



Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: European Union Responses and Implications for U.S.-EU Relations

Updated April 12, 2022

The 27-member European Union (EU) has responded with unprecedented unity and speed to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. [EU policy responses](#) and [coordination with the United States](#) are of interest to Congress given the EU's role as an important U.S. partner.

Key EU Responses

Sanctions

The EU has imposed [several rounds](#) of sanctions—or *restrictive measures*—intended to cripple Russia's ability to finance the war against Ukraine, enact costs on Russia's elites, and diminish Russia's economic base. Imposing sanctions requires unanimity among EU members. As of April 8, 2022, [EU sanctions included](#)

- Freezing the assets of 80 entities and imposing asset freezes and travel bans on 1,091 Russian officials, legislators, and other elites (Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov are subject only to asset freezes)
- Expanding existing sanctions on Russia's financial sector, restricting transactions with Russia's Central Bank and blocking access to its reserve holdings, and freezing the assets of and [disconnecting seven Russian banks from SWIFT](#) (the world's dominant international financial messaging system, headquartered in Belgium)
- [Prohibiting imports of coal](#) (to take full effect in August 2022), steel and other raw materials, spirits, and seafood from Russia
- Banning certain exports in the oil refining, aviation, maritime, and technology sectors (e.g., semiconductors) and the export of luxury goods to Russia
- Broadening the scope of export controls on dual-use goods and technologies

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IN11897

- Closing EU airspace, seaports, and roads to Russian aircraft, ships, and freight operators, respectively (with some exceptions, including for energy-related cargo)
- Expanding sanctions on Belarus for supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The EU's [increasingly punitive sanctions](#) are [notable](#) given the bloc's [trade and investment ties](#) to Russia and [reliance on Russian energy imports](#). Some within and outside the EU are [critical](#) that the bloc has not disconnected Sberbank (Russia's largest bank) or Gazprombank (linked to Russia's energy sector) from SWIFT or [banned](#) oil and gas imports from Russia. (See CRS Insight IN11869, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Overview of U.S. and International Sanctions and Other Responses*; and CRS In Focus IF12062, *New Financial and Trade Sanctions Against Russia*.)

Military Assistance

The EU has [announced](#) a total of €1 billion (about \$1.1 billion) to date in [financing for military assistance](#) to Ukraine through the [European Peace Facility \(EPF\)](#). For the first time, this financing includes funding for lethal equipment, worth €900 million (\$987 million); the remaining €100 million (\$110 million) is for nonlethal supplies. Member states are responsible for delivering equipment and may be reimbursed from the EPF for assistance provided since the start of 2022.

Helping Refugees and Providing Aid

[Over 4.5 million people](#) have fled Ukraine, with about 60% of refugees arriving in Poland. The EU has adopted a [temporary protection mechanism](#) to provide Ukrainian nationals and other legal residents of Ukraine with immediate residency rights and access to benefits throughout the EU. [EU assistance to date](#) includes €550 million (around \$598 million) in humanitarian aid for Ukraine and neighboring countries and the provision of in-kind emergency supplies. On April 9, 2022, the EU [pledged €1 billion](#) more in assistance for refugees and the internally displaced. (See CRS Insight IN11882, *Humanitarian and Refugee Crisis in Ukraine*.)

Tackling Disinformation

The EU has condemned Russia's disinformation campaign against Ukraine and [suspended broadcasting of Russian state-owned media outlets Russia Today \(RT\) and Sputnik](#) across all platform types (cable, satellite, websites, apps). Through its [EUvsDisinfo](#) project, the EU also is [addressing disinformation targeting Ukraine](#).

U.S.-EU Cooperation

Russia's war against Ukraine has [strengthened](#) U.S.-EU ties and transatlantic unity. The United States and the EU have moved largely in lockstep in terms of the [types and timing of sanctions](#) imposed. Many EU sanctions are identical or substantively similar to U.S. sanctions, including [restrictions on Russia's Central Bank](#). With other partners, the EU and the United States established a [transatlantic task force](#) to ensure effective implementation of sanctions against designated individuals and companies and [announced plans to suspend Russia's preferential trade treatment](#) under World Trade Organization rules.

One U.S.-EU [divergence](#) centers on sanctioning Russian oil and gas imports. The [United States](#) has banned imports of Russian crude oil and certain petroleum products, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and coal. The EU, however, is far [more dependent](#) on Russian energy [than the United States](#). Although [some EU countries](#) reportedly [support](#) going beyond banning Russian coal imports to prohibiting oil and gas imports, others [remain reluctant](#). The EU has [pledged to decrease its energy dependence on Russia](#), starting with reducing demand for Russian gas by two-thirds by the end of 2022.

While in Brussels on March 24-25, 2022, [President Biden](#) committed to [help the EU reduce its dependency on Russian gas](#) by working with “international partners” to boost LNG shipments to the EU this year and outlined plans to enable additional annual U.S. LNG shipments through 2030. A [new U.S.-EU task force on energy security](#) is to implement these and other goals. Biden also announced plans for the United States to [welcome up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees](#) and noted close U.S.-EU coordination on humanitarian assistance efforts.

U.S. and Congressional Interests

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has [galvanized debate](#) on [several EU initiatives](#) that could be central to how the EU as an institution and U.S.-EU relations evolve. Among the most prominent of interest to Congress are

- **Security and Defense.** Russia’s actions could [prompt](#) greater EU efforts to improve military capabilities and become a more independent global actor (often referred to as [strategic autonomy](#)). Such ambitions could create some U.S.-EU tensions, but Russia’s aggression also has [reinforced](#) NATO’s importance and could strengthen the NATO-EU partnership (as suggested in the EU’s new [Strategic Compass](#) document).
- **Energy and Climate Policies.** Russia’s war in Ukraine could accelerate EU energy diversification efforts (long called for by some in Congress), [bolster](#) the [European Green Deal](#) to address climate change, and encourage U.S.-EU cooperation on clean energy technologies and renewables.
- **EU Enlargement.** Traditionally, strong bipartisan support has existed in Congress for [EU enlargement](#). Russia’s invasion may be [boosting](#) Ukraine’s EU membership prospects, with the EU agreeing to [assess](#) Ukraine’s recent membership application. Joining the EU, however, typically takes many years, and some EU members [remain wary](#) about Ukraine’s readiness and about further antagonizing Russia.

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