

Is Russia Losing Patience with the EU's Constant Provocations

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Another meeting of European Union foreign minister's took place this week, with one of the main topics being the new sanctions against Russia. The EU's Chief of Diplomacy, Josep Borrell, said on Monday that “It's clear that Russia is on a confrontational course with the European Union. In the case of Mr Navalny, there is a blunt refusal to respect their engagements, including the refusal of taking into account the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights.”

In this context, on the eve of the meeting, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis initiated contact with his colleagues, particularly Navalny's 2018 Presidential campaign staff head, Leonid Volkov, and the head of the Russian Anti-Corruption Foundation, Ivan Zhdanov. Both this, and [Borrell's humiliation during his visit to Moscow](#) earlier this month, as well as Russia's refusal to comply with the ruling made on Navalny by the European Court of Human Rights, should have prompted European diplomats to support tough sanctions against the Eurasian country. These sanctions would have included a wide circle of those close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Lithuania's hope was for the EU to suspend the Nord Stream 2 project. As Germany opposes the suspension of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, Landsbergis even desperately suggested:

“Let us give Vladimir Putin the opportunity to hold a free election to the State Duma this autumn with the participation of the opposition. Until then, let us stop the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.”

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that the EU would not remain silent and would impose additional sanctions on Russia, but also noted that even in the current situation, we need to think about maintaining a constructive dialogue with Russia, because without Moscow, various international conflicts cannot be resolved. Athens was even more blunt and said days before sanctions were imposed that “Greece believes that the European Union must maintain open channels of communication and dialogue with Russia because we have many common problems. Therefore, there must always be an open channel.”

For his part, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov openly stated that Moscow's relations with the EU have hit a low point and that they are prepared to end them. The EU reacted

nervously to his statement, but did not lose the determination to somehow provoke Russia. As Lavrov pointed out, it is straightforward in Europe that sanctions against Russia are the standard response now when Moscow enacts its interests.

It can also be interpreted that the EU, despite endless complaints from Lithuania and Poland, are making tokenistic sanctions against Moscow to somewhat appease anti-Russia member states without destroying the Nord Stream 2 project. In fact, there is a huge divide in the EU between states that are aggressively Russophobic and those who want positive relations with Moscow, while most member states remain indifferent.

The sanctions agreed by the EU's foreign ministers are unlikely to make any economic impact against Russia, rendering them symbolic just to quieten the complaints emanating from Vilnius and Warsaw. Lithuania, which thought that the EU would act more harshly towards Russia, at least for now, failed once again.

It should be noted that during the EU's ministerial meeting, they spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Earlier, American President Joe Biden talked a lot about the need to fight Russia together. Therefore, it is likely that Blinken encouraged his European colleagues to take an aggressive position against Moscow. However, the result shows that the EU, at least for now, is not enacting Washington's wishes. And in general, the EU's conversation with Blinken [concluded](#) that they must form a joint global leadership to fight the pandemic and deal with recovery, mitigate climate change and ensure the promotion of democratic values.

Russia's opponents in Washington and across Europe are doing everything they can to harm the EU's political and economic relations with Moscow. Despite this, Berlin will not give up its policy of symbolic sanctions. The weak sanctions show that EU's relationship with the U.S. is uncertain. Biden seems to have formulated his priorities in the fight for so-called democracy, but so far there are no indications that the EU intends to comply unconditionally with all of Washington's instructions.

More importantly, Moscow appears tired of looking sensible in the face of endless public accusations made by the EU and is becoming firmer with its tone. Moscow understands that a radical curtailment of relations with the EU will only benefit its opponents, such as Lithuania and Poland. Therefore, its tougher tone is likely a warning to the EU that it should not cross red lines like the Americans want them to because there will be a response from Moscow.

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