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Russia Demands Sanctions Relief for Black Sea Ceasefire

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Andrei Rubtsov / TASS

Russia said Tuesday that a U.S.-brokered agreement to halt military activity in the Black Sea would only take effect after a number of sanctions were lifted, including those targeting the country's state-owned agricultural bank.

The White House said earlier that Russia and Ukraine had both agreed to "eliminate the use of force" in the Black Sea, following separate talks with the two sides in Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. side did not mention lifting sanctions in its statement, only that it would help restore "access to the world market" for Russia's agricultural and fertilizer exports.

The Kremlin said the truce would enter into force only after sanctions on Rosselkhozbank and other financial institutions involved in providing international trade operations in food and fertilizers were lifted.

It also called for those institutions to be re-connected to the SWIFT network, an international

payment system that some Russian banks have been blocked from using.

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The West has not directly sanctioned Russian agriculture, but Moscow has long complained that restrictions on shipping insurance and its state lender Rosselkhozbank — which provides financing to agribusiness — have hampered its exports.

Later on Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump said his administration would study the Kremlin's list of demands for a ceasefire in the Black Sea.

"They will be looking at them, and we're thinking about all of them right now. There are about five or six conditions. We're looking at all of them," Trump told reporters at the White House.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed frustration over the fact that a potential Black Sea ceasefire agreement would be tied with sanctions relief and accused the Kremlin of deceiving U.S. officials.

"We see how the Russians have already started to manipulate. They are already trying to distort the agreements and actually deceive our mediators and the whole world," Zelensky said in an evening address on Tuesday.

AFP contributed reporting.

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