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# The postponement of the 19th sanctions package against Russia shows the limits of European unity



On 16 September, the European Union was due to **discuss** the new, 19th sanctions package against Russia. Instead, the item was **removed** from the agenda without a new date and without explanation.

The lack of discussion shows that no consensus has been reached among the member states, but also that the EU is currently unable to agree even on technically limited measures.

The package was supposed to include additional Russian banks, tanker networks known as the "shadow fleet" that circumvent the oil embargo, and entities in third countries involved in the transfer of prohibited technologies.

These are all areas that Brussels has identified as critical loopholes in the sanction regime for years. The withdrawal of the proposal means that these loopholes will continue to exist.

## Signs of mechanism fatigue

The logic of speed and unity guided the European policy of sanctions against Russia starting in 2022. The first packages were launched without lengthy negotiations and with a clear signal of determination.

Today, three years later, the dynamic is different. Sanctions are still a key instrument, but maintaining them has become a political and economic burden.

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Each new measure creates asymmetric costs within the EU: while the Baltic states and Poland demand maximum pressure, members such as Germany and Hungary warn of the consequences for their own industry and energy stability.

This is precisely the reason why the 19th package was withdrawn without discussion. There was neither a willingness to publicly declare differences of opinion nor to seek a compromise through negotiations. This shows signs of fatigue in the mechanism and a willingness to set aside sensitive decisions to avoid an open split.

## The political costs of the delay

For Moscow, the delay is confirmation that European unity is breaking down at its own borders. Russia is using all existing channels to mitigate the impact of the sanctions, and this decision gives it room to continue building parallel trade and financing systems.

For Ukraine, the signal is clear: the West's support remains declarative, but it becomes increasingly complicated as new leverage is sought.

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The failure to agree on even a "technical" sanctions package sends the message that the EU is entering a defensive phase in which maintaining existing measures becomes the maximum possible.

For the EU member states themselves, the delay means that existing weaknesses in the regime will remain untouched.

The "shadow fleet" will **continue** to supply Russian oil, financial flows through third countries will remain open, and European companies will be at a disadvantage compared to their competitors in Asia or the Middle East.

## Credibility crisis

At this moment, the European Union cannot afford to doubt its own resolve. Its policy

towards Russia is based on the assumption that joint economic action has a strategic effect.

If it turns out that it is not even possible to reach agreement on technical issues, this will weaken the EU's credibility as a sanctioning force.



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It is not just about relations with Moscow. Washington is **watching** to see whether the EU can maintain its political cohesion, because without European support, American pressure on Russia is losing its power.

Third countries, from Turkey to Kazakhstan, are receiving confirmation that Europe will not react quickly, which encourages them to continue to fill the gaps in the sanctions regime and build their own interests on them.

## What happens next?

The decision to remove the 19th package from the agenda without setting a deadline for reconsideration cannot be **presented** as a technical issue. It is a political message.

It says that the EU is currently not in a position to move forward with its own sanctions regime and that further steps will be about maintaining the status quo.

This has several consequences: Brussels loses the initiative, and Moscow gains space to

consolidate its alternative networks. Ukraine remains without a new signal of political support from Europe at a time when it needs it most.

The internal legitimacy of European policy towards Russia is weakened because citizens and businesses see the costs but no new results.

Since 2022, Europe has established a reputation for unity and a willingness to bear the consequences. The decision not to discuss the 19th package at all shows that this reputation has serious limits.

If the EU cannot agree on measures that have long been prioritised, it is difficult to expect that it will be able to respond in the event of a more serious escalation.

**If the Union wants to maintain its credibility and political authority, it must adopt at least a partial package and set deadlines for its continuation**

The lack of a decision on a new sanctions package is not a technical incident but a symptom. It shows that European policy towards Russia is entering a phase of stagnation and that the Union is no longer in a position to create new means of pressure.

It is not a question of political will but of the ability to harmonise different interests through a common strategy.

There are two realistic options. The first is to adopt a narrower package focusing on the "shadow fleet" and intermediary networks, with a clear deadline for expansion to banks and the energy sector.

The second is further delay, which would mean loopholes remaining open for months and the EU losing the initiative.

In the first months of the war, Europe showed that it could react quickly and with unity. Today, the situation is different: there is unity

in principle, but there is a lack of decisions when they affect the sensitive interests of the member states.

If the Union wants to maintain its credibility and political authority, it must adopt at least a partial package and set deadlines for its continuation. Otherwise, delay will become the new norm – a message that will directly benefit Moscow and weaken Europe's position with its partners and its own public.