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EU Extends Sanctions Against Ukraine's Yanukovych and 17 Others

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Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych

The European Union said on Thursday that it had extended a freeze on the assets of ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych and 17 others suspected of stealing from the Ukrainian state.

It will also will lift current sanctions on four people. Diplomats said legal proceedings in Ukraine had not produced enough evidence of their role in misappropriating funds which Kiev's new leaders allege ran into tens of billions of dollars.

EU officials confirmed Yanukovych and his prime minister Mykola Azarov would remain under sanctions. Of the 22 people sanctioned last year, the identities of the four who have been freed from restrictions will be made public on Friday.

The EU froze the assets of Yanukovych, his two sons, Azarov and 14 other senior Ukrainian officials a year ago after Yanukovych fled to Russia following huge protests over his failure to sign a trade agreement with the EU.

A further four names, including Azarov's successor Serhiy Arbuzov, were added in April last year.

The pro-Western authorities who took over accused Yanukovych and a coterie of relatives and close allies, known as The Family, of accumulating huge wealth by robbing state coffers and plundering national assets through corrupt deals.

Current Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk alleged that Yanukovych embezzled as much as $37 billion.

EU governments have agreed to extend asset freezes on people "subject to initial investigations on the embezzlement of Ukrainian state funds, including ... Yanukovych," the EU said in a statement, adding that the sanctions had been adjusted to take account of progress in the Ukrainian judicial proceedings.

The asset freeze will be extended by 12 months for 14 people on the list and by three months for four others, an EU official said. The names will be made public in the EU's Official Journal on Friday.

In January, Interpol put Yanukovych and two members of his former government on the international wanted list at Ukraine's request.

The international police organization said Yanukovych and his former finance minister Yuri Kolobov were wanted in Ukraine on charges of embezzlement and financial wrongdoing.

In May, the former president, his sons Viktor and Oleksander, and businessman Serhiy Kurchenko filed suits asking the European Court of Justice to annul the Council's sanctions.

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