

United European Position on Russian Sanctions 'Increasingly Difficult', says EU

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Customers choose chickens for sale at a food market, which operates once a week on Saturday, in the Russian southern city of Stavropol March 14, 2015

European Council President Donald Tusk said Friday it was increasingly difficult to maintain a united European Union position on sanctions imposed on Russia over its involvement in the Ukraine crisis.

European Union leaders agreed on Thursday that economic sanctions imposed on Russia will stay in place until a Ukraine peace deal is fully implemented, effectively extending them to the end of the year if need be.

But strains have been growing for some time within the 28-country bloc over sanctions which some member governments have only supported reluctantly.

"It is increasingly difficult to build European unity over the relatively tough actions, which we have to acknowledge today include maintaining sanctions," he said, speaking to Polish media after the EU summit in Brussels.

EU officials speaking on condition of anonymity said that half or more of the countries were keen to see some easing, while some of the more hawkish EU members were in favor of keeping them in place until the terms of the Minsk peace agreement had been fully met.

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