

EU Approves Asset Freezes, Visa Bans Against Ukrainian Officials

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The European Union has approved asset freezes and visa bans against Ukrainian officials whom it holds responsible for the violence in Kiev, the EU said in a statement.

EU foreign ministers imposed the measures "as a matter of urgency" at an emergency meeting in Brussels on Thursday, Europe's Foreign Affairs Council said in an online statement.

The visa ban, which blocks entry to any of the 28 EU member states, affects "those responsible for human rights violations, violence and use of excessive force" in Ukraine," the statement said. It did not give any names, but said the bloc would start working out the final details of the measures "immediately."

Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans said the measures would become law in "the coming days," the Wall Street Journal reported.

The package also includes a ban on exports to Ukraine of equipment that could be used for "internal repression," the EU statement said.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton indicated that the visa ban would specifically target Ukrainian officials, whom the bloc holds responsible for the violence. Russia has demanded that the West should instead condemn the protesters, whom the Kremlin on Wednesday accused of "terrorist" activities."

"The responsibility to stop the violence rests squarely with those in power, and we urge them to do so as fast as possible," Ashton said after the meeting in Brussels, when asked who the sanctions would target.

The U.S. has already imposed visa bans against about 20 senior officials from the Ukrainian government and other individuals it considers "responsible for ordering human rights abuses related to political oppression in Ukraine," a State Department official said Wednesday.

At least 75 people have been killed following two days of violent clashes between anti-government protesters and riot police in Kiev, while hundreds of others have been injured, the Health Ministry said in a statement Thursday.

The protests began in November after Ukraine pulled out of a planned association deal with the E.U. in favor of closer ties with Russia.

The demonstrations soon took on a political character, however, with demands for the government's resignation escalating into large-scale clashes this week.

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