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“Op-Ed: The Spokesperson of the U.S. Embassy reacts to the statements by Vladimir Yakunin, a crony of Vladimir Poutine, according to whom the solution to the Ukrainian crisis lies exclusively with Washington.”

Le Figaro, April 24, 2015

In your interview with Vladimir Yakunin, President of the Russian railroad RZD, Mr. Yakunin makes a number of false statements. According to him, the U.S. caused the invasion of Crimea and the broader Ukrainian crisis and somehow “has the key” to resolving the conflict; Russia has no responsibility for the conflict; the biased world media fundamentally misunderstand the situation and are responsible for misrepresenting the facts; and sanctions are having no significant impact. Finally, he claims that Washington’s main purpose in imposing sanctions is to steal market share from its European partners.

No country has gained economically as a result of Russia’s actions in Ukraine, and we recognize the impact of the sanctions on our European partners, many of which, like France, have substantial trading relationships with Russia. We are also feeling the impact in the United States: U.S. trade with Russia was down nearly ten percent in 2014 as a result of sanctions. Trade in a number of strategic goods –manufactured products, chemicals, and machinery – has fallen and certain sectors, such as agricultural exports that employ many Americans, is down 28 percent.

Sanctions are just one of the ways in which the United States and European Union are checking Russian aggression and supporting Ukraine’s independence and right to self-determination. Together, we are providing billions of dollars in humanitarian aid and loan guarantees to support Ukraine’s viability as it undertakes important political and economic reforms. The United States has committed over a billion dollars to support military deployments and rotations to reassure our NATO Allies of our iron-clad commitment to mutual self-defense. On March 11, Secretary Kerry announced that we are providing an additional 75 million dollars in non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine.

The costs of sanctions, assistance, and preparedness are significant, but they are wise investments in Europe’s long term prospects for enduring peace and prosperity. The costs pale in comparison to the importance of the principles that unite us: the principle that each country has the right to choose its own future, that might does not make right, and that nations must live up to their international commitments.

We are most effective at checking Russian aggression when we act together, and when the message from the transatlantic community is united and clear. In the real world, the key to lifting sanctions lies with Moscow, and it is simple: sanctions will remain in place until Moscow fulfills its obligations under the Minsk accords. President Hollande, Chancellor Merkel,

President Porochenko and President Putin negotiated that agreement. All Mr. Putin has to do to get relief from sanctions is to uphold his commitments.”