

The Berlin Post - Independent News since 1871

European Council decides to uphold sanctions against Russia

After an intense debate in Berlin the representatives of the EU member states agreed on upholding sanctions against Russia until full the the Minsk II Agreement is fully implemented.

The representatives of the EU member states in front of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (dpa)

More than a year has passed since Vladimir Putin authorised the annexation of Crimea. Since then ongoing fights between, Russia, Ukraine and separatists could never fully be stopped, resulting in over 6000 deaths (number as of report of the United Nations from March 2015). Especially due to the current violent outbreaks in the Eastern Ukraine, the European Council is extremely concerned and remains committed to fully implementing its non-recognition policy.

In the assessment of the current situation, the approaches of some member states on how to deal with the conflict differed quite fundamentally. Whereas most of the Member states felt need to express the will to include the separatists in informal talks, a group of states led by the Portuguese representative expressed strong concerns about negotiating with the separatist group. 'We do not acknowledge their presence, we do not legitimate them (...) they are not on the same level as a state. It would be a bad signal, a wrong signal to other separatists'.

The Delegate of Portugal (on the right) expressing her concerns about negotiating with the terrorists (dpa)

After a an intense and to some extent even emotional discussion, the Representatives could finally agree on a version stated as following:

' We call on France and Germany to continue the efforts with regard to the Minsk's Agreements and to conduct informal talks with all parties as soon as possible.'

Regarding the content of the sanctions, especially the Representatives of Hungary and Cyprus pointed out that a few member states are highly affected by the sanctions (and counter-sanctions) opposed by the EU and therefore argued in favor of a gentler sanction policy. Given the situation that Russian investors make more than 50 % of the Cyprian bank funds and that Hungary is fully dependant on Russian gas, the other member states showed comprehension on that point and assured their loyalty and help.

The Cyprian delegation fought for a smoother sanction policy (dpa)

The remaining question for Cyprus and Hungary but also states like Greece and Bulgaria is how this expression of solidarity will actually lead into stabilisation of their economy may their relation with Russia get more damaged.

Further, the Baltic States expressed their strong will to install Nato forces on their territory as they - to put in the word of the Delegate of Estonia - 'fear Russia and fear to fall next'. Germany, however stated, that placing Nato troops could 'provoke Russia even more' and that the Baltic states were not 'that threatened'. ' Putin is reasonable enough to know about consequences of attacking another sovereign state'. Given Putins actions in this crisis so far though, it is highly understandable that relying on his reasonability seems like a rather weak security for the Baltic states.

In conclusion, the European Council postponed the debate on the Nato forces in Eastern European countries depending on the future development on the conflict.

Furthermore the European Council expresses its appreciation of the effort of humanitarian assistance of all international organizations such as the United Nations. In this context the European council also calls on all Member states to support and

facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations. Moreover the European Council encourage the extension of humanitarian aid.

Also during these times of conflict the importance of the partnership with Eastern Europe should not be underestimated; Europe's representatives should bear in mind they have to create a situation in which the relation to these states is not weakened, which would probably lead into Europe's restitution by Russia.

The next day, under the guidance of the High Representative, Frederica Mogherini, the Council of the European Union met to elaborate on the specific content of sanctions against Russia. Most of the members felt need to at least uphold the current sanctions. In terms of increasing them there were debates on how and in which sector. So did Cyprus strongly speak against sanctions in the bank sector. Also Hungary wants to limit the sanctions on specific persons and wants to make a way out of economic sanctions, by which Europe was 'shooting itself in the foot'.

Further there was the idea to put a weapon embargo on third countries which export weapons to Russia. Germany, which traditionally has an importance role in the council, stated that a flat ban would not be possible and that such a ban could only be accepted if there was real proof.

As a result for the sanctions policy it can be stated, that there will be the possibility of prolonging, reducing or increasing the sanctions depending on the success of the Minsk II Agreement. The situation should be reviewed after the 31st December 2015.

All in all Europe's position in the Ukraine crisis did not really change. Strength shall be shown towards Russia, but cooperation should also be encouraged.

There are still many open question, which are in the moment filled by diplomatic flowery phrases right now. The concretion of those phrases is yet to be done after seeing the future developments.

