

UK Backs Tough New EU Sanctions as Russia Faces Mounting Economic Pressure

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The European Union has rolled out its 18th sanctions package targeting Russia's oil and gas sector, a move aimed at tightening the economic noose on Moscow over its ongoing aggression in Ukraine. The measures, described by French President Emmanuel Macron as "unprecedented" in a post on X, have been broadly welcomed by Kyiv's European backers. Macron stressed that Europe's security, freedom, and future are "inextricably linked" to Ukraine's fate, underscoring the urgency of supporting Kyiv against Russian advances.

However, the Kremlin remains defiant. Dmitry Peskov, Moscow's spokesperson, dismissed the sanctions as "illegal" and claimed Russia has developed a resilience to Western restrictions. In a recent statement, Peskov argued that such measures harm the economies of the sanctioning nations more than Russia itself, a narrative Moscow has long pushed to downplay the impact of global isolation.

The EU's latest package includes a G7-agreed reduction in the price cap on Russian crude oil, now set at \$47.6 per barrel, according to diplomatic sources cited by Reuters. This aims to further choke Moscow's energy revenues, a critical lifeline for its war machine. Yet, with Russia's economy showing adaptability, questions linger over the sanctions' real-world bite.

On the diplomatic front, discussions between US President-elect Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky have centred on a potential deal. In a recent interview, Zelensky revealed that talks focused on Washington purchasing Ukraine's battle-tested drones in exchange for Kyiv acquiring American weaponry. This arrangement could bolster both nations' aerial capabilities, though details remain sparse.

On the ground, the conflict grinds on. Russia claimed its forces captured three villages across Ukraine's frontline, a claim swiftly denied by Kyiv. Meanwhile, a Russian drone attack on Odesa killed at least one person, with regional governor Oleh Kiper reporting damage to civilian infrastructure. "Our air defence forces worked tirelessly, but the enemy's strike drones caused havoc," Kiper said on Telegram, adding that casualty figures were still being verified.

Australia, a staunch non-NATO ally of Ukraine, has stepped up its support, delivering M1A1 Abrams tanks as part of an A\$245m (£128m) aid package. Defence Minister Richard Marles stated, "These tanks will significantly enhance Ukraine's fight against Russia's illegal invasion." Canberra's contributions, totalling A\$1.5bn (£785m) since February 2022, also include a ban on alumina and aluminium ore exports to Russia, alongside sanctions on roughly 1,000 Russian individuals and entities.

The UK, under its current Labour government, has also taken a firm stance, sanctioning over 20 Russian spies, hackers, and GRU units for what it calls a "sustained campaign of malicious cyber activity" across Europe. The Foreign Office highlighted Russia's targeting of Mariupol and the 2018 Novichok poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia as key triggers for these measures. Critics, however, argue that Labour's broader foreign policy

lacks the decisiveness needed to confront Moscow effectively, with domestic priorities often overshadowing global commitments.

Across the Atlantic, Trump's recent ultimatum to Moscow demanding a ceasefire within 50 days or face fresh sanctions has stirred tensions. Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova rebuffed the threat, accusing the US of fuelling the conflict by supplying Ukraine with new missiles. "The language of ultimatums and blackmail is unacceptable," Zakharova said, insisting Moscow would protect its interests regardless of Western pressure.

As the war drags on, the EU's sanctions and allied support signal a united front against Russia. Yet, with Moscow's stubborn resilience and the UK government's perceived hesitancy under Labour, the path to resolution remains fraught. Ukraine's defiance, backed by tangible aid like Australia's tanks, keeps hope alive, but the cost of the conflict continues to mount.