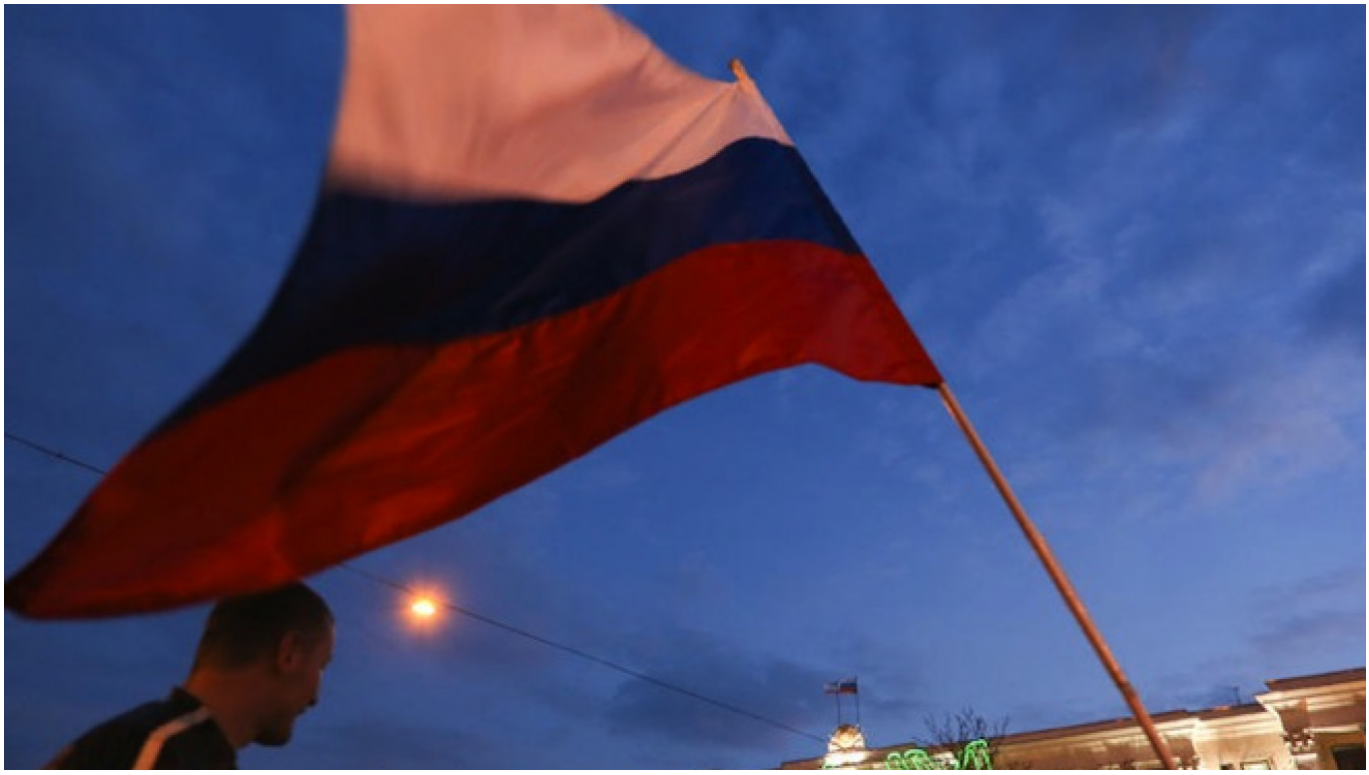
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Russians See Western Sanctions as Plot to Weaken Them, Poll Shows

By Anna Dolgov

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Nearly half of Russians — 46 percent — believe that Western sanctions are aimed against Russia's population in general.

Two out of three Russians believe that Western governments want to "weaken and humiliate" Russia with their sanctions over the Ukraine crisis, and only 5 percent think the measures are aimed at ending the bloodshed in Ukraine, a new poll indicates.

Nearly half of Russians — 46 percent — believe that Western sanctions are aimed against Russia's population in general, while another 29 percent believe the measures target a "narrow circle of people who are responsible for Russia's policy on Ukraine," and 19 percent believe that Western governments do not care whom the sanctions might hit, a poll released Monday by the independent Levada Center indicated.

After months of rhetoric by Kremlin officials and state-run television channels claiming that Western nations were eager to crush Russia's renewed might, the view seems to be shared by

the majority of the population: A total of 66 percent of respondents believe that the sanctions aim to “weaken and humiliate Russia,” the poll showed. That figure was however lower than in December last year, when it stood at 72 percent.

Another 21 percent believe the sanctions aim at “restoring the geopolitical balance” that was upset by Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine last year, and only 5 percent said that sanctions were aimed at “stopping the war, destruction and the loss of life in eastern Ukraine,” according to the report.

Western governments accuse Russia of fueling the war between pro-Moscow separatists and Kiev government troops in eastern Ukraine. Russia denies accusations of supplying weapons and fighters to the insurgents.

The effect of Western sanctions is being felt at least to some degree by 33 percent of Russians, compared to 16 percent in September 2014, according to the Levada Center poll.

Despite economic troubles, the vast majority of Russians support the annexation of Crimea and believe that Moscow should continue its policies, the poll indicated.

A total of 87 percent of Russians fully or mostly support the annexation, according to the poll. Support for the move had shrunk slightly amid the economic turmoil at the start of this year, when Russians “started to worry about their economic future,” but has since recovered, a deputy head of the Levada Center, Alexei Grazhdankin, was quoted by Kommersant newspaper as saying Monday.

A vast majority, or 70 percent, of Russians also believe that their country should “continue its policies, despite the sanctions,” while 20 percent would prefer the government to seek a compromise to have the punitive measures rolled back, the report said.

The poll was conducted among 800 adults across the country. The margin of error did not exceed 4.1 percent.

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