

(English version)

Question for written answer E-003133/25
to the Commission
Michael von der Schulenburg (NI)
(30 July 2025)

Subject: Impact of EU sanctions against individuals on democracy and freedom of speech

In the light of the European Union's increasing use of restrictive measures (sanctions) targeting individuals for alleged disinformation, concerns have been raised regarding the potential implications of such measures for democratic principles and freedom of expression, particularly when individuals have been sanctioned for their political views or public statements.

Can the Commission clarify:

1. what safeguards and review mechanisms are in place to prevent the misuse or overextension of such sanctions against individuals based on their opinions or affiliations;
2. whether the Commission has assessed the broader impact of individual sanctions on democratic discourse within and outside the EU?

Submitted: 30.7.2025

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Kallas on behalf of the European Commission
(19 September 2025)

EU sanctions are preventive, reversible, gradual, and proportionate to their objectives.

Decisions are approved by Member States in the Council of the EU. The reasons for designating any person are public and contained in the legal acts. They are also underpinned by evidence documenting how a listed person fulfils the listing criteria.

The Council of the EU does not target individuals merely exercising freedom of speech. For instance, persons listed under the sanctions regime in view of Russia's destabilising activities need to fulfil the listing criteria set out in Articles 1 and 2 of Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/2643 ⁽¹⁾ and Article 2 of Council Regulation (EU) 2024/2642 ⁽²⁾.

One of the criteria is the involvement in the use of information manipulation and interference, which undermines or threatens democracy, the rule of law, stability or security in the EU or in one or several of its Member States, in an international organisation, or in a third country. The evidence documents also how the actions of a listed person are attributable to the Government of the Russian Federation.

EU sanctions are fully compliant with obligations under international law, including those pertaining to human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as due process rights of the listed persons. All listed persons have a right to bring a legal challenge and contest the listing in front of the European courts.

The Council of the EU regularly reviews sanctions, reassesses the circumstances pertaining to each listed person and determines whether changes to the legal acts should be made.

⁽¹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2024/2643/oj/eng>.

⁽²⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2642/oj/eng>.