



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Maintaining sanctions against Russia, Europe's strongest asset in the conflict with Trump



While the Russian honeymoon with US President Donald Trump is in full swing, Moscow is openly announcing its expectations of Washington regarding the achievement of peace in Ukraine. The lifting, or at least a significant easing, of Western sanctions is at the top of Moscow's list of expectations.

The question of the future of sanctions against Russia has undeservedly remained in the background of the US-Russian rapprochement regarding the security aspects of resolving the Ukraine conflict.

The first further phases of the process, which began with high-level US-Russian talks in Saudi Arabia without the participation of Ukraine and the Europeans, will show how important sanctions really are for reaching a comprehensive solution.

Moscow has made it very clear that the easing or complete lifting of economic sanctions is an important prerequisite for a peaceful solution.

Moreover, its strategy to achieve this goal clearly shows that it will direct its main efforts towards Donald Trump by utilising his negotiation strategy, in which the economy is the most important factor.

Russian pandering to Trump

Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russian state investment fund, who took part in the talks in Riyadh and will lead the economic negotiations with the US, is **pandering** to President Trump in his intention to protect US interests by finding a solution for Ukraine.

“US businesses lost around \$300 billion from leaving Russia,” said Mr Dmitriev after talks with the Americans in Saudi Arabia. That is music to the ears of the US administration.

It would therefore not be surprising if the US administration and its chief use the very argument that the Kremlin banker gave them to justify their more than open attitude towards the Russian negotiators.

Lavrov emphasised the importance of removing the unilateral barriers inherited from the previous US administration

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in a telephone conversation with State Secretary Marco Rubio a few days before the meeting in Riyadh, **emphasised** the importance of „removing the unilateral barriers inherited from the previous US administration that have hindered mutually beneficial trade, economic and investment cooperation.”

When Lavrov talks about lifting (or easing) sanctions, he, like economist Dmitriev, is offering President Trump an easy way to fulfil one of Russia's top priorities as quickly as possible.

This time to use his vindictive style of discontinuity with the previous administration of Joe Biden and reverse all his decisions regarding sanctions against Russia.

Washington ready to ease sanctions

And indeed, President Trump has the authority to lift a significant portion of the sanctions against Russia himself, without the confirmation of the US Congress. These are the sanctions introduced by the presidential executive order, for example, the entry ban and the freezing of assets in the USA in relation to influential people from Russia, then the oil price cap or the ban on investments in Russia.

However, the President will have to obtain the approval of the US Congress for a whole series of sanctions resulting from the law (CAATSA) that he himself **signed** in 2017 during his first presidential term.

As for the sanctions, American officials have shown their willingness to at least consider easing them, just as they have been sympathetic to a number of other Russian

demands, such as territorial claims in Ukraine or not allowing it to join NATO.

A possible American easing of sanctions does not automatically mean an easing of sanctions by Europe

In Saudi Arabia, when **asked** whether the US could lift the sanctions against Moscow, Secretary Rubio said that "to bring an end to any conflict, there has to be concessions made by all sides."

Even if Washington takes the path of easing sanctions against Russia, which it has already announced enough times, this will not be a complete relief for the Kremlin. A possible American easing of sanctions does not automatically mean an easing of sanctions by Europe. And things are even more difficult there.

Since 2014 and Russia's annexation of Crimea, the US and European partners have tightened sanctions against Moscow in a coordinated manner, introducing new packages, especially since the full invasion in 2022. However, the reverse path towards easing, will not be nearly as synchronised.

A means of European influence on the USA

Offended by Trump excluding them from negotiations with Russia, Europe is showing no willingness to ease sanctions against Russia. On Wednesday, the day after the Russian-American talks in Riyadh, EU ambassadors agreed on a new, 16th package of sanctions against Russia. They are to be confirmed at the EU ministerial meeting next Monday, symbolically on the third anniversary of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

The package includes sanctions against the import of aluminium from Russia as well as the blacklisting of more than 70 Russian tankers from the so-called "shadow fleet," which

Moscow uses to circumvent sanctions on oil exports. The EU is thus joining the large package of sanctions against the Russian oil sector launched by former US President Biden in his final days in office.



We are committed to keep up the pressure on the Kremlin
- Ursula Von der Leyen

"We are committed to keep up the pressure on the Kremlin," **said** Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission. On the same occasion, her commissioner for economic affairs, Valdis Dombrovskis, emphasised that the EU would continue sanctioning Russia.

Sticking to the current strategy of economic sanctions against Russia will mean a lot for Europeans in the confrontation with the Trump administration regarding Russia, which has escalated in recent days.

Trump's possible concessions to Russia in terms of easing sanctions will be insufficient for Moscow if they are not accompanied by an identical European policy. The loss of the European market for Russian oil and gas is one of the heaviest blows the Russian war economy has taken so far. Moreover, there are no signs that any peace agreements on Ukraine could bring Russia back into the European energy market.

America has many economic reasons not to oppose this European shift away from Russian energy products, because it is the biggest winner, considering that it has greatly increased its gas supplies to European customers.

At the same time, keeping European sanctions in force will be one of the most effective means of pressure on Washington not to push the Europeans out of the comprehensive agreements on Ukraine, which it has been trying to do in recent days.