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US warns Russia, welcomes new EU sanctions

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State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki said the agreement by EU foreign ministers to expand existing European sanctions “is just a further sign that the actions of the last several days and weeks are absolutely unacceptable and that there will be new consequences put in place.”

The move in Brussels, where EU foreign ministers were meeting, was “building on a large sanctions effort that’s been going on for months now,” Psaki said, dubbing Thursday’s announcement a “positive step.”

She had no prediction about when the next round of US sanctions would come into force, or who would be targeted.

“Sometimes we add names, sometimes we add sectors or companies, and that’s the same thing for the EU,” Psaki said.

“We’ll continue to consider others that we could add.”

Earlier this week President Barack Obama pledged to increase pressure on Russia and, in cooperation with US allies including Europe, to look at other options to tackle the issue.

“I will look at all additional options that are available to us, short of military confrontation, and try to address this issue,” he said.

Psaki also condemned intensifying attacks on Debaltseve, in eastern Ukraine, where rebels have almost surrounded the town.

The town lies 13 kilometers (about eight miles) beyond the ceasefire line set in a September accord, she said.

“Over the past week, the separatists have fired countless rockets at the city, killing and wounding scores of innocent people and prompting the Ukrainian government and local NGOs to organize a city-wide evacuation,” Psaki told reporters.

“There can also be no mistake about Russia’s role in the escalation of violence,” she said, adding Moscow had “equipped the separatists with tanks, armored vehicles, heavy artillery, rocket systems and other military equipment.”

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