead to a reversal of the reality on the ground – Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson will soon be integral parts of the Russian Federation. With some of these regions still under Ukrainian occupation, it now appears that Moscow has a clear end-game to its military operation in Ukraine, the full liberation of these territories from Ukraine.

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