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Crimea Has Lost 'Almost Nothing' From EU Sanctions, Top Official Claims

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Crimean leader Sergei Aksyonov **Kremlin Press Service**

Crimea's top official has claimed that European sanctions have had almost no effect on the region's economy.

Speaking in an interview with Rossiskaya Federatsiya Segodnya, Crimean leader Sergei Aksyonov said that the Russian-controlled peninsula had "lost almost nothing" due to international embargoes.

"There was little in the way of European investments during the "Ukrainian era," and very few European tourists," Aksyonov said.

He also claimed that foreign business investors were showing "great interest" in the region, including delegations from Europe, China, India, Israel, and the United States.

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The former businessman was also optimistic about improving ties with United States under President-elect Donald Trump, but maintained that Crimea would always be "de facto and de jure part of Russia."

"[Crimea's status as part of Russia] does not depend on the views of leaders of foreign states," he said. "If the United States recognizes the will of the Crimean people, it is merely recognizing reality. But that would give the world a positive signal."

EU restrictions on the region include an embargo on all Crimean products to Europe, a ban on all investment in the Crimean economy, and the export of some goods and services to the peninsula. The sanctions also prohibit European ships from entering Crimean ports.

Crimea formally became part of Russia in March 2014, following a controversial referendum and military annexation of the peninsula. A package of economic sanctions against Moscow and the disputed territory have been in place for over two years.

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