

Lavrov: Russia Will Not Respond in Kind to Western Sanctions

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov speaking at Monday's briefing in Moscow.

Russia will not impose tit-for-tat measures or "fall into hysterics" over Western economic sanctions, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday, trying to stake out the high ground amid growing tensions with the West.

Speaking at a news conference, Lavrov said he hoped for an objective investigation into the crash in eastern Ukraine of a Malaysian airliner on July 17. Western leaders say Flight MH17 was almost certainly shot down by mistake by Russian-backed separatists using a Russian-supplied surface-to-air missile, killing all 298 people on board.

Russia is facing more sanctions from Europe over its role in the Ukraine crisis, which has left Russia's ties with the West at their most strained since the Cold War, but Lavrov said such measures could make Russia more economically independent.

"I assure you, we will overcome any difficulties that may arise in certain areas of the economy, and maybe we will become more independent and more confident in our own strength," the foreign minister said.

"We cannot ignore it. But to fall into hysterics and respond to a blow with a blow is not worthy of a major country."

Any retaliatory measures from Russia could affect oil major BP, whose 19.75 percent holding in Russian top oil producer Rosneft leaves it heavily exposed to the Russian economy.

Kremlin-controlled Rosneft also has agreements with ExxonMobil, Eni and Statoil to tap Russia's Arctic offshore oil and gas.

Members of the European Union, angered by the downing of MH17 on its way from Amsterdam, are expected to reach a final decision on Tuesday on measures including closing the bloc's capital markets to Russian state banks, an embargo on arms sales and restrictions on dual-use and energy technologies.

The EU added new names on Friday to its list of individuals and companies facing travel bans and asset freezes over their alleged involvement in Ukraine and could agree to extend the list further as early as Monday.

Presumption of Innocence

The West blames Russia for fanning the violence in Ukraine by allowing fighters and arms to travel freely over its porous border into rebel-held territory in the country's predominantly Russian-speaking eastern regions.

Lavrov responded to those accusations by saying Moscow had tried to contribute to diplomatic efforts to end the fighting in eastern Ukraine but that the West has not sufficiently used its leverage over Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

Lavrov also repeated calls for an objective investigation into the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, which Moscow has suggested was caused by Ukrainian government forces.

"Only the honest, open participation of all those who have access to information about the crash can be regarded as normal. Anything else we will consider as deceitful attempts to influence the investigation, putting presumption of innocence in doubt," he said.

"I do not want to throw accusations in advance, but I expect that no one will try to cover up evidence [at the crash site]."

Censorship in the West

His criticism of the West's reaction to the Malaysia Airlines crash extended to its policy toward Russian media. He lashed out at the British government for what he described as "blatant censorship" in its attempt to restrict English-language broadcasts of the Kremlin-owned RT channel over complaints of biased coverage of the Malaysia Airlines crash.

Addressing reporters at Monday's news conference, Lavrov stressed the importance of "establishing the facts" in the case, saying he hoped "these facts are not censored" by the British government.

Ofcom, Britain's communications regulator, announced plans last week to investigate the channel after receiving complaints from viewers about the channel's coverage of the Malaysia Airlines crash. Three of the complaints were made over biased coverage and one over gruesome footage of the victims' bodies at the scene of the crash, according to RIA Novosti. The regulator has yet to make a decision on the network's coverage.

The Probe

As for the work of international monitors at the wreckage site, Lavrov suggested that Kiev had hampered access to the area on Sunday when the monitors abandoned plans to visit the region of the crash due to reports of heavy fighting.

The Ukrainian government said its forces were advancing toward the crash site to try to free it from the rebels, who have impeded the work of international monitors and whom Kiev accuses of tampering with evidence pointing to who shot it down.

International monitors said the fighting itself could affect the crash site, underlining the growing complexity of trying to establish who shot down the plane.

Lavrov also said Moscow was hopeful that monitors from the European rights and security watchdog, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, could be deployed along Russia's border with Ukraine, amid accusations from the West that Moscow was shipping fighters and arms through the border.

"We hope that this [monitors' deployment] will allow to dispel suspicions that are regularly being voiced against us, that those [border] checkpoints controlled by the militias from the Ukrainian side are used for massive troops and weaponry deployment from Russia to Ukraine," he said.

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