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Hollande Calls for End to Russia Sanctions – Once Progress Made in Ukraine

By The Moscow Times

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French President Francois Hollande prepares to answer journalists during a live interview at the France Inter radio station studios in Paris on Jan. 5, 2015.

French President Francois Hollande has called for Western sanctions against Russia to be removed as soon as progress is made in resolving the ongoing Ukraine crisis, French media reported Monday.

"I think it is necessary to stop the sanctions. They should be cancelled once there is progress. If there is no progress, the sanctions will remain," Hollande was cited as saying by Agence France-Presse.

Hollande also said on Monday that he hoped for progress during the upcoming four-way talks in Astana, scheduled for Jan. 15. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said late last month

that he had invited the leaders of Russia, France and Germany to the talks, which are aimed at bringing an end to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

In retaliation for Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and alleged backing of separatists in the country's east, the United States and the European Union have imposed wave after wave of sanctions on Russian companies and government officials, dragging Russia's economy down further amid falling oil prices, a drastic devaluation of the ruble currency and rising inflation.

Western leaders have said they will remove the sanctions only when Russia stops backing separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine. Russian officials, meanwhile, deny supporting the rebels.

Russian officials have repeatedly criticized the sanctions, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov telling French news agency France 24 in December that the sanctions were a Western attempt to provoke a regime change in Russia.

Russia's Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev predicted in late December that the sanctions could last for decades, saying they had added to a "perfect storm" of factors that would together cause a major recession, Reuters reported.

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