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EU Unlikely to Extend Russia Sanctions at Upcoming Summit

By The Moscow Times

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EU leaders are due to discuss sanctions on Russia, imposed over the Ukraine conflict, at a summit next week.

European Union leaders are unlikely to reach an agreement at their summit next week to prolong economic sanctions on Russia that expire in July, a senior EU official said Friday.

New sanctions on Russia are also off the table for now because EU governments want to give a chance to a fragile cease-fire in eastern Ukraine.

But some of the EU's 28 member states had pushed for an early decision on extending sanctions on Russia's financial, energy and defense sectors adopted in July last year over Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine.

While leaders will discuss sanctions at next week's summit, the senior EU official said a majority would probably want to hold over discussion of renewing the economic sanctions on

Russia until July.

"I don't think there is unanimity at all for the rollover of sanctions, the sanctions that are due in July," the official, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity, said.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said Friday that new or extended EU sanctions against Russia would not help the cease-fire in eastern Ukraine.

"The cease-fire needs to be supported and we will hardly support it by saying that we will bring some new and further and further sanctions," Fico said in Prague.

The EU is divided on sanctions and Fico has in the past called them "meaningless and counterproductive."

Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcak said the prevailing view in the EU was that sanctions should remain in place in their current form for the time being.

"We have not gotten that far that we could talk about canceling sanctions," Lajcak told reporters in Slovakia.

EU governments did agree on Friday to prolong sanctions on a list of Ukrainian and Russian individuals and companies accused of undermining Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

The asset freezes and travel bans on 150 people and 37 organizations were extended for a further six months, until Sept. 15. Details will be published in the EU's Official Journal on Saturday.

The decision was a formality after EU foreign ministers agreed in January to extend the sanctions.

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