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Russia Sanctions Could Be Eased If Ukraine Progress Made, U.S. Adviser Says

By The Moscow Times

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Talks on easing sanctions against Russia imposed over the conflict in Ukraine could begin in the next few weeks, but more measures are possible if there is no progress over a ceasefire deal, the U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser said on Friday.

The European Union and the United States have imposed economic sanctions on Russia, with the West accusing Moscow of providing pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine with troops and weapons. Russia denies the accusation.

Last month, envoys from Ukraine, Russia, and the separatists negotiated a ceasefire in Minsk, and U.S. adviser Tony Blinken said sanctions could start to be removed if conditions agreed were put into practice.

"Our hope over the next weeks is that we begin to implement that agreement in a meaningful

way on the Russian side. And if that happens we can actually begin to talk about rolling back the sanctions," Blinken told reporters at a briefing in London.

"But you know we will get to a point where if there is no action in implementing the Minsk agreement, we will need to look at not only sustaining the pressure but looking at ways to increase it."

Sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union have targeted companies including Sberbank, Russia's largest bank by assets, and Rostec, a conglomerate that makes everything from Kalashnikovs to cars, limiting their ability to access the U.S. debt markets.

"The challenge now is to actually implement an agreement that Russia has signed on to. There is not a specific time limit on it but there are clear steps that need to be taken," Blinken said.

"Among them, most critically, are making sure that Russian personnel and equipment leave Ukraine, that the border is appropriately back under the control of Ukrainian forces and the Ukraine government, that its monitored appropriately, and that there are buffer zones on both sides."

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