

EU's Tusk Wants Russia Sanctions, Not Dialogue

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U.S. President Barack Obama (R) listens to comments by European Council President Donald Tusk to reporters in the Oval Office in Washington.

ROME / MOSCOW — Europe must maintain pressure on Russia with sanctions until the Kiev government has full control of Ukraine, the president of the European Council Donald Tusk said in a joint interview with several newspapers published on Monday.

He also warned against the danger of a Greek exit from the euro, a scenario he called "idiotic," and said Europe needed to work out a clearer approach to its overall security policy in nearby crisis regions including Libya and Russia.

Tusk, the former prime minister of Poland, has been one of the strongest critics of Russia's role in the crisis in Ukraine and repeated that he had little confidence in Moscow.

"I'm skeptical about the goodwill of the Russians and I'm convinced that what's needed is to maintain pressure, not discuss details," he was quoted as saying by Italian daily La Stampa, one of six European newspapers that took part in the interview.

He said the Minsk accord brokered by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande, which calls for an end to fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists, needed to be fully implemented.

"If we want to support the efforts of Merkel and Hollande, we have to keep up sanctions until there is full respect for the agreements. That is until Kiev is responsible for its national frontiers," Tusk was quoted as saying.

Russian Economy Minister Alexei Ulyukayev said Monday that he expected sanctions to remain in place this year and next year.

'Grexit' Fears

The 28-nation bloc remains divided, with some member states arguing for more sanctions, others reluctant to go further and a few lobbying privately for an easing. Economic sanctions on Russia expire in July and renewing them would need approval from all countries.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, arriving in Brussels for talks with EU peers, said the bloc must stand firm.

"I hope we will have a clear political commitment to maintaining sanctions until Minsk has been delivered in its entirety," he told reporters.

Russia has been hit by the West with several waves of sanctions for its role in the Ukraine crisis. The measures have significantly limited Russia's access to foreign capital and have cut investments in the country.

Tusk also warned against underestimating the dangers that would arise if Greece were forced out of the euro, directly countering a number of economists and politicians in Germany who have said that the risk would be manageable for Europe.

"My efforts are to keep the euro zone united. In Germany, certain experts say that 'Grexit' would be a solution. I don't see anything good in that. We have to avoid this idiotic scenario."

Appointed last year, Tusk's role as council president involves steering policy meetings of EU leaders and trying to forge consensus in the union as it struggles to build economic recovery and tackle crises like that in Ukraine.

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