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EU Says No Sanctions Relief for Russia Until Full Military Withdrawal From Ukraine

By AFP

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Russian servicemen in the Kherson region of Ukraine. **Alexei Konovalov / TASS**

The European Union said Wednesday that it would not lift or amend sanctions on Russia unless Moscow agrees to unconditionally withdraw its forces from Ukraine.

Russia is seeking sanctions relief as part of a Black Sea ceasefire deal discussed with U.S. officials in Saudi Arabia this week. The Kremlin says the agreement can enter into force only after Western sanctions impacting its agricultural exports are lifted.

In particular, Russia wants restrictions removed from the state-owned agricultural lender Rosselkhozbank, which was sanctioned by the EU in 2022 and disconnected from the SWIFT international banking system.

The "unconditional withdrawal of all Russian military forces from the entire territory of

Ukraine would be one of the main preconditions to amend or lift sanctions," European Commission spokesperson Anitta Hipper said.

She noted that while the EU was not part of the talks in Saudi Arabia, it "took note" of their outcome. Hipper also stressed that "Russia must now demonstrate genuine political will to end its illegal and unprovoked war of aggression."

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Brussels remains "ready to support the upcoming steps, together with Ukraine, the United States and other partners," she added.

In a statement released Tuesday, the White House did not mention lifting sanctions as part of the proposed Black Sea ceasefire plan, stating only that it would help restore "access to the world market" for Russian agricultural and fertilizer exports.

The EU has imposed multiple rounds of sanctions on Russia since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as well as tariffs on agricultural imports from Russia and its ally Belarus to increase financial pressure on Moscow.

However, Brussels has carefully avoided measures that could disrupt the global grain market or threaten food security in Africa and Asia.

Hipper emphasized that EU sanctions "do not target trade in agricultural goods, including food, grain and fertilizers, between Russia and third countries."

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