# European unity at risk as US signals shift on Russia sanctions amid escalating conflict



European leaders find themselves at a critical juncture as they prepare for a potentially expansive new round of sanctions against Russia. Following President Vladimir Putin's continued defiance of calls for a ceasefire in Ukraine, the European Union has been readying what it describes as "massive" sanctions aimed at further crippling the Russian war economy. However, the efficacy of these measures is under threat, as the United States appears willing to reconsider its participation in this collective effort.

The immediate concern arose after President Donald Trump's recent phone call with Putin did not yield any new commitments for U.S. sanctions. Instead, Trump expressed a desire to explore the possibility of future trade with Russia once the "catastrophic" conflict concludes. “Russia wants to do largescale TRADE with the United States when this catastrophic ‘bloodbath’ is over,” he posted on social media, while suggesting that Ukraine could benefit economically from rebuilding after the war. This stance has left European officials anxious about the ramifications of a U.S. pivot away from a cooperative sanctions approach.

In response to ongoing aggressions, the EU has enacted its 17th package of sanctions, adding dozens of Russian individuals and businesses to a list that now encompasses over 2,400 entities facing asset freezes and travel bans. This recent expansion includes measures targeting Russia's so-called "shadow fleet"—vessels circumventing sanctions to transport oil. While the EU aims to dismantle this network, the challenge remains substantial as the fleet is now estimated to comprise around 800 vessels, a stark increase from just 100 two years ago.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has indicated that more stringent sanctions targeting Moscow’s energy sector and banking institutions are on the horizon. These could conceivably include actions against the Nord Stream gas pipelines, which have already been rendered largely inoperative. Nevertheless, with the EU being the largest buyer of Russian liquefied natural gas, the bloc’s dependency complicates matters further.

Beyond immediate sanctions, Ukraine has called for stronger measures. The Ukrainian government is proposing secondary sanctions aimed at countries purchasing Russian oil, specifically naming large importers like China and India. This would mark a significant escalation in the sanctions strategy, which until now has been relatively conservative. Critics have highlighted the shortcomings of existing sanctions, arguing that more decisive actions are needed to firmly disrupt Russia's economic stability.

Despite a unified front among EU nations, cracks are beginning to emerge. Concerns linger about maintaining cohesion if the United States reduces its involvement. The complex dynamics of EU governance require unanimity for sanctions, a process that could be jeopardised by dissenting voices such as Hungary, which has previously threatened to veto sanctions. If such divisions surface, the EU might find its effectiveness severely undermined, especially with the crucial price cap on oil—set at $60 per barrel—being at stake.

Simultaneously, outside forces are at play, with foreign shipping companies like Japan's Mitsui O.S.K. Lines assessing the implications of these sanctions on their operations. Their vessels have been implicated in transporting liquefied natural gas from Russia, raising questions about compliance amidst the evolving regulatory landscape.

With the shadows of uncertainty looming over both U.S. policy and EU unity, the stakes remain high. As Europe grapples with the implications of reduced American leadership, it feels compelled to step up as a beacon of resolve against Russian aggression. Yet, with varying priorities across its member states, the question remains: can the EU act decisively enough without the full backing of the U.S.?

Reflecting on these developments and the precarious nature of European unity, Kaja Kallas, the EU’s foreign policy chief, emphasised the critical importance of the oil price cap, declaring it “the most important” measure in their forthcoming sanctions package. Without a cohesive strategy, the EU risks undermining the very progress it has fought to achieve in the face of Russian hostility.

In these turbulent times, the European Union’s resolve faces testing waters. The need for a unified approach to sanctions grows more urgent as the international community watches closely, aware that the outcome will significantly shape the geopolitical landscape in the months and years to come.

### Reference Map

1. Information on EU sanctions strategy and concerns about U.S. involvement
2. Ukraine's proposals for stronger sanctions
3. Shipping companies assessing impact of EU sanctions
4. Debates in U.S. and the context of sanctions
5. Newly adopted sanctions and responses from European leaders
6. Political dynamics regarding Trump and Russia

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/21/european-unity-against-putin-will-be-in-peril-if-trump-moves-to-ease-sanctions> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-ask-eu-lead-russia-sanctions-us-wavers-2025-05-21/> - Ukraine is urging the European Union to intensify sanctions against Russia, proposing measures like asset seizure and secondary sanctions targeting foreign buyers of Russian oil, including India and China. This appeal comes amid diminishing U.S. involvement under President Donald Trump, who recently opted not to impose new sanctions after a call with President Putin. The proposal suggests reforms for faster asset seizure and majority-rule decisions on sanctions to avoid individual EU state vetoes. It also criticizes the U.S. for stepping back from enforcement mechanisms and multilateral coordination, causing concern that this may undermine EU unity on sanctions policy. Despite the reduced U.S. role, Ukraine encourages the EU to take a leadership position, asserting that strong European action could still effectively pressure Russia. The proposal reflects fears that U.S. disengagement could weaken the broader Western sanctions effort and highlights Ukraine's push for Europe to fill the leadership void. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-ask-eu-lead-russia-sanctions-us-wavers-2025-05-21/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/japanese-shipping-group-mitsui-osk-assessing-eu-sanction-impact-its-lng-vessels-2025-05-21/> - Japan’s second-largest shipping company, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines (MOL), is evaluating the impact of the European Union’s latest sanctions against Russia on three of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) vessels. The sanctions, part of the EU’s 17th package in response to the war in Ukraine, target Russia’s shadow fleet and include MOL's vessels North Moon, North Ocean, and North Light. These ships, built in 2024, have been transporting LNG from Russia’s Yamal project to East Asia using ship-to-ship transfers with the icebreaking vessel Nikolay Urvantsev. According to data from Kpler, North Ocean recently delivered cargo to Taiwan, while North Moon and North Light have made shipments to ports in northern and southern China. Presently, both North Moon and North Light are en route to Asia with Yamal LNG cargoes. MOL states it is cooperating fully with authorities from the EU and Japan and will take necessary actions in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/japanese-shipping-group-mitsui-osk-assessing-eu-sanction-impact-its-lng-vessels-2025-05-21/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://apnews.com/article/d08d27b4742a8950aadf141ac2c2a7f2> - Recent editorials illustrate key political and social debates in the U.S. and abroad. The Washington Post analyzed President Trump's unconventional diplomacy during his Middle East tour, highlighting gains in Iran and Syria talks, commercial deals, and shifts in strategy, but also pointing out setbacks in peace efforts for Gaza and Ukraine due to his preference for rapid results and personal diplomacy. Meanwhile, The Wall Street Journal condemned the cover-up of President Biden's cognitive decline, arguing his continued candidacy deprived Democrats of stronger alternatives and fueled Trump's reelection, while a new book and audio evidence reignited scrutiny. The Guardian examined the failed Russia-Ukraine talks in Istanbul, orchestrated under pressure from Trump, portraying them as largely symbolic and indicative of Moscow's intransigence. The Boston Globe criticized a GOP tax proposal that hikes university endowment taxes, potentially causing financial strain for elite institutions like Harvard and MIT, arguing it’s a politically motivated move rather than meaningful education reform. Lastly, The Dallas Morning News rebuked Mark Zuckerberg’s claim that AI could alleviate loneliness, asserting that genuine human connection, not technology, is essential to well-being and social healing. Collectively, these pieces reflect tensions in U.S. foreign policy, political leadership, education funding, and societal challenges. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/d08d27b4742a8950aadf141ac2c2a7f2?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-adopts-new-sanctions-against-russia-kallas-says-2025-05-20/> - On May 20, 2025, the European Union and the United Kingdom independently imposed new sanctions on Russia, focusing on Moscow's "shadow fleet" of oil tankers and financial institutions aiding sanction evasion. This move came without coordination from the U.S., following a call between President Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin that failed to yield a ceasefire in Ukraine or prompt fresh U.S. sanctions. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy welcomed the EU and UK actions and urged continued American support. European leaders, including German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul and EC President Ursula von der Leyen, emphasized the need for increased pressure on Russia to end the war. Russia dismissed ultimatums, maintaining its readiness to negotiate under its terms. Meanwhile, Pope Leo offered the Vatican as a venue for further peace talks. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio defended the administration's cautious stance on new sanctions, suggesting they could hinder diplomatic efforts. The new European sanctions aim to disrupt Russia's oil revenues and may involve lowering the G7’s $60 per barrel oil price cap. Britain and the EU expressed hope that Washington would eventually align with their measures to counter Russia’s ongoing aggression. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-adopts-new-sanctions-against-russia-kallas-says-2025-05-20/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://as.com/actualidad/politica/aviso-de-finlandia-sobre-la-relacion-de-donald-trump-y-rusia-n/> - El presidente de Finlandia, Alexander Stubb, declaró que Donald Trump está perdiendo la paciencia con Rusia en el contexto de las negociaciones para poner fin a la guerra en Ucrania. Stubb expresó que esta impaciencia se dirige en la "dirección correcta". Está prevista una conversación telefónica entre Trump y Vladimir Putin, cuyo resultado podría desencadenar un nuevo paquete de sanciones económicas severas por parte de Estados Unidos, incluyendo aranceles del 500% a productos de países que comercien con energía rusa. Esta medida busca ejercer presión indirecta sobre Rusia al impactar a terceros países. Mientras tanto, Europa insiste en que cualquier negociación de paz incluya de forma activa a Ucrania y al presidente Zelenskyy. Trump anunció la llamada con Putin a través de Truth Social, esperando lograr un alto el fuego y el fin de una guerra que califica como innecesaria. Europa busca asegurar que Ucrania no sea excluida en las decisiones sobre su propio futuro. ([as.com](https://as.com/actualidad/politica/aviso-de-finlandia-sobre-la-relacion-de-donald-trump-y-rusia-n/?utm_source=openai))