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Japan Widens Russia Sanctions List Ahead of Putin Visit

By The Moscow Times

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin (R) shakes hands with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe before their meeting at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Beijing, on Nov. 9, 2014.

Japan has expanded sanctions against Russia and two separatist Ukrainian regions ahead of a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Tokyo next year, news agency TASS reported Tuesday, citing Japan's Foreign Ministry.

The new sanctions list targets 26 individuals and 14 organizations, the majority of which are tied to the leaders of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. Clashes between the two self-declared republics and Ukrainian government forces have continued despite a September cease-fire agreement.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry has not yet published the names of those sanctioned, but said they held a "direct connection to the joining of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia, as well as the destabilization of Ukraine's east," TASS reported.

While the move marks a toughening of Tokyo's stance, Japan's sanctions over Russia's annexation of Crimea and support of Ukrainian separatists fall short of wide-ranging U.S. and European measures targeting Russia's banking, defense and energy industries.

Tokyo in September cut off some arms exports to Russia and barred Russian banks from issuing securities in Japan.

But the announcement of the measures will not affect Putin's upcoming visit to Tokyo next year, according to Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga.

While Tokyo and Moscow have scuffled over Russia's control of several Pacific islands claimed by Japan, both countries in recent years have sought to improve relations. Last year Japan relied on Russia for 4 percent of its energy supply, a July 2014 report by Japan's Institute of Energy Economics said.

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