

Russian Foreign Ministry Slams EU For Lifting Ukraine Military Export Ban

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August 03, 2014



Ukrainian servicemen checking their weapons as they guard a checkpoint in the country's restive east Saturday.

The European Union applied "double standards" in lifting a ban on military exports to Ukraine, in a move that could contribute to internal repression in the conflict-torn country, Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a strongly worded statement.

The European Council "discreetly" agreed to lift a ban on the export of military technology and equipment to Ukraine that was imposed following deadly clashes between Maidan protesters and Ukrainian law enforcement in February, according to the statement released Saturday. The ban remained in place until July, Reuters reported.

"Despite the continuation of the military operation in southeastern Ukraine ordered by the current authorities in Kiev, the EU has considered it necessary to fully resume issuing export licenses for special and military equipment," the statement said. "It is understandable that

the EU ignores indisputable facts about attacks on Russian territory from Ukraine: the prospect of involvement in such acts probably creates some discomfort in Brussels."

Russia, which claimed the EU's decision was influenced by Washington, said that the measure violated Europe's own regulations about the control of military exports, including the necessity of banning exports that can prolong or aggravate armed conflicts, as well as those that can be used for internal repression.

The Russian statement went on to implore the EU to reinstate the ban, without which "its responsibility for the bloodshed in southeastern Ukraine would increase."

Relations between Moscow and Brussels have deteriorated since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis. Last week, the EU targeted Russia's defense, financial and energy sectors in a new round of sanctions, the harshest it has imposed against the country yet.

The new European sanctions impose restrictions on defense exports and the delivery of certain dual-purpose equipment to Russia.

Russia's military cooperation with the EU took center stage in July after France pledged it would go ahead with the delivery of two Mistral warships to Russia, scheduled for the end of the year and late 2015 or early 2016. Western governments have urged France to annul the deal amid escalating tensions in Ukraine.

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