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EU snubs Hungary and Slovakia over Ukraine oil sanctions

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European Commission declines to open formal talks with Kyiv after its Central European neighbors complained it was violating a 2014 trade deal.

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Following Moscow's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU imposed an embargo on imports of Russian oil. | Zuzana Gogova/Getty Images

AUGUST 1, 2024 4:55 PM CET
BY VICTOR JACK

BRUSSELS — The European Commission has no plans to begin formal talks with Ukraine after Kyiv imposed a partial ban on exports of Russian oil to Hungary and Slovakia, the EU executive said on Thursday.

In June, Ukraine adopted sanctions blocking the transit of pipeline crude sold by Moscow's largest private oil firm, Lukoil, to Central Europe, prompting fears of supply shortages in Budapest and Bratislava.

Last month, the two countries sent a letter to the EU executive, urging it to open emergency consultations with Ukraine over the move — a precursor to legal action. Kyiv, they claimed, was violating a wide-spanning 2014 trade agreement with Brussels.

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But on Thursday, the EU executive rebuffed the demand. Speaking to reporters, Commission spokesperson Balazs Ujvari said urgent consultations "do not appear to be guaranteed," arguing that in the Commission's preliminary assessment, the sanctions do not pose "an immediate risk to [both countries'] security of supply."

Ujvari said the Commission was still "verifying facts" and had responded to the Slovak and Hungarian letter with a request for more information.

Meanwhile, after meeting with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal on Thursday, EU trade chief Valdis Dombrovskis also said that oil exports to Hungary and Slovakia were "not affected, as long as Lukoil is not [the] owner of the oil."

Following Moscow's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU imposed an embargo on imports of Russian oil but exempted pipeline supplies — including those coming to Hungary and Slovakia via the Druzhba pipeline — to give those countries time to find alternative sources, with the understanding they would do so rapidly.

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