

Germany Pushes EU to Maintain Sanctions on Russia Until Cease-Fire Deal is Upheld

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Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, and other European leaders are keen to extend sanctions in order to improve situation in Ukraine

Germany and other countries want European Union leaders to endorse a declaration saying that EU sanctions on Russia will not be eased unless Moscow complies with a Ukraine cease-fire deal, two officials said Saturday.

EU leaders, who meet in Brussels next Thursday and Friday, will discuss the sanctions imposed on Russia's financial, energy and defence sectors last July over Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Ukraine.

The cease-fire deal, which was signed last September in Minsk, called for an end to hostilities between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line.

"It is the plan to have a political declaration to link sanctions to fulfilment of Minsk," said one of the two officials, who asked not to be named.

Germany and some others EU countries were in favour of such a declaration, the officials said, without giving further details.

If EU leaders decide to back this stance, it would effectively extend the sanctions, which expire in July, to the end of the year, as the cease-fire deal requires the restoration of Ukrainian border controls with Russia by year-end.

EU leaders have to be unanimous in their decision to extend sanctions, but a senior EU official said Friday that they were unlikely to reach a decision at next week's summit.

Some EU governments have only reluctantly backed tough EU sanctions and most want to leave them as they are while they assess the impact of the cease-fire agreement.

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