

Sanctions Will Not Stop Russians from Shopping and Partying in Europe

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

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The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, published a tweet on February 22 in which he assured that the sanctions imposed by the bloc against Russia will prevent multiple members of the Russian State Duma, who voted in favour of the recognition of the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, from shopping in the Italian fashion city of Milan, partying in the French Mediterranean city of Saint-Tropez or make high-end purchases in the famous diamond shops of Belgium’s Antwerp.

The tweet was made before the widescale Russian missile attack to immobilize the Ukrainian air force, including the complete destruction of its Turkish-supplied drone fleet, during the early hours of January 24. Yet, even with this pre-emptive strike to immobilize Ukrainian aggression, Russian commodities continue to grow in value and the economy for now remains strong.

Borrell explained that the blocs sanctions package will affect 351 deputies of the Lower House of the Russian Parliament, as well as “27 individuals and entities who are undermining Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. This will cover political, military, business and media sectors.”

Following this tweet, he added (and then humiliatingly deleted):

“No more shopping in Milan, no more parties in Saint-Tropez and no more diamonds in Antwerp.”

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova wrote on her Telegram channel that she knew that Borrell “did not manage his social networks and was not even aware of what was being written for him. It can happen. But these things should not be left in the hands of ignorant personnel.”

However, it can be argued that Zakharova was opening a door for reconciliation by passing

on the blame of the naïve tweet to an ignorant social media handler rather than Borrell himself. This would be rather patient of Moscow though when remembering Borrell only days ago was involved in another fluff when he confusingly condemned “the use of heavy weaponry and indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, which constitute a clear violation of the Minsk agreements and international humanitarian law,” but added that the EU “commends” Ukraine’s “posture of restraint in the face of continued provocations and efforts at destabilization.” Borrell managed to condemn the violation of the Minsk agreement but also commend Ukraine for supposed “restraint” – a contradiction if there ever was one and something that enables Kiev to continue its violence.

Although Borrell deleted the tweet, it was already too late as the message was saved as an image and has been circulating around social media with much amusement. The most [common response](#) to Borrell was that:

“Russians will no doubt reply that the shopping is better in Moscow than Milano, these days, and the partying in Sochi beats the, very over-rated, Saint Tropez. Russia has the largest diamond reserves in the world.”

The EU's chief diplomat doesn't know that Russia has the largest diamond reserves in the world..

Meanwhile, Russians will no doubt reply that the shopping is better in Moscow than Milano, these days, and the partying in Sochi beats the, very over-rated, Saint Tropez. pic.twitter.com/RdAMiCBvdA

— Bryan MacDonald (@27khv) [February 22, 2022](#)

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on February 21 his decision to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics, after which friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance agreements were signed. At the same time, the Russian president ordered the Ministry of Defense to guarantee the maintenance of peace by the Russian Armed Forces in both republics – thus inspiring the pre-emptive strikes against Ukraine’s provocative military.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden reported on the first package of measures against Russia, which includes: sanctions against two large Russian banking institutions; comprehensive sanctions on Russia’s sovereign debt and sanctions against Russian elites and their relatives. However, this is unlikely to have any real impact on the Russian economy, which has already fortified itself from feeling the full impact of sanctions.

As Brussels-based Bloomberg senior markets report Nikos Chrysoloras [tweeted](#) on February 23, just a day after the sanction announcements:

“European stock markets rebound today as the sanctions announced against Russia are seen as kind of ‘meh’, and clearly falling short of an outright economic war.”

As Reuters highlighted, the US has never before attempted to cut a \$1.5 trillion economy out of global commerce, and it is unclear how much pressure unified Western sanctions can put on Moscow. A World Bank review and United Nations trade data shows that since sanctions were imposed against Russia in 2014 after unifying with Crimea, China has

emerged as the Eurasian country's biggest export destination.

According to Harry Broadman, a former US trade negotiator and World Bank official with China and Russia experience, it is speculated that new sanctions could prompt Moscow to deepen its non-dollar denominated trade ties with Beijing.

"The problem with sanctions, especially involving an oil producer, which is what Russia is, will be leakage in the system," he said, adding: "China may say, 'We're going to buy oil on the open market and if it's Russian oil, so be it.'"

Although Biden said he would "take robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at the Russian economy, not ours," this will prove to be difficult, especially as Russia is among the world's top exporters of oil, natural gas, copper, aluminum, palladium and other important commodities.

In fact, the World Bank's World International Trade Solution database review found that Russia's dependence on trade declined over the past 20 years, thus making it more immune to sanctions. So long as China remains Russia's top supplier of imports, it is unlikely that Moscow will view these new sanctions with major concern.

The sanctions, as audacious as Borrell (and Biden) believe they are, will not stop Russians from shopping in Milan, partying in Saint-Tropez or buying diamonds in Antwerp – but Russians can also do such shopping and parting in Moscow, Sochi and elsewhere in Russia anyway, if they choose.

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Paul Antonopoulos is an independent geopolitical analyst.

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