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# France Says EU and Russia Must Rebuild Trust But Too Early to End Sanctions

By Reuters

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Jean-Yves Le Drian **Ministre de la Défense / Flickr**

France's foreign minister said on Monday Europe and Russia should try to overcome their mutual distrust and work towards improving relations but that it was still too early to lift EU sanctions against Moscow.

The European Union imposed the sanctions over Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula in 2014 and its support for pro-Russian armed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

But there have been signs of a modest thaw in the standoff, and on Saturday Russia and Ukraine swapped dozens of prisoners in a carefully-negotiated rapprochement that drew Western praise.

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"The time has come, the time is right, to work towards reducing the distrust between Russia and Europe, who ought to be partners on a strategic and economic level," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in Moscow after the first Russian-French Security Cooperation Council since the annexation of Crimea.

"It's not yet the time to lift sanctions. (But) we are seeing a new state of mind compared to that of the last few years, which we are pleased about," he said at a joint news conference with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

French President Emmanuel Macron is keen to show Russia it is not an ostracized power even if Europe and the Kremlin have sharp differences over matters including Iran, the Syrian conflict and Ukraine.

But France's diplomatic overture to Russia is likely to create tensions with some other EU countries such as Poland and the Baltic states, which feel it is wrong to start re-engaging with Russia while it still controls Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine remains unresolved.

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"Our divisions hurt our shared interests," Le Drian added, before telling his Lavrov that Russia must play its part. "This dialogue will only be productive if it is reciprocated and produces tangible, concrete results."

Last month Macron invited President Vladimir Putin to his summer residence and urged him to abide by democratic principles following weeks of protests in Moscow.

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