

The EU Sanctions Architecture against Russia

Effectiveness, Limits, and Strategic Options for 2026–2030

A comprehensive assessment of the political, economic, social, legal, hybrid, and compliance dimensions of the EU sanctions regime



EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT



The EU Sanctions Architecture against Russia: Effectiveness, Limits, and Strategic Options for 2026–2030

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PART SIX

Hybrid Sanctions Measures

6.1. Definition of Hybrid Sanctions

6.1.1. Hybrid Sanctions as a Cross-Domain Restrictive Architecture

Hybrid sanctions should be defined not as a separate legal category in the narrow formal sense, but as a mode of sanctions design and operation in which restrictive effect is generated through the simultaneous interaction of several policy domains rather than through a single isolated channel. In the EU–Russia context, this means that a given measure often works at once through legal prohibition, commercial risk re-pricing, service denial, logistics disruption, compliance escalation, and reputational deterrence. The key analytical point is that pressure is no longer transmitted solely by the black-letter rule itself; it is transmitted by the wider operational environment that the rule activates. This is why contemporary sanctions against Russia cannot be understood adequately if they are described only as “political”, “economic”, or “legal” measures in separation. The current EU regime explicitly combines listings, trade controls, service prohibitions, anti-circumvention measures, guidance, and enforcement support into a broader architecture of cumulative restriction. In that architecture, the legal act is only the starting node of a much wider chain of behavioural effects. Hybrid sanctions are therefore best understood as cross-domain restrictive architectures whose practical force derives from interaction effects between law, markets, infrastructures, and compliance systems rather than from any single prohibition taken in isolation^{1,2}.

This definition is consistent with the broader evolution of the EU sanctions regime since 2022. The Union’s measures have developed not merely by adding more prohibited goods or more listed persons, but by thickening the connective tissue between sectors, operators, and implementation layers. The sanctions timeline itself shows a cumulative sequence in which packages increasingly target not only direct transactions with Russia, but also facilitation routes, enabling services, intermediary actors, and specific infrastructural nodes. Such development matters analytically because it indicates a transition from a predominantly sectoral model to a more systemic one. Once sanctions begin to regulate shipping access, service provision, reporting obligations, due diligence expectations, beneficial-ownership concealment, and anti-circumvention patterns, they cease to function as discrete economic measures alone. Instead, they become governance mechanisms shaping the whole ecology of permissible and risky behaviour. A hybrid sanctions regime is therefore one in which the object of restriction is not only the targeted state or entity, but also the network of relationships that enables targeted activity to continue. This network orientation is one of the clearest markers of hybridisation in the EU approach towards Russia^{3,4}.

The practical significance of this shift is visible in the way recent EU packages have been framed and justified. The Council’s presentation of the sixteenth package already described it as a wide-ranging set of economic and individual restrictive measures touching “vital sectors” of the Russian economy, while later package explanations emphasised services, infrastructure, and anti-circumvention tools alongside more conventional sectoral controls. A think-tank reading of the fourteenth package likewise stressed

¹ European Commission. (2026). *EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

that the package had a “strong anti-circumvention angle”, which is revealing because anti-circumvention is not a separate sector like energy or finance. It is a cross-cutting enforcement logic that operates across sectors simultaneously. In other words, the EU has increasingly moved from regulating only the main transaction to regulating the pathways through which the same transaction could be disguised, outsourced, fragmented, or rerouted. That move is a hallmark of hybrid sanctions design. It shows that the relevant policy object is no longer only the direct Russia-facing act, but the total operational chain through which strategic capability, revenue, logistics, or specialised services are maintained. Hybrid sanctions thus describe not merely tougher sanctions, but sanctions that are architected to affect the enabling environment of targeted conduct^{1,2}.

At the legal level, hybridisation begins when sanctions are drafted so as to capture indirect benefit, substitution, and circumvention rather than only straightforward primary dealings. Article 12 of Regulation 833/2014 prohibits participation, knowingly and intentionally, in activities whose object or effect is to circumvent prohibitions in that Regulation. This matters conceptually because a regime centred only on direct bans would remain comparatively linear. By contrast, a regime that also regulates conduct designed to replicate forbidden outcomes through proxies, substitutes, altered transaction chains, or formally separate intermediaries has already moved into a hybrid space. The legal rule is no longer concerned only with the nominal form of a transaction, but with its practical function inside a wider network. This broadens the restrictive perimeter from visible frontline conduct to enabling conduct. It also forces regulators and private operators to think in relational rather than purely textual terms. Hybrid sanctions therefore begin in law not when a new label is invented, but when the law itself starts targeting the ecology of circumvention^{3,4}.

Yet the legal channel alone does not make sanctions hybrid. Their hybrid character emerges fully only when formal rules are translated into operational guidance, sector-specific FAQs, interpretative maintenance, and repeated clarifications that shape how businesses, banks, insurers, freight operators, technology suppliers, and advisers actually behave. The European Commission’s sanctions pages and thematic FAQ architecture show precisely this maintenance function. There are dedicated interpretative materials on services, vessels, infrastructure transaction bans, state-owned enterprises, dual-use export restrictions, enhanced due diligence, and multiple other topics. Such an ecosystem of guidance does more than explain the law; it actively structures risk perception and therefore market behaviour. In practice, many firms do not wait for litigation or administrative sanction before adjusting conduct; they respond to the combined signal of legal text, guidance, enforcement trends, and reputational exposure. This interpretative layer is therefore part of the sanctions instrument itself. Hybrid sanctions must accordingly be defined as measures whose effect depends not only on the formal act of prohibition, but also on the sustained production of operational meaning through compliance-oriented guidance^{5,6}.

A further element of hybridisation lies in the role of service denial. Classical sanction analysis often privileged goods, capital, and asset measures, but the Russia regime shows that services can be equally decisive because they govern access to the enabling expertise without which complex economic activity becomes slower, riskier, and costlier. Restrictions on legal advisory, accounting, business consulting, software, maritime services, and other professional or technical functions do not simply remove one market input; they degrade the organisational environment in which adaptation would otherwise occur. This is a highly hybrid form of pressure because it couples legal prohibition with managerial disruption,

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia’s full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures*.

² Sibona, M. (2024, October 9). *Tackling circumvention of EU sanctions*. Jacques Delors Institute.

³ Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (consolidated version of 20 July 2025).

⁴ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

⁶ European Commission. (2026, January 23). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.

due-diligence intensification, and the fragmentation of transnational business support networks. The service channel is also especially hybrid because it sits at the boundary between law and market infrastructure. When an operator is denied a specialist service, the impact is partly legal, partly commercial, partly organisational, and partly informational. The result is not only a lost transaction, but a reduction in the target’s capacity to coordinate substitutes, manage compliance risk, or maintain access to high-trust international ecosystems. Hybrid sanctions therefore operate as capability-degrading measures at the level of institutional support, not only at the level of commodities and finance^{1,2}.

Logistics provides another clear example of why the term “hybrid” is analytically justified. Measures affecting vessels, ports, maritime services, routing patterns, and oil-transport practices are not simply transport sanctions in the ordinary commercial sense. They operate through the intersection of legal rules, shipping intelligence, insurance controls, flag-state decisions, private-sector screening, and coalition enforcement practices. The updated Price Cap Coalition maritime advisory illustrates this clearly by addressing both governments and private-sector actors and by emphasising best practices designed to disrupt sanctioned trade and enhance compliance. A measure of this kind acts simultaneously through regulation, detection, self-policing, and transaction-cost escalation. It also relies on behavioural change by operators who are not themselves the original target state. That indirectness is central to hybrid sanctions. Pressure is generated by altering the risk environment of the whole transport and services chain rather than merely banning a single shipment^{3,4}.

The same is true of the criminal-enforcement layer now built into EU sanctions governance. Directive (EU) 2024/1226 makes clear that effective application of Union restrictive measures requires effective, proportionate, and dissuasive penalties, and expressly states that those penalties must also address circumvention. The Directive additionally treats false or misleading information used to conceal beneficial ownership and other circumvention-related conduct as criminally relevant, while also requiring statistical recording, inter-authority cooperation, and frequent information-sharing on patterns of circumvention. This is important because it embeds sanctions inside a wider enforcement architecture that includes criminal law, information systems, data collection, and cross-border cooperation. Once sanctions are linked to criminalisation, reporting channels, beneficial-ownership concealment, data-sharing, and strategic enforcement planning, they clearly exceed the boundaries of a conventional trade or diplomatic measure. They become hybrid governance instruments connecting external policy with internal enforcement infrastructures. That internal–external fusion is one of the strongest reasons why hybrid sanctions should be treated as a distinct analytical class within the report⁵.

For that reason, hybrid sanctions should not be confused with a vague notion of “mixed” sanctions. All complex sanction regimes contain more than one element, but not all of them deserve to be classified as hybrid in the stronger analytical sense. The term should be reserved for cases in which restrictive effect is intentionally or structurally generated through cross-domain interaction between legal, economic, service, logistical, informational, and compliance channels. A simple asset freeze is not hybrid merely because it has economic consequences. It becomes hybrid when its practical force depends on beneficial-ownership tracing, reporting duties, de-risking behaviour by financial institutions, reputational exclusion, and anti-circumvention policing across jurisdictions. Likewise, a trade ban is not hybrid solely because it affects supply chains. It becomes hybrid when enforcement shifts to intermediary jurisdictions, shadow shipping, service denials, customs intelligence, and operator due

¹ European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

² European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

³ Ibid.

⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Publication of updated Price Cap Coalition advisory for the maritime oil industry and related sectors*.

⁵ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

diligence. The concept must therefore remain precise. Hybrid sanctions are not synonymous with complexity in general. They denote a specific cross-domain mode of restrictive governance^{1,2}.

This distinction is especially important when differentiating hybrid sanctions from “purely” political sanctions. Political sanctions primarily operate by signalling, delegitimation, diplomatic downgrading, representational exclusion, or elite stigmatisation. Their main transmission mechanism is normative and symbolic pressure, even if secondary practical effects follow. Hybrid sanctions, by contrast, do not rely chiefly on message transmission. Their central feature is operational multi-channel restriction. They shape whether transactions can be insured, whether services can be supplied, whether vessels can enter ports, whether intermediaries will assume risk, whether concealed ownership can remain hidden, and whether compliance departments will treat a transaction as too dangerous to touch. Political sanctions may contribute to the climate in which hybrid sanctions are received, but they are not the same instrument family. The former speak to diplomatic status and legitimacy. The latter redesign the operational environment in which prohibited or high-risk conduct becomes harder to perform^{3,4}.

Nor should hybrid sanctions be collapsed into “economic sanctions” as a generic label. Economic sanctions in the narrower sense typically refer to direct restrictions on trade, finance, investment, imports, exports, or access to specified goods and markets. Hybrid sanctions may contain all of those elements, but their distinctive quality lies in the fact that they work through the enabling systems around economic exchange rather than only through the exchange itself. The relevant target is therefore not only value transfer, but the infrastructure of value transfer: services, compliance, information, routing, documentation, ownership opacity, risk screening, and intermediary conduct. This matters analytically because the effectiveness of hybrid measures is often less visible in headline trade or finance statistics. Their effect appears instead in rising transaction friction, longer lead times, reduced service quality, narrower routing options, and higher dependence on opaque or costly intermediaries. If one calls all such effects simply “economic”, the operational specificity of the mechanism is lost. Hybrid sanctions are thus a subset of broader coercive policy, but they are not reducible to ordinary economic restriction^{5,6,7}.

The distinction from legal sanctions is equally necessary. Legal sanctions, as analysed in Part Five of the present report, concern the normative construction, legal authority, judicial defensibility, derogations, and enforceability of restrictive measures as law. Hybrid sanctions, by contrast, concern the way that law is operationally distributed across multiple domains and made effective through networks of private and public behaviour. Every hybrid sanction has a legal basis, but its analytical identity is not exhausted by that basis. The focus shifts from doctrinal validity to transmission ecology. One asks not only whether the rule is lawful and precise, but how the rule interacts with market aversion, compliance screening, logistics intelligence, service fragmentation, beneficial-ownership opacity, and coalition cooperation. In this sense, legal sanctions answer the question “what is prohibited and on what authority?”, whereas hybrid sanctions answer the question “through which interconnected channels does the prohibition actually produce pressure?”. The two categories overlap, but they do not coincide^{8,9}.

A decisive feature of hybrid sanctions is the central role of private operators as transmission mechanisms. In more classical sanction models, the state could appear as the almost exclusive actor

¹ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

² Sibona, M. (2024, October 9). *Tackling circumvention of EU sanctions*. Jacques Delors Institute.

³ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁴ European Commission. (2026). *EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine*.

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

⁶ European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

⁷ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Publication of updated Price Cap Coalition advisory for the maritime oil industry and related sectors*.

⁸ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

⁹ European Commission. (2026, January 23). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.

imposing and supervising the measure. In the current EU architecture, however, banks, insurers, freight forwarders, port service providers, software vendors, law firms, commodity traders, certification actors, and compliance officers all become distributed enforcement nodes. Their incentives are shaped by a mixture of formal obligations, criminal liability risk, supervisory scrutiny, commercial caution, and reputational concern. This private-sector intermediation means that the real perimeter of the sanction often extends beyond the minimum legal perimeter. Some operators will decline borderline business even where a narrowly arguable lawful route may still exist. That is not an accidental side effect. It is part of how hybrid sanctions generate pressure. The measure works because the regulated environment becomes denser, less predictable for circumvention, and more expensive to navigate. Hybrid sanctions therefore rest on co-produced enforcement between public law and private risk governance^{1,2}.

This private-public co-production also explains why information is so central to hybrid sanctions. A traditional embargo can often be described in terms of a binary legal prohibition. A hybrid sanctioning environment requires continuous updating of who owns what, who controls whom, which vessel is masking activity, which jurisdiction is emerging as a rerouting corridor, which service contract creates indirect benefit, and which corporate structure conceals sanctioned exposure. Such environments are characterised by asymmetries of information and by repeated attempts to exploit those asymmetries. The Directive's emphasis on beneficial-ownership concealment, statistical recording, and cooperation on circumvention patterns reflects this problem directly. The Commission's rolling FAQ system also reflects it indirectly, because interpretative maintenance is needed precisely where actors test the margins of existing rules. Hybrid sanctions are therefore information-intensive instruments. Their effectiveness depends on the capacity to see the network well enough to disrupt it without overgeneralising so broadly that proportionality and legal certainty collapse^{3,4}.

Another important definitional point is that hybrid sanctions operate through both direct and indirect coercive effects. Direct effects arise where a transaction, service, or route is formally prohibited. Indirect effects arise where market actors, compliance teams, or service providers withdraw because the legal, operational, or reputational environment has become too risky. In practice, the indirect channel is often as consequential as the direct one. Russia may still access certain goods or capabilities through intermediaries, but at higher cost, lower quality, longer lead times, and greater dependence on opaque networks. Those frictions are not incidental noise; they are part of the sanction's coercive design. Hybrid sanctions therefore do not require perfect closure to be meaningful. Their success may lie in degrading efficiency, compressing legitimate options, and forcing reliance on more fragile or more expensive substitutes. This is another reason why conventional binary assessments of sanctions frequently miss the true mechanism at work^{5,6,7}.

In policy terms, one may therefore define hybrid sanctions as measures that target not merely a person, entity, product, or financial flow, but an enabling system. That enabling system may include logistical corridors, shipping arrangements, insurance and reinsurance, software and professional services, legal structuring, beneficial-ownership concealment, trade finance, licensing pathways, data opacity, or intermediary jurisdictions. The distinctive characteristic is that the sanction is designed or operates so as to reshape the environment in which targeted activity is organised. Its object is functional capability, not only formal transaction volume. Such a definition also captures why hybrid sanctions matter particularly in long-duration conflicts. Over time, the target adapts; therefore, sanctions that remain

¹ European Commission. (2026, January 23). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

² European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673.*

³ Ibid.

⁴ European Commission. (2026, January 23). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

⁵ Sibona, M. (2024, October 9). *Tackling circumvention of EU sanctions.* Jacques Delors Institute.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Publication of updated Price Cap Coalition advisory for the maritime oil industry and related sectors.*

⁷ European Commission. (2026). *EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine.*

fixed only on the original front-end transaction become progressively less effective. Hybrid sanctions respond by moving deeper into the enabling architecture of adaptation itself. In the EU case, that movement is visible in the growing importance of anti-circumvention, targeted vessels, enhanced due diligence, service-specific FAQs, infrastructure transaction bans, and service-related controls^{1,2,3}.

For analytical clarity in this report, the concept can be synthesised in the following operational matrix.

Table 6.1.1-1. Hybrid sanctions as a cross-domain restrictive architecture

Domain/channel	Typical instrument	Immediate mechanism	Secondary transmission effect	Why this is hybrid rather than “pure”
Legal-regulatory	Direct prohibitions, anti-circumvention clauses, criminalisation of violations	Defines prohibited conduct and expands liability perimeter	Encourages ex ante withdrawal by operators and advisers	Law is used to alter wider behaviour beyond the nominal addressee
Economic-commercial	Trade bans, financial restrictions, transaction bans	Cuts or limits direct exchange	Re-prices risk, raises transaction costs, narrows partner options	Economic restriction is reinforced by non-market compliance and service effects
Service-professional	Bans on specified business, advisory, software, and technical services	Denies enabling expertise	Degrades organisational capability and slows substitution	Pressure works through capability erosion, not only through commodity denial
Logistics-maritime	Vessel listings, port-access bans, maritime screening, coalition advisories	Disrupts transport and shipping routes	Forces rerouting, opacity, cost inflation, and reliance on weaker intermediaries	Restriction operates through infrastructure, insurance, data, and private-sector controls
Compliance-information	FAQs, due-diligence expectations, reporting duties, ownership scrutiny	Makes high-risk conduct more visible and less defensible	Produces de-risking, self-policing, and over-compliance at the margins	The sanction effect is co-produced by public law and private governance
Intermediary-jurisdictional	Measures addressing rerouting and facilitation through third countries	Narrows circumvention corridors	Shifts pressure from primary target to enabling networks	The object of restriction is the surrounding ecosystem, not only the final counterparty

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU legal and institutional sources, coalition enforcement materials, and cited analytical literature

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.
- Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia’s full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures*.
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.
- Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (consolidated version of 20 July 2025).
- European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

³ European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

- European Commission. (2026, January 23). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it.*
- European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia.* Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Publication of updated Price Cap Coalition advisory for the maritime oil industry and related sectors.*
- Sibona, M. (2024, October 9). *Tackling circumvention of EU sanctions.* Jacques Delors Institute.

The matrix shows that the concept of hybrid sanctions is not an exercise in terminological inflation. It identifies a real transformation in the architecture of coercive policy. Restrictive measures against Russia increasingly work by combining formal legal rules with distributed enforcement, private-sector aversion, service denial, routing disruption, and information-driven anti-circumvention. This is why the analytical vocabulary of purely political or purely economic sanctions has become insufficient. It captures the formal surface of the regime but not its operational depth. A Brussels-level assessment that ignores this would systematically underestimate both the sophistication of the current EU framework and the complexity of Russia’s adaptation pathways. The hybrid concept is therefore not a stylistic addition to the report. It is necessary to explain how contemporary sanctions generate pressure under conditions of institutional adaptation, commercial rerouting, and networked circumvention^{1,2,3}.

From the perspective of the Russian case specifically, this conceptualisation is especially useful because adaptation since 2022 has rarely taken the form of simple legal defiance. More often, it has taken the form of substitution through third countries, alternative service providers, opaque ownership structures, fragmented routing, and shadow infrastructures. A sanctions framework designed only for direct bilateral restriction would be poorly suited to that environment. The EU’s progressive move towards targeted vessels, enhanced due diligence, service-specific FAQs, infrastructure transaction bans, criminalisation of circumvention-related conduct, and repeated interpretative updates therefore reflects structural necessity rather than bureaucratic overproduction. The target of policy is not only Russia’s immediate access to particular goods or transactions, but the resilience of the adaptive networks that sustain that access over time. Defining hybrid sanctions as cross-domain restrictive architectures captures that necessity with greater precision than older terminology. It also prepares the conceptual ground for the subsequent subsections of Part Six, which will examine anti-circumvention measures, logistics, service ecosystems, facilitation infrastructures, and effectiveness indicators as mutually connected rather than analytically isolated fields^{4,5,6}.

A final definitional conclusion follows from the foregoing analysis. Hybrid sanctions should be treated in this report as a cross-domain restrictive architecture in which legal acts, market responses, logistics controls, service denials, informational screening, and compliance infrastructures operate in combination to constrain, degrade, or raise the cost of targeted state capability and its adaptive support networks. Their distinguishing feature is not merely severity, nor merely multiplicity, but the structured interaction of domains that would traditionally have been analysed separately. Therefore, they are (1) different from purely political measures, which primarily signal and stigmatise; (2) different from purely economic measures, which primarily restrict direct exchange; and (3) different from purely legal measures, which primarily define normative authority and formal obligation. Hybrid sanctions reside at the point where these logics intersect and become operationally inseparable. For the purposes of Part Six, this definition should serve as the baseline conceptual formulation. It is sufficiently precise to

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions.*

² European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673.*

³ Sibona, M. (2024, October 9). *Tackling circumvention of EU sanctions.* Jacques Delors Institute.

⁴ European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia.* Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

⁵ European Commission. (2026, January 23). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it.*

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022.*

preserve analytical discipline, yet broad enough to capture the actual architecture of EU sanctions practice against Russia as it has evolved by 2025–2026^{1,2,3}.

6.1.2. Mechanisms of Hybridisation: Law, Market Behaviour, and Enabling Infrastructures

The mechanism of hybridisation in sanctions policy begins with a basic structural fact: the restrictive effect of a measure is no longer generated solely by the formal prohibition written in the legal act, but by the interaction between that prohibition and a wider field of economic, logistical, informational, and compliance responses. In the EU–Russia case, the law establishes the initial perimeter of forbidden conduct, but the practical force of the measure emerges only when private operators, partner jurisdictions, insurers, banks, freight intermediaries, software suppliers, and supervisory bodies internalise the new risk environment. This means that the sanction does not operate as a simple command followed by a binary compliance decision. It operates as a cascading process in which the legal norm reshapes incentives, transaction design, routing choices, documentation standards, and tolerance for ambiguity. In this sense, hybridisation is a mechanism of multiplication: one rule produces several layers of behavioural adjustment that exceed the minimum textual scope of the rule itself. The legal act therefore functions as an activating instrument rather than the sole carrier of coercive pressure. Once this is understood, it becomes clear why identical formal prohibitions can produce very different real-world effects depending on the density of compliance expectations, the structure of enabling infrastructures, and the degree of coordination among public and private actors. Hybridisation is thus not an ornament added to sanctions analysis. It is the actual mode through which advanced sanctions regimes produce operational pressure in conditions of adaptation and evasion. In the Russia case, this mechanism has become progressively more visible as the EU moved from primarily sectoral prohibitions towards anti-circumvention, third-country facilitation controls, shadow-fleet targeting, and service-based restrictions. The underlying logic is that pressure must be exerted not only on the final transaction but on the surrounding environment that makes the transaction feasible, repeatable, and scalable. That logic defines the mechanisms of hybridisation examined in this section^{4,5}.

The first and most visible mechanism is the interaction between formal prohibitions and induced market behaviour. A legal ban on a specific transaction, good, service, or financial relationship has immediate direct effect only within the narrow perimeter of the prohibited act. However, once operators understand that regulatory scrutiny, liability risk, and reputational exposure are increasing, the direct effect is supplemented by a broader process of commercial withdrawal. Firms begin to revise counterpart screening, reduce borderline exposures, narrow acceptable documentation thresholds, and exit transactions that are technically possible but operationally unsafe. This behavioural shift is essential to hybridisation because it shows that the sanction becomes more expansive in practice than in doctrinal form. The European Commission’s sanctions guidance explicitly addresses EU operators and aims at uniform implementation, which in itself demonstrates that the measure is designed to shape behaviour *ex ante* and not merely punish violations *ex post*. In reality, a considerable part of the coercive effect is produced not by adjudicated breaches but by anticipatory caution among private actors. That caution is especially strong where the transaction chain is complex, opaque, or routed through higher-risk jurisdictions. The law therefore works not simply by prohibition, but by changing the threshold at which market actors judge a transaction to be commercially acceptable. Hybridisation begins precisely at this

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

³ European Commission. (2026). *EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

point, where legal rules and market risk perception become operationally inseparable. The formal prohibition supplies the normative anchor, but market withdrawal amplifies its reach^{1,2}.

De-risking constitutes a second core mechanism and should be treated as analytically central rather than incidental. In sanction-heavy environments, banks, insurers, freight operators, consultants, and export-control sensitive firms increasingly move from transaction-by-transaction permissibility analysis to portfolio-level risk compression. They reduce exposure not only to clearly prohibited business but also to classes of activity associated with elevated uncertainty, opaque ownership, route irregularities, or intermediary jurisdictions linked to circumvention patterns. The Commission's guidance on enhanced due diligence states explicitly that the scale of sanctions and the techniques used to circumvent them have created increased risks for EU operators and therefore justify enhanced due diligence practices. This is highly significant because it formalises a transition from passive compliance to proactive risk management. Once enhanced due diligence becomes an expected standard, operators begin to internalise sanctions not simply as legal prohibitions but as ongoing governance obligations. De-risking then follows naturally, because the cost of investigating ambiguous relationships or verifying contested documentation may exceed the expected benefit of continuing the business. The result is a contraction of commercially available channels even where some legal space technically remains. Hybridisation therefore works through compliance-induced market self-limitation. The state does not need to prohibit every marginal route if private risk responses progressively close the most usable ones. De-risking is thus one of the main transmission belts through which sanctions migrate from law into the wider economic environment^{3,4}.

A third mechanism is service withdrawal, which is especially important because complex cross-border economic activity depends not only on goods and funds but on dense layers of organisational support. Legal advisory, accounting, management consulting, engineering support, software services, technical certification, maritime services, and specialised financial messaging are all enabling functions that sustain production, routing, contracting, and payment. When the EU restricts the provision of such services, it does more than remove one tradable input from the market. It degrades the quality, legality, efficiency, and credibility of the organisational environment through which the targeted economy adapts. This effect is hybrid because it combines direct legal restriction with indirect managerial disorganisation. An entity or network may still attempt substitution through non-EU or lower-trust providers, but that substitution frequently entails reduced expertise, increased error rates, weaker verification, and higher hidden costs. The Commission's services guidance and repeated FAQs show that service restrictions are not marginal adjuncts to trade controls. They are part of a deliberate strategy to affect the capability structure around sanctioned conduct. In practice, service withdrawal also intensifies de-risking because many firms view advisory and technical services as especially sensitive from a liability and reputational standpoint. This means that the absence of service providers does not merely slow a transaction. It often changes whether the transaction remains governable at all. Hybridisation here arises from the fusion of legal ban, professional retreat, and institutional capability erosion^{5,6}.

Routing disruption forms a fourth major mechanism and is especially visible in maritime and trade logistics. Contemporary sanctions do not need to prohibit every shipment directly in order to degrade the target's external economic capacity. It is often sufficient to make routing less predictable, more

¹ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

² European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia.* Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

³ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention.*

⁴ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

⁵ European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services.* Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

⁶ European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia.* Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

expensive, opaquer, and more vulnerable to interruption. The updated Price Cap Coalition advisory for the maritime oil industry states that recent developments in maritime oil trade expose stakeholders to increased safety, environmental, economic, reputational, financial, logistical, and legal risks, and it recommends best practices for private-sector actors and governments alike. This is a textbook example of hybridisation. The mechanism is not limited to one legal prohibition; it relies on the interaction of legal restrictions, best-practice compliance, screening expectations, insurance caution, and operational intelligence. When these elements combine, shipping routes become less stable, acceptable carriers become fewer, and the cost of concealment rises. Even where oil or goods continue to move, they do so under conditions of greater friction and reduced reputational legitimacy. Routing disruption therefore imposes a coercive cost through uncertainty and complexity rather than through absolute immobilisation alone. This is precisely why it belongs to a hybrid category: it is law translated into logistical risk architecture^{1,2}.

This routing mechanism becomes stronger when it is tied to targeted vessel measures and port-access bans. The Council's sixteenth package stated that additional vessels were added to the list of those subject to a port access ban and a ban on the provision of a broad range of services related to maritime transport, targeting non-EU tankers associated with the shadow fleet, oil-price-cap circumvention, military transport, or stolen Ukrainian grain. The seventeenth package expanded this logic further by listing an additional 189 vessels, bringing the total number of listed vessels to 342, while also underlining the role of coordination with Member States and the European Maritime Safety Agency. These steps show that routing disruption is not just a derivative outcome; it is itself a policy objective. By targeting vessels, ports, related services, and operational hubs, the EU attacks the continuity of the transport system that enables sanctioned trade to survive. The sanction therefore works through multiple channels at once: legal exclusion, service denial, insurer caution, reputational contamination, and operational re-routing. That combination magnifies pressure beyond what any single measure could generate in isolation. It also shows that hybridisation is cumulative, because each new layer of restriction makes the surrounding network more fragile and more expensive to reproduce. Where previously a target could shift from one carrier or jurisdiction to another, repeated logistics-oriented measures gradually narrow the viable set of substitutes. Hybrid sanctions thus use infrastructure sensitivity as a force multiplier^{3,4}.

A fifth mechanism is data asymmetry, which is indispensable for understanding both circumvention and the architecture of counter-circumvention. Sanctions rarely fail only because the law is too narrow; they often fail because authorities and private operators cannot fully see beneficial ownership, control relationships, route changes, document falsification, or proxy intermediation in real time. The Commission's enhanced due diligence guidance notes that Russian targets have used complex financial schemes, falsified the nature or origin of traded goods, relied on third-country jurisdictions, and concealed assets, thereby creating elevated risk for EU operators. Likewise, Directive (EU) 2024/1226 addresses structures to conceal beneficial ownership and requires cooperation, statistical recording, and enforcement-oriented information exchange. These materials reveal that data asymmetry is not an ancillary problem but a central battlefield. Hybridisation emerges because the sanction's practical effect depends on how well public and private actors can reduce that asymmetry. If the ownership structure remains obscure, if documentation is unreliable, or if routing data are manipulated, the legal prohibition alone will underperform. Conversely, when data visibility improves, market actors withdraw

¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Publication of updated Price Cap Coalition advisory for the maritime oil industry and related sectors*.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

³ Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

faster, enforcement becomes more credible, and facilitation networks become easier to map. Information is therefore not merely supportive of the sanction. It is constitutive of its hybrid effect^{1,2}.

A sixth mechanism lies in the production of interpretative certainty through FAQs, guidance papers, and compliance-oriented clarifications. Hybrid sanctions require more than legal enactment because the formal rule does not automatically tell operators how to assess indirect benefit, corporate control, facilitation risk, documentation anomalies, or third-country trade exposure. The Commission's consolidated FAQ document states that it is drafted to provide guidance to national authorities, EU operators, and citizens and to support the uniform application of sanctions across the Union. This interpretative function is critical because fragmented interpretation would weaken sanctions through jurisdictional inconsistency and transactional arbitrage. Once operators can identify a reasonably stable common approach, behavioural convergence becomes more likely. That convergence is a hybridising force because it links public legal authority with decentralised market practice. It also reduces the ability of targets to exploit regulatory grey zones between sectors or Member States. Guidance therefore acts as a behavioural harmonisation mechanism. It is not a substitute for the law, but it converts the law into a governable risk framework usable by banks, exporters, service firms, and logistics providers. Hybridisation, in short, requires interpretative infrastructures capable of turning abstract prohibitions into routinised operational choices^{3,4}.

Partner coordination is a seventh mechanism and one of the most underestimated. Hybrid sanctions lose force if they remain confined to the territorial authority of a single regulator while trade, shipping, finance, and professional services are organised through cross-border networks. The Price Cap Coalition advisory is explicitly coalition-based and addresses not only government stakeholders but also private actors involved in maritime trade. The EU's packages likewise increasingly refer to coordination with Member States and, in practice, operate within a wider constellation that includes G7 and like-minded partners. This matters because hybrid sanctions function through ecosystem pressure, and ecosystems are rarely national in structure. When partner coordination is robust, opportunities for rerouting, transshipment, under-insured shipping, or substitute service provision diminish. When it is weak, the target can redistribute activity geographically without fundamentally altering the underlying business model. Coordination therefore works as a multiplier of credibility and a compressor of exit options. It converts parallel sanctions into a more unified operational environment. The mechanism of hybridisation here lies in the fact that public coordination among states changes the private geography of feasible risk-taking^{5,6}.

This coordination mechanism also applies to intermediary jurisdictions and third-country entities. The seventeenth package added 31 companies providing direct or indirect support to Russia's military-industrial complex or engaged in sanctions circumvention, including firms established in Turkey, Vietnam, the UAE, Serbia, and Uzbekistan. The significance of such measures lies not merely in the listing count. Their deeper meaning is that the sanctioning authority is attempting to relocate the enforcement frontier from direct Russia-facing actors to the transnational networks that enable circumvention. This is a classic hybrid move because it recognises that modern sanctions pressure must be projected through the architecture of intermediation. The relevant question is no longer only whether Russia can import or finance directly, but whether the surrounding ecosystem of brokers, shell companies, shipping intermediaries, and dual-use facilitators can continue to perform their enabling

¹ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

² European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

³ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁶ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

role. Once third-country support structures are targeted, the sanction acquires a network logic rather than a purely bilateral one. That network logic is central to hybridisation. It transforms sanctions from a dyadic coercive measure into a broader governance regime affecting the opportunity structures of a much larger set of actors. The measure thereby becomes more preventive, more intelligence-dependent, and more reliant on cooperation^{1,2}.

An eighth mechanism is the criminal-enforcement turn embodied in Directive (EU) 2024/1226. Hybridisation intensifies when violations and circumvention of Union restrictive measures are not treated merely as regulatory non-compliance but as matters requiring effective, proportionate, and dissuasive penalties, common offence definitions, asset-tracing sensitivity, and institutional cooperation. The Directive is important not only because it criminalises certain behaviours, but because it embeds sanctions inside a broader architecture of investigative coordination and informational exchange. This changes the risk calculus of market participants. A firm or intermediary evaluating a doubtful structure must now consider not only civil or administrative exposure, but also the prospect of criminal-law consequences tied to concealment, facilitation, or false information. That shift has a behavioural effect even before prosecutions occur. It raises the compliance salience of sanctions across sectors and encourages firms to over-invest in screening, documentation, and exit decisions. Criminalisation therefore contributes to hybridisation by transmitting the sanctions signal deeper into organisational decision-making. It is a mechanism through which the state's coercive capacity is projected into private governance routines³.

The ninth mechanism is reputational contagion, which frequently accompanies formal risk responses but deserves separate treatment. In highly sanctioned sectors, operators do not assess only legal permissibility; they also consider whether involvement with a transaction, vessel, route, or intermediary will be viewed by supervisors, investors, insurers, or counterparties as indicative of weak controls or excessive appetite for sanctions exposure. The Price Cap Coalition advisory expressly refers to reputational risks alongside financial, legal, logistical, safety, and environmental risks. This is analytically important because reputational contagion expands the sanction's influence beyond the legal perimeter. A business line may be abandoned not because the transaction is certainly prohibited, but because association with it damages trust, raises insurer scrutiny, or complicates access to other partners. In practice, reputational risk often accelerates de-risking faster than formal enforcement alone. It is especially powerful in shipping, finance, and specialised services where network trust is commercially decisive. Hybridisation thus operates through symbolic and market channels simultaneously, but unlike "pure" political sanctions, the reputational signal here is tied directly to operational risk. It is not only about condemnation. It is about the declining viability of continued business within high-trust global systems^{4,5}.

A tenth mechanism concerns specialised financial messaging, transaction monitoring, and the infrastructure of payment connectivity. The sixteenth package introduced, for the first time, a transaction ban on credit or financial institutions established outside Russia that use the System for Transfer of Financial Messages of the Central Bank of Russia, while also extending restrictions on specialised financial messaging services for certain regional banks. This demonstrates that hybridisation does not stop at direct banking restrictions. It reaches into the infrastructure through which payments are signalled, routed, and normalised. Once payment architecture itself becomes a target, the sanction extends beyond balance-sheet exposure into connectivity risk. Financial institutions, payment service participants, and counterparties must then evaluate not only the person or entity

¹ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

³ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁵ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it*.

involved but the messaging ecosystem used to support the transaction. This materially raises compliance complexity and can trigger pre-emptive withdrawal from entire classes of exposure. Hybridisation here arises from the intersection of finance law, technological infrastructure, correspondent caution, and transaction-monitoring behaviour. The payment system becomes not just a channel of exchange but a site of coercive intervention¹.

An eleventh mechanism is the progressive narrowing of legal ambiguity concerning indirect support. Earlier sanction architectures often struggled because they targeted obvious direct transactions while leaving broad room for facilitation through adjacent actors and supporting functions. The newer EU packages increasingly close these gaps by creating criteria linked to vessel ownership or operation, support for the military-industrial complex, facilitation via financial institutions, and use of ports, locks, and airports connected to circumvention or military transfer. Such provisions matter not only because they add more targets, but because they reduce the protective value of formal distance from the primary sanctioned act. A vessel owner, port operator, service provider, or financial intermediary can no longer assume that standing one step away from the end-user is sufficient insulation. The law thus reaches functionally into the support chain. This functional reach is one of the clearest legal mechanisms of hybridisation. It makes sanctions more network-aware and forces private actors to analyse economic substance rather than contractual surface. As a result, support ecosystems become less stable and less deniable^{2,3}.

A twelfth mechanism is operational over-compliance, which should be distinguished from simple de-risking. De-risking refers to structured withdrawal from high-risk exposures; over-compliance refers to situations in which operators narrow permissible conduct beyond what the law strictly requires because the cost of precise differentiation is too high. This is common in sanctions environments characterised by fast-changing rules, complicated ownership structures, and severe downside risk from mistakes. The Commission's emphasis on uniform implementation and enhanced due diligence unintentionally also creates incentives for precautionary conservatism, especially among firms lacking advanced compliance capacity. In practice, smaller institutions and medium-sized firms may adopt broad refusals because they cannot efficiently verify nuanced exceptions or derogations. This produces an additional hybrid effect. The law indirectly generates stricter market behaviour than the minimum legal text would imply, and that stricter behaviour contributes to pressure on the targeted system. Although over-compliance can create proportionality concerns, it remains one of the channels through which hybrid sanctions acquire really economic and organisational weight. It demonstrates again that the sanction's effect is co-produced by law and private governance, not delivered by law alone^{4,5}.

A thirteenth mechanism is infrastructural substitution pressure. Once sanctions target direct trade, services, vessels, financial messaging, or intermediary networks, the sanctioned side is forced to seek alternatives. However, substitute infrastructures are usually less efficient, less transparent, more expensive, and more operationally fragile than the systems from which access has been lost. The seventeenth package explicitly states that coordinated vessel listings and partner-country efforts are making it increasingly difficult to replace sanctioned vessels and that exporting oil has become more complex and costly for the Kremlin. This is an important indicator of hybridisation because it shows that the sanction need not eliminate activity altogether. It need only push the activity into a narrower, costlier, and more vulnerable infrastructure environment. Once this occurs, every subsequent restriction has greater marginal effect because the adaptation base is already degraded. Hybridisation therefore works dynamically through capability compression. Alternative infrastructures remain possible, but they

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures.*

² Ibid.

³ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022.*

⁴ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention.*

⁵ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

become less resilient and more dependent on opaque actors whose own exposure to sanctions risk is rising. The result is cumulative erosion rather than one-off blockage^{1,2}.

A fourteenth mechanism concerns the interaction between shadow infrastructures and safety-regulatory risk. The updated Price Cap Coalition advisory does not frame the problem solely in sanctions terms. It also emphasises maritime safety, environmental exposure, and responsible practices in the market. This is important because it broadens the set of reasons why private actors, flag states, insurers, and service providers may avoid questionable shipping arrangements. A vessel associated with opacity, high-risk routing, or shadow-fleet practices is not only a sanctions concern. It is a safety and liability concern. Hybridisation occurs when those fields reinforce each other. The sanction thus gains strength from adjacent regulatory and commercial logics that are not sanctions-specific in origin but become sanctions-relevant in practice. This dramatically increases behavioural pressure because actors may refuse participation for multiple overlapping reasons at once. The transaction becomes unattractive not only because it may breach a rule, but because it may generate insurance, environmental, reputational, or safety costs that are independently unacceptable. Hybrid sanctions derive a large part of their power from precisely this multi-vector aversion. They convert a political-legal restriction into a broader no-go zone across several regulatory systems³.

A fifteenth mechanism is the reconfiguration of time. Traditional sanctions analysis often concentrates on whether a transaction can or cannot occur. Hybrid sanctions alter not only permissibility but tempo. Enhanced due diligence, ownership verification, service withdrawal, route rechecking, and insurance hesitation all slow down decision-making and execution. Delays matter strategically because they reduce flexibility, increase inventory and financing costs, complicate military-industrial procurement cycles, and weaken the reliability of adaptation pathways. In this sense, time itself becomes a restrictive variable. A transaction that remains theoretically possible but takes twice as long, requires far more documentation, and depends on more fragile intermediaries is no longer operationally equivalent to its pre-sanctions form. Hybridisation therefore works through temporal drag as much as through legal exclusion. This temporal dimension is often invisible in headline sanctions debates, yet it is central to understanding how capability is degraded without total closure. The more intermediation and verification a transaction requires, the less scalable and less dependable it becomes. Sanctions thus hybridise by turning time into cost and uncertainty into structural friction^{4,5}.

A sixteenth mechanism is the diffusion of enforcement to the private sector. In older sanction paradigms, public authorities occupied the centre of enforcement, while firms mainly responded to explicit instructions. In the current EU architecture, private actors function as distributed enforcement nodes. They screen beneficial ownership, examine routing histories, question end-use declarations, review financial messaging connections, evaluate service exposure, and refuse suspicious counterparties. The Commission's guidance documents are addressed precisely to support such decentralised vigilance. This diffusion is not a secondary implementation detail; it is a constitutive feature of hybrid sanctions. Because the modern sanctions environment is too complex for centralised enforcement alone, the regime relies on private actors to detect anomalies and deny operational space. Hybridisation therefore involves a transfer of monitoring and filtering functions into the market itself. This increases coverage, but it also means that sanctions effectiveness depends on private capacity,

¹ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁵ European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

incentives, and caution. The law establishes the expectation. The market performs much of the daily boundary policing^{1,2}.

A seventeenth mechanism is the compression of plausible deniability. In loosely regulated environments, intermediaries can often claim that they were too distant from the end-use, too unaware of beneficial ownership, or too removed from the main transaction to understand the strategic significance of their role. Hybrid sanctions narrow that defence by publishing guidance, clarifying circumvention typologies, criminalising concealment-related conduct, and directly targeting facilitatory nodes. Once authorities repeatedly identify patterns of rerouting, indirect support, vessel ownership abuse, and documentary manipulation, the informational space for innocence claims contracts. This is significant because sanctions effectiveness often depends not only on hard enforcement but on the ability to alter what actors can plausibly justify to themselves, to supervisors, and to business partners. Hybridisation thus has a cognitive-governance dimension. It redefines what counts as acceptable ignorance in a high-risk environment. When plausible deniability shrinks, private risk responses intensify. Firms begin to assume that regulators expect active inquiry rather than passive non-knowledge^{3,4}.

For analytical clarity, the principal mechanisms discussed above can be summarised in the following matrix.

Table 6.1.2-1. Principal mechanisms of hybridisation in the EU sanctions regime against Russia

Mechanism	Primary legal or policy trigger	Immediate operational effect	Secondary hybrid effect	Strategic consequence
Formal prohibition	Regulations, package measures, listings, service bans	Establishes legal boundary of forbidden conduct	Induces anticipatory caution and market withdrawal	Pressure exceeds the narrow textual scope of the ban
De-risking	Enhanced due diligence expectations, enforcement risk	Reduction of exposure to ambiguous or higher-risk transactions	Compression of commercially available channels	Shrinks the space for circumvention through precautionary exit
Service withdrawal	Restrictions on advisory, technical, software, and maritime services	Loss of enabling expertise and organisational support	Capability degradation and weaker substitution quality	Erodes the target's adaptive support systems
Routing disruption	Vessel listings, port bans, service bans, coalition advisories	More costly, opaque, and fragile movement of goods and oil	Logistical friction and reduced route reliability	Raises cost and lowers resilience of external trade flows
Data asymmetry reduction	Ownership scrutiny, reporting, intelligence sharing, guidance	Better detection of concealment and indirect benefit	Faster private-sector withdrawal from suspect structures	Improves network visibility and disrupts hidden facilitation
Partner coordination	EU–Member State cooperation, G7/coalition alignment	Narrower jurisdictional and infrastructural loopholes	Harder geographic relocation of sanctioned activity	Multiplies credibility and limits rerouting capacity
Criminal-enforcement integration	Directive (EU) 2024/1226 and national implementation	Higher liability salience for facilitation and concealment	Deeper compliance internalisation by firms and intermediaries	Embeds sanctions in broader enforcement architecture

¹ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

² European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention.*

³ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673.*

⁴ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

Mechanism	Primary legal or policy trigger	Immediate operational effect	Secondary hybrid effect	Strategic consequence
Reputational contagion	Public advisories, listings, scrutiny of shadow infrastructures	Avoidance of actors or routes associated with sanctions risk	Self-reinforcing withdrawal across trust-based networks	Makes suspect business lines commercially toxic
Infrastructure substitution pressure	Targeting of shadow fleet, messaging systems, third-country facilitators	Need to rely on weaker and more expensive alternatives	Cumulative fragility of substitute systems	Degrades long-run adaptability rather than only current transactions
Temporal drag	Screening, verification, route changes, due diligence burdens	Slower execution of trade, finance, and service arrangements	Time becomes an additional coercive variable	Reduces scalability and reliability of adaptation

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU legal and institutional sources, coalition enforcement materials, and cited analytical literature

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia’s full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures.*
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions.*
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline - Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022.*
- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention.*
- European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025). *Frequently asked questions — Sanctions against Russia.* Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.
- European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services.* Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.
- European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it.*
- European Commission. (2026). *EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine.*
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673.*
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Publication of updated Price Cap Coalition advisory for the maritime oil industry and related sectors.*
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors.*

The table demonstrates that hybridisation is not a single instrument but a mechanism chain. Each component strengthens the others: (1) legal prohibitions stimulate due diligence; (2) due diligence encourages de-risking; (3) de-risking amplifies service withdrawal; (4) service withdrawal magnifies routing disruption; (5) routing disruption raises the value of information; (6) improved information increases the effectiveness of partner coordination and criminal enforcement; and (7) all of these together erode the viability of substitute infrastructures. The result is a sanctions architecture in which multiple modest or medium-strength restrictions can produce a stronger cumulative effect than one formally severe but operationally isolated ban. This explains why hybrid sanctions often appear difficult to measure using simple trade or finance indicators alone. A large part of their effectiveness lies in friction, delay, uncertainty, and organisational degradation. These effects are distributed rather than spectacular, but they are strategically consequential. In long-duration conflicts, such mechanisms may prove more durable than attempts at total closure, because they continuously force the target into costlier adaptation cycles. The policy implication is that hybrid sanctions should be assessed less as

one-off prohibitions and more as systems for shaping the operating environment of the target economy and its enabling networks^{1,2,3}.

From the standpoint of the Russian case, these mechanisms are particularly important because adaptation since 2022 has depended heavily on substitution through service providers, third-country entities, concealed ownership, route manipulation, and shadow logistics rather than on open defiance of the legal prohibition itself. A sanctions regime focused only on direct bans would therefore miss much of the real terrain of contestation. The EU's progressive emphasis on anti-circumvention, vessel and infrastructure targeting, enhanced due diligence, financial-messaging restrictions, and coordination with partner countries should be interpreted as an attempt to move sanctions pressure closer to the real adaptation pathways used by the target. This does not eliminate evasion, nor does it guarantee linear coercive success. However, it changes the quality of the adaptation problem facing Russia by making circumvention more expensive, less scalable, less transparent, and more dependent on fragile substitute networks. That is the essential mechanism of hybridisation. Law remains indispensable, but it is only the first stage in a broader process that transforms risk perception, operational feasibility, and network resilience across several domains at once. In that sense, hybrid sanctions are best understood not as a supplementary category of measures, but as the dominant operational form of mature sanctions regimes under conditions of prolonged geopolitical confrontation^{4,5,6}.

6.1.3. Boundary Questions: Distinction from Political, Economic, Legal, and Compliance Sanctions

A rigorous boundary analysis is necessary because the overall report already treats sanctions against Russia as a cumulative, integrated architecture rather than as a collection of isolated measures. At the same time, the report's internal logic depends on preserving analytical distinctions between political, economic, legal, hybrid, and compliance dimensions, even where they interact closely in practice. The General Introduction explicitly states that the document evaluates sanctions through six interconnected dimensions and that the hybrid sections are intended to analyse cross-domain instruments and enabling structures that complicate straightforward categorisation, while the compliance sections examine implementation capacity, private-sector transmission, anti-circumvention vulnerabilities, and enforcement-related governance challenges. It also stresses that political sections address signalling and diplomatic restriction, economic sections address structural sectoral pressure, and legal sections address normative architecture, derogations, and judicial defensibility. This means that Part Six cannot simply repeat the language of cross-domain interaction without defining what makes a measure genuinely hybrid rather than merely influential across more than one field. Otherwise, the category would become too elastic to be analytically useful. The boundary question is therefore methodological as much as substantive. It concerns the dominant mechanism, primary object, and principal level of operation of a restrictive measure, not merely the number of side effects that follow from it. For the purposes of this report, a measure should be classified as hybrid only when its coercive force is generated through cross-domain interaction among legal, market, logistical, service, infrastructural, and informational channels in a way that is constitutive rather than incidental. This threshold allows the concept to remain precise while still capturing the operational reality of sanctions governance in 2025–2026.

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁴ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁵ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures*.

The first boundary line must therefore be drawn between hybrid sanctions and political sanctions. In the structure of this report, political sanctions are centred on signalling, delegitimation, diplomatic restriction, external coalition management, and the narrowing of Russia’s room for international manoeuvre. The EEAS likewise describes EU sanctions as a peaceful tool of diplomacy used to defend international law, international peace and security, and EU values and interests, which reflects the primarily normative and diplomatic logic of that category. Political sanctions can certainly have secondary operational effects. A listing may increase compliance pressure, a visa ban may indirectly complicate certain business contacts, and media restrictions may reinforce wider resilience policy. Yet these downstream consequences do not automatically convert the measure into a hybrid instrument. The crucial distinction is that political sanctions operate primarily by status alteration, signalling, stigmatisation, representational exclusion, and institutionalised non-normalisation. Their main function is to communicate and codify an external policy boundary. A hybrid sanction, by contrast, is one whose main coercive force depends on distributed operational disruption across several enabling systems at once. The distinction is therefore not between “symbolic” and “real” measures, but between dominant signalling logic and dominant cross-domain restriction logic^{1,2}.

This means, more concretely, that not every politically motivated listing should be treated as hybrid. If an individual restrictive measure primarily targets elite mobility, public signalling, diplomatic isolation, or delegitimation of a war-enabling actor, it remains a political sanction even if banks and business partners subsequently respond by withdrawing. The hybrid threshold is crossed only where the measure is constructed or functions principally as a multi-node intervention in an enabling network. For example, a network-based designation strategy targeting owners, operators, intermediaries, and facilitators around a shadow-fleet or procurement structure can become hybrid because the operational chain itself is the object of restriction. However, an ordinary elite designation with reputational spillovers should remain in Part Two. This distinction matters because otherwise the political sphere would be conceptually cannibalised by Part Six. It would also weaken evaluative discipline, since political sanctions are judged largely by signalling coherence, legitimacy, coordination value, and durable refusal of normalisation, whereas hybrid sanctions are judged by their ability to disrupt adaptation pathways, rerouting, facilitation, and hidden infrastructures. Mixed effects therefore do not settle classification; dominant function does. In this report, the phrase “mixed effect of a political sanction” should not be confused with a “hybrid instrument.” The former describes spillover; the latter describes operating design^{3,4}.

The second boundary line concerns economic sanctions. Part Three of the report is built around structural pressure on finance, trade, technology, transport, and services, and it treats economic sanctions as instruments that reconfigure the target state’s operating environment by degrading macro-level capacity, increasing transaction friction, and constraining long-term renewal. That description already contains important complexity. Economic sanctions often spill into logistics, services, and investment behaviour. However, the analytical core of the economic category remains the direct restriction of value flows, sectoral activity, capital access, goods, technologies, and revenue structures. A measure belongs primarily in the economic sphere where its main object is the restriction of production, exchange, revenue generation, financial intermediation, or access to inputs and markets. By contrast, a hybrid measure is focused less on the front-end economic transaction itself and more on the enabling architecture that sustains that transaction under pressure: shadow routing, shell structures, proxy jurisdictions, service ecosystems, ownership opacity, and adaptive infrastructure. Economic sanctions reduce exchange; hybrid sanctions target the ecology that keeps restricted exchange alive. The distinction is subtle but essential. Without it, almost all sophisticated economic sanctions would be redescribed as hybrid merely because modern economies are networked.

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *A peaceful tool of diplomacy*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *European Union sanctions*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

That is why mixed economic effects are not enough to establish hybrid status. A trade ban on specified goods, a financial restriction on certain institutions, or an export prohibition on dual-use items remains an economic sanction even if implementation requires guidance and even if circumvention risks subsequently emerge. The direct legal object of the measure still concerns trade, finance, capital, or technology denial. The measure becomes hybrid only when its practical pressure depends centrally on action against the surrounding adaptation system rather than the main transaction channel. Thus, a ban on exports of advanced technology is economic. However, a regime that combines that ban with third-country facilitator targeting, service withdrawal, beneficial-ownership scrutiny, route monitoring, logistics intelligence, and proxy-network disruption may contain a hybrid component because the operational focus has shifted from commodity denial to adaptation-system degradation. The classification question should therefore ask: what is the immediate mechanism of pressure? If the answer is direct economic restriction, the measure belongs primarily in Part Three even where hybrid consequences follow. If the answer is coordinated disruption of the supporting network through multiple domains, Part Six becomes the correct analytical home. In this framework, hybridity is not the same as economic sophistication. It is a distinct mode of cross-domain intervention^{1,2}.

A third boundary line must be drawn in relation to legal sanctions. Part Five of the report is concerned with restrictive measures as law: legal authority, regulatory architecture, doctrinal precision, derogations, judicial review, and the legal defensibility of enforcement decisions. The General Introduction to the document states explicitly that the legal sections focus on the normative architecture of restrictive measures, including asset freezes, service restrictions, derogations, and judicial scrutiny. This offers a clear criterion for distinction. Legal sanctions are those whose primary analytical significance lies in what the law prohibits, authorises, exempts, or makes reviewable, and in how that normative structure is institutionally organised. Hybrid sanctions may well contain legal components, and indeed they cannot exist without legal hooks. But their analytical identity is not exhausted by doctrine, validity, or formal scope. They are defined by how law interacts with infrastructures, services, logistics, information asymmetries, and private risk governance to produce pressure through several operational channels simultaneously. Legal sanctions ask: what is the rule, how precise is it, how defensible is it, and under what derogations does it operate? Hybrid sanctions ask: through what interacting systems does the rule become coercively effective or conversely vulnerable to circumvention? The categories overlap, but they are not interchangeable.

This distinction is particularly important because anti-circumvention law can look hybrid at first sight. Article 12 of Regulation 833/2014, for example, prohibits participation, knowingly and intentionally, in activities whose object or effect is to circumvent prohibitions in that Regulation. Directive (EU) 2024/1226 further strengthens the legal architecture by defining criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and by addressing concealment-related conduct, including structures obscuring beneficial ownership. These are unquestionably legal instruments. They belong to the legal sphere when the analytical focus is on the perimeter of liability, mental elements, authorisation structures, judicial manageability, or the relationship between prohibition and derogation. Yet the same provisions can become part of hybrid analysis when the focus moves from their doctrinal design to their role in reshaping logistics, information flows, intermediary behaviour, route selection, and distributed private-sector caution. The same rule may therefore appear in Part Five and Part Six, but under different analytical questions. This is not duplication; it is functional differentiation. In the legal part, the emphasis is normative architecture. In the hybrid part, the emphasis is cross-domain transmission^{3,4}.

The fourth boundary line concerns compliance sanctions, or more precisely the compliance dimension of the sanctions regime that is reserved for Part Seven. The report's General Introduction defines the

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

² European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (consolidated version of 20 July 2025).

⁴ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

compliance sections as those examining implementation capacity, private-sector transmission, anti-circumvention vulnerabilities, and enforcement-related governance challenges. This is highly important because hybrid sanctions and compliance sanctions are the two categories most likely to blur into one another. Both involve private actors, risk detection, information sharing, due diligence, and distributed enforcement. Yet they are not analytically identical. Compliance sanctions, in the framework of this report, concern the machinery that translates law into behaviour: screening protocols, beneficial-ownership checks, licensing practice, operator guidance, alert systems, governance standards, and the quality of institutional follow-through. Hybrid sanctions, by contrast, concern cross-domain restrictive instruments that act through enabling systems such as routing corridors, service ecosystems, shadow infrastructures, and intermediary networks. Compliance is often the transmission mechanism of hybrid measures, but it is not the same as the hybrid instrument itself. The former is about implementation architecture; the latter is about restrictive design and operational target structure.

The European Commission's sanctions guidance architecture illustrates this distinction well. The Commission's consolidated FAQs are explicitly drafted to provide guidance to national authorities, EU operators, and citizens and to support the uniform application of sanctions. The dedicated guidance documents page also emphasises general advice on risk assessment, best practices for due diligence on business partners and transactions, and red flags for circumvention. These are paradigmatic compliance tools. Their immediate purpose is not to create a new cross-domain restriction, but to standardise interpretation, improve implementation quality, and reduce evasion opportunities by informing operator behaviour. If the analytical question concerns clarity, operator burden, national divergence, institutional learning, false positives, or distributed enforcement quality, the matter belongs primarily in Part Seven. Only when such compliance tools are examined as components of a broader intervention against a cross-domain enabling system do they become relevant to hybrid analysis. Thus, guidance is usually compliance infrastructure, not a hybrid instrument in itself. Its role in hybrid sanctions is mediating rather than constitutive unless it is embedded in a wider architecture targeting adaptation networks^{1,2}.

From this follows a more general criterion: classification must be based on dominant function, not on total causal footprint. Most mature sanctions today have effects across several domains. An asset freeze affects legal rights, financial behaviour, compliance costs, and reputational standing. A visa restriction may influence mobility, diplomacy, and even certain business interactions. An export ban may alter logistics, market incentives, and compliance burdens. If classification followed all possible effects, every measure would belong everywhere and the report's architecture would collapse. The correct method is therefore to identify the dominant operative mechanism that gives the measure its primary coercive force. Where that mechanism is signalling and exclusion, the measure is political. Where it is direct restriction of exchange, revenue, technology, or capital, it is economic. Where it is doctrinal prohibition, derogation, or review structure, it is legal. Where it is implementation, detection, due diligence, and private-sector transmission, it is compliance. Where it is coordinated disruption of enabling networks through interaction among several domains, it is hybrid. This criterion of dominant mechanism is the core analytical filter for Part Six.

A second criterion is the primary object of restriction. Political sanctions primarily target status, recognition, representation, and the diplomatic-institutional room for manoeuvre of actors. Economic sanctions primarily target value flows, sectoral capacity, access to capital, technologies, markets, and revenue channels. Legal sanctions primarily target legal entitlements, legal relationships, and the conditions under which certain acts become prohibited, derogable, or reviewable. Compliance sanctions primarily target the implementation pathway, aiming to ensure that formal restrictions are translated into consistent screening and operational caution. Hybrid sanctions, by contrast, primarily target enabling systems: routing chains, facilitation structures, intermediary jurisdictions, opacity

¹ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it.*

² European Commission. (2025). *Guidance documents.*

mechanisms, service dependencies, and the adaptive infrastructures that help the targeted economy function under pressure. This object-based criterion helps avoid confusion in borderline cases. A measure may mention services, routes, or due diligence without necessarily being hybrid. The decisive question is whether the measure's real target is an enabling ecology rather than an individual transaction or purely normative status. Where the answer is yes, hybrid classification becomes warranted^{1,2}.

A third criterion is the unit of analysis. Political sanctions are usually best analysed at the level of institutions, diplomatic relations, listed elites, public signalling, and international legitimacy. Economic sanctions are most often analysed at the level of sectors, revenue streams, trade flows, financial channels, prices, and macro-structural constraints. Legal sanctions are analysed at the level of regulatory provisions, derogation structures, evidentiary standards, and judicial scrutiny. Compliance sanctions are analysed at the level of operator behaviour, implementation systems, governance quality, reporting channels, and enforcement coordination. Hybrid sanctions require a different unit: the network. They are analysed through chains, nodes, intermediaries, facilitators, proxy entities, overlapping infrastructures, and adaptive arrangements that cut across standard categories. This network-centred unit of analysis is one of the strongest practical tests for hybrid classification. If the measure only becomes intelligible when mapped as a cross-domain network rather than a sector, actor class, or rule set, it likely belongs in Part Six. If it can be fully explained without such network analysis, it probably belongs elsewhere. This distinction is not absolute, but it is highly useful for maintaining conceptual discipline.

A fourth criterion is evidentiary dependence. Political sanctions often rely on public attribution, diplomatic rationale, institutional signalling, and political-legitimacy arguments. Economic sanctions depend heavily on macroeconomic, trade, sectoral, technological, and financial indicators, even where these must be treated cautiously. Legal sanctions depend on textual analysis, case law, derogation logic, interpretative coherence, and legal robustness. Compliance sanctions depend on implementation evidence: guidance quality, enforcement case patterns, operator uptake, divergence across Member States, whistleblowing, and due-diligence practice. Hybrid sanctions, however, are especially dependent on network evidence: shipping patterns, ownership concealment, route anomalies, intermediary jurisdictions, proxy actors, shell-company structures, service fragmentation, and cumulative red-flag constellations. This is why the General Introduction of the report emphasises the role of information asymmetry, proxy structures, service fragmentation, and re-routing in the hybrid dimension. A measure should thus be considered hybrid where its evaluation depends materially on tracing dispersed enabling patterns rather than primarily on doctrinal, diplomatic, or macro-sectoral evidence. The evidentiary form reflects the mechanism. Hybrid measures are difficult to see precisely because they act against systems that are designed to disperse visibility.

A fifth criterion is whether cross-domain interaction is constitutive or merely consequential. This is perhaps the most important test for distinguishing a genuine hybrid instrument from a measure with mixed effects. Many sanctions create consequences in adjacent domains. A bank listing can affect politics, law, compliance, logistics, and social perceptions. A service restriction can affect revenue, legal relationships, and operator risk models. Yet a consequence remains a consequence unless the measure's very mechanism of pressure requires those domains to interact in order to work. Hybrid sanctions are constitutively cross-domain. Their effectiveness depends on legal norms activating market withdrawal, service denial, route instability, information sharing, and private risk governance together. If these elements disappeared, the measure would lose most of its force. By contrast, in an economic or political measure with mixed effects, the secondary domains amplify but do not define the instrument. The main coercive logic would remain intelligible even without them. This criterion is

¹ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

especially useful because it prevents the hybrid category from becoming a label for “complicated sanctions” in general^{1,2}.

This distinction can be illustrated with anti-circumvention measures. Anti-circumvention law as such is not automatically hybrid. When the focus is on the legal prohibition of circumvention and its penal consequences, the matter belongs to the legal and compliance spheres. However, where the measure is directed at intermediary jurisdictions, route manipulation, facilitator entities, concealment patterns, service denials, and networked enabling structures, the hybrid dimension becomes central because the object is no longer a single prohibited act but an adaptive system. The Commission’s due-diligence guidance to help EU operators identify and assess possible circumvention risks clearly demonstrates this transition from rule enforcement to ecosystem analysis. Likewise, EEAS materials on making sanctions effective stress coalition breadth and implementation reach, which are essential for closing systemic loopholes. Anti-circumvention therefore straddles several categories. It is not hybrid by default, but it frequently becomes hybrid when it targets the surrounding ecology of evasion rather than only the legal breach in the abstract. This is precisely why Part Six is necessary: it captures the point at which anti-circumvention ceases to be only enforcement support and becomes a substantive cross-domain restrictive strategy^{3,4}.

The same logic applies to shadow-fleet targeting. If one looked only at oil revenues, shipping costs, or trade continuity, one might classify these measures as merely economic or transport-related. If one looked only at listings and prohibitions, one might classify them as legal. If one looked only at operator alerts and due diligence, one might classify them as compliance matters. Yet in reality, shadow-fleet restrictions function by combining vessel listings, port access bans, insurance caution, price-cap enforcement, routing intelligence, reputational contagion, safety concerns, and private-sector screening. Their coercive effect depends on all of these interacting layers. The Council’s 17th-package press materials and the Commission’s parallel statement underline both the scale of vessel targeting and the intention to make Russia’s oil exports more complex and costly through coordinated action. The U.S.-led Price Cap Coalition advisory further shows that maritime risk, compliance, insurance, legality, and reputational concerns are treated together rather than separately. This is the classic profile of a hybrid instrument. The measure cannot be understood adequately within only one of the older categories because its operational logic is inherently networked and cross-domain^{5,6,7}.

By contrast, not every service restriction is hybrid. Part Five already analyses restrictions on legal advisory and arbitration-related services as legal sanctions because their doctrinal significance concerns legal process, access to representation, exemptions, and the rule-of-law boundaries of sanctions governance. A ban on a specified service may also have economic effects, because services are inputs into business activity. However, the measure should not be classified as hybrid unless its principal object and mechanism concern the disruption of a wider enabling network across several domains at once. A standalone prohibition on certain services, even if important, remains primarily legal-economic. It becomes hybrid only when it is embedded in a broader architecture aimed at crippling a support ecosystem composed of documentation, consultancy, route engineering, ownership opacity, certification, and cross-border facilitation. This boundary is important to preserve because otherwise the hybrid part would absorb substantial portions of Part Five and Part Three. The test, again, is

¹ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

³ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025, May 20). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions*.

⁶ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁷ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

constitutive cross-domainity rather than collateral breadth of effect. A service ban can be a component of hybrid sanctions without itself exhausting the concept of hybridity^{1,2}.

Another useful boundary test concerns the place of private-sector responses. Private risk aversion, de-risking, and over-compliance are present across many sanction types. They are central to Part Seven because compliance is one of the principal transmission mechanisms through which law becomes economic and institutional effect, and because compliance systems can themselves generate fragmentation, excessive caution, and uneven burdens. A measure should therefore not be called hybrid merely because it triggers private withdrawal. If private withdrawal is simply the implementation reaction to a political, economic, or legal measure, the issue belongs mainly in the compliance analysis. Only when private-sector responses are woven together with service denial, routing instability, information asymmetry reduction, and network targeting so that they form the measure’s operational core should the instrument be treated as hybrid. This distinction helps separate implementation effects from substantive cross-domain design. It also prevents the compliance section from being hollowed out by the hybrid category. In short, private-sector reaction is a necessary but not sufficient indicator of hybridity. It becomes sufficient only when combined with an enabling-system target structure.

The report’s architecture offers a helpful way to operationalise these distinctions. Part Two is primarily concerned with signalling and political governance. Part Three is primarily concerned with structural economic pressure. Part Five is primarily concerned with normative precision, rights boundaries, and legal-operational defensibility. Part Seven, by the report’s own design, will address implementation capacity, private-sector transmission, and enforcement-related governance. Part Six should therefore reserve itself for measures and mechanisms that cannot be adequately understood within any one of those frameworks because they operate by attacking adaptive infrastructures that span them. This means that Part Six is not a residual category for everything complicated. Nor is it an umbrella category for “all sanctions under modern conditions.” It is a tightly delimited analytical field addressing cross-domain restrictive architectures whose target is the enabling environment of sanctioned conduct. If this discipline is maintained, the report’s six-part classification remains both differentiated and coherent. If it is not maintained, the hybrid concept becomes inflationary and analytically weak.

For analytical clarity, the distinction can be synthesised in the following matrix.

Table 6.1.3-1. Analytical criteria for distinguishing hybrid sanctions from political, economic, legal, and compliance sanctions

Category	Primary object of restriction	Dominant mechanism	Main unit of analysis	Typical evidence base	When mixed effects do not make it hybrid
Political sanctions	Status, legitimacy, representation, diplomatic room for manoeuvre	Signalling, delegitimation, exclusion, non-normalisation	States, elites, institutions, diplomatic relations	Political rationale, listings logic, diplomatic practice, external signalling	When operational spillovers are secondary to signalling and status alteration
Economic sanctions	Value flows, revenues, trade, finance, technologies, sectoral capacity	Direct restriction of exchange, inputs, capital, or market access	Sectors, revenue streams, trade flows, financial channels	Trade, banking, industrial, macroeconomic, price, and sectoral data	When logistics or compliance effects merely amplify a direct economic ban
Legal sanctions	Normative scope of prohibition,	Doctrinal restriction, authorisation,	Provisions, regulations, derogations, case	Legal texts, case law, derogation practice,	When cross-domain effects follow from the law but are not

¹ European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

² Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (consolidated version of 20 July 2025).

Category	Primary object of restriction	Dominant mechanism	Main unit of analysis	Typical evidence base	When mixed effects do not make it hybrid
	derogation, review, liability	judicial defensibility, legal architecture	law, competent-authority powers	interpretative guidance	its principal analytical focus
Compliance sanctions	Implementation pathways, operator behaviour, screening and enforcement quality	Due diligence, monitoring, reporting, alerting, internal controls, enforcement coordination	Firms, NCAs, compliance systems, enforcement workflows	Guidance, FAQs, typologies, alerts, enforcement cases, implementation patterns	When the issue is translation of rules into behaviour rather than substantive network disruption
Hybrid sanctions	Enabling systems: routes, facilitators, proxy structures, service ecosystems, opacity mechanisms, adaptive infrastructures	Cross-domain interaction among law, markets, logistics, services, information, and private risk governance	Networks, chains, nodes, intermediaries, infrastructures	Routing data, ownership opacity, facilitation networks, service fragmentation, circumvention typologies	Only where cross-domain interaction is constitutive of the measure's coercive force rather than a secondary consequence

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of the report's internal analytical architecture, official EU institutional materials, EU legal acts, and coalition enforcement guidance

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.
- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.
- European Commission. (2025). *Guidance documents*.
- European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.
- European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.
- European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *A peaceful tool of diplomacy*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *European Union sanctions*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.
- Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (consolidated version of 20 July 2025).
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

The matrix shows that the boundary question is not solved by counting effects but by identifying the dominant architecture of pressure. This is especially important for a report such as the present one, which deliberately combines differentiated chapters with an overarching cumulative logic. If the reader is given no stable criteria for classification, the same measure could be redescribed in incompatible ways across Parts Two, Three, Five, Six, and Seven. That would weaken comparison, distort effectiveness assessment, and blur the logic of recommendations. The dominant-mechanism test, the primary-object test, the network unit-of-analysis test, and the constitutive cross-domainity test together provide a workable solution. They do not eliminate all grey zones, but they reduce conceptual arbitrariness to an acceptable minimum. In policy terms, this is preferable to false purity on the one hand and taxonomic inflation on the other. Hybrid sanctions should therefore be treated as a narrow but strategically significant category within the wider sanctions' architecture.

A final conclusion follows from the foregoing analysis. A hybrid instrument in this report should be defined as a restrictive measure, or tightly integrated cluster of measures, whose principal coercive effect depends on coordinated disruption of an enabling network through interaction among legal rules, logistical pathways, service ecosystems, market responses, informational visibility, and private-sector risk governance. Measures that are primarily aimed at signalling, direct exchange restriction, doctrinal prohibition, or implementation management should remain classified respectively as political, economic, legal, or compliance sanctions, even when they generate wider spillovers. The existence of mixed effects is normal in a mature sanctions regime and does not by itself justify hybrid classification. Hybrid status is warranted only where cross-domain interaction is constitutive of the instrument's force and where the enabling system itself is the object of pressure. This definition preserves the internal architecture of the report, clarifies the relationship of Part Six to Parts Two, Three, Five, and Seven, and provides a stable basis for the subsequent review of anti-circumvention measures, shadow-fleet restrictions, technology-service ecosystem controls, and facilitation infrastructures. In methodological terms, it allows the report to remain integrated without becoming conceptually blurred. In policy terms, it helps identify where future sanctions design should focus not only on prohibiting acts, but on destabilising the systems that keep those acts feasible under conditions of prolonged adaptation^{1,2,3}.

6.1.4. Targeting Logic, Attribution Difficulties, and Legitimacy Constraints

The targeting logic of hybrid sanctions differs from that of more classical sectoral measures because the object of pressure is not only a revenue stream, a market segment, or a legally defined counterparty, but the enabling system that allows restricted activity to continue under adaptive conditions. Once sanctions move into a mature phase, the main analytical problem ceases to be the existence of a direct Russia-facing transaction in the abstract. The real problem becomes the architecture of substitution through which the same economic, technological, or logistical effect is reproduced by other means. In that environment, pressure directed only at a single sector is often too narrow, because the target can reroute activity through intermediaries, non-transparent ownership chains, service providers, or transport infrastructures located outside the immediate point of prohibition. This is why the EU's anti-circumvention framework now addresses complex financial schemes, falsification of the nature or origin of goods, and reliance on third-country jurisdictions, rather than treating sanctions evasion as a marginal compliance anomaly. The targeting logic is therefore systemic and relational rather than simply bilateral. Hybrid measures are designed to reach the nodes that preserve functionality when direct channels are narrowed. In policy terms, this means that the sanction no longer asks only who is acting, but who is enabling, insulating, disguising, transporting, financing, certifying, or operationally normalising that action. That shift explains why hybrid measures so often focus on networks of intermediaries, routes, service ecosystems, and facilitating structures rather than on one sector alone^{4,5}.

This targeting logic follows directly from the structure of Russian adaptation since 2022. The current regime is not dealing only with open, formal trade and finance, but with rerouting, concealment, ship-to-ship transfers, shadow fleets, proxy traders, and fragmented service arrangements. Under such conditions, a purely sectoral sanction often leaves intact the operational chain that can reconstruct the prohibited outcome in altered form. A restriction on one bank can be circumvented through another payment pathway; a restriction on one service can be replaced through a lower-trust provider; a ban on one direct route can be mitigated through a more circuitous logistics chain. Hybrid sanctions respond by moving the enforcement frontier outward, from the immediate transaction to the wider support ecology that enables that transaction to remain viable. The Consilium sanctions page now explicitly

¹ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

³ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks*.

frames anti-circumvention measures in terms of techniques such as complex financial schemes and third-country jurisdictions, and not merely in terms of straightforward legal breach. That official framing matters because it reveals the conceptual object of current EU practice. The target is no longer simply a sectoral flow, but the resilience of the network that sustains the flow. The broader and more adaptive the circumvention pattern becomes, the more hybrid the targeting logic must become in response^{1,2}.

For that reason, intermediary actors occupy a central place in hybrid targeting. In the older model of sanctions analysis, intermediaries could appear as secondary or derivative figures, significant mainly for enforcement. In the hybrid model, they become primary targets because they are often the very mechanism through which restricted capability is kept operational. A sanctions regime that ignores intermediaries may successfully prohibit formal dealings while leaving adaptation networks substantially intact. The EU's contemporary approach increasingly recognises this by imposing sanctions on persons and entities involved in circumvention, including those supporting Russia through third-country structures and those linked to the shadow fleet. What matters here is not only the legal identity of the intermediary, but the intermediary's systemic function. A company, trader, port user, financial operator, or corporate service provider may not be the original strategic actor, yet it may be indispensable to the continuity of restricted activity. Targeting logic therefore follows functional relevance rather than simple proximity to the Russian state. This is one of the decisive features that makes hybrid measures analytically distinct from narrower sectoral restrictions^{3,4}.

Routes are targeted for analogous reasons. A route is not merely a line of transport between origin and destination; it is an infrastructure of possibility, combining carriers, insurers, ports, customs documents, transshipment points, schedules, and tolerated risk assumptions. If the route remains available, a surprisingly wide range of otherwise restricted activity can still be conducted in altered form. That is why the EU has moved towards bans on port access, restrictions on service provision to vessels, and transaction bans involving Russian ports, locks, and airports used for circumvention of the oil price cap. These are not simply transport penalties. They are measures aimed at the continuity of the logistical environment itself. By narrowing route availability and contaminating route legitimacy, the Union increases cost, delay, opacity, and operational fragility even where some movement remains technically possible. The targeting logic is therefore one of infrastructural compression rather than merely transactional prohibition. Routes become objects of pressure because they are the connective tissue of circumvention^{5,6}.

The shadow fleet is the clearest practical illustration of this logic. On the current Consilium sanctions page, the EU states that access to EU ports has been banned for vessels that are part of Russia's shadow fleet, including those engaged in ship-to-ship transfers, those suspected of breaching sanctions, and those suspected of illegally interfering with or disabling their automatic identification system when transporting Russian oil. The same page notes that almost 600 vessels have been targeted so far, while the 17th package press materials describe the designation of 189 additional vessels, bringing the then total to 342 in that package cycle alone. These are not classical sectoral sanctions in the narrow sense. They are hybrid measures directed at the maritime system of concealment, reflagging, route opacity, and insurer-risk displacement that makes sanctions evasion scalable. The updated Price Cap Coalition advisory reinforces this by treating the maritime oil trade as an environment of intertwined safety, environmental, economic, reputational, financial, logistical, and legal risks. In other words, vessels are targeted not simply because they transport oil, but because they are nodes in a broader evasion

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

architecture. Hybrid targeting thus follows network centrality and evasion functionality, not only commodity category^{1,2,3}.

Service ecosystems are targeted for similar structural reasons. Modern trade and finance depend not only on physical movement and bank transfers but on advisory, technical, software, compliance, classification, engineering, audit, and verification services. A sanctioned actor that loses direct access to these services does not simply lose convenience. It loses reliability, legal comfort, coordination quality, and access to high-trust international operating standards. The Commission's guidance on the provision of services and its broader sanctions FAQ architecture make clear that the EU treats these functions as operationally significant rather than secondary. In hybrid logic, service providers are not peripheral helpers but part of the enabling structure that allows sanctioned business to remain governable and scalable. Restricting a service ecosystem therefore weakens substitution capacity in a way that pure commodity denial may not. This is especially true when the targeted side is forced to rely on less reputable, less experienced, or more legally exposed alternatives. Hybrid measures accordingly target service environments because they are the organisational substrate of adaptation^{4,5}.

Facilitating structures occupy an even broader category. These include not only corporate intermediaries and service firms, but also ownership-concealment devices, payment infrastructures, financial messaging systems, customs and documentation channels, and third-country subsidiaries or partners that reproduce a prohibited outcome at one remove from the primary restriction. The anti-circumvention section of the Consilium page now explicitly notes that EU parent companies are required to ensure that their third-country subsidiaries do not take part in activities resulting in an outcome that sanctions seek to prevent. The same section refers to due-diligence obligations for battlefield goods, the "no-Russia" clause, notification requirements for large transfers of funds, and restrictions addressing crypto-related circumvention risk. These are all examples of measures aimed not at one sector as such, but at the enabling mechanisms through which restrictions can be neutralised in practice. Hybrid targeting thus follows the path of practical substitution. The more important a structure is for concealment, rerouting, or indirect benefit, the more likely it becomes an appropriate target. This explains why hybrid measures often look diffuse: they are not diffused by accident, but by design, because the object of pressure is itself diffuse^{6,7}.

That functional targeting logic, however, immediately creates attribution difficulties. In a direct sanctions case, attribution may be relatively straightforward: a listed bank, a named exporter, or a specified goods category can be linked to a clear legal prohibition. In hybrid cases, the relevant conduct is frequently indirect, layered, and partly inferential. The question is rarely whether one actor openly declared an intention to circumvent sanctions. More often, the question is whether a cluster of behaviours, commercial patterns, route anomalies, ownership arrangements, or service links is sufficient to establish that an actor forms part of a facilitating structure. The Commission has repeatedly noted that circumvention techniques are increasingly complex and opaque, while the Consilium page refers to complex financial schemes and falsification of the nature or origin of traded goods. This means that attribution in hybrid sanctions often depends on red-flag constellations rather than on a single conclusive fact. Such environments complicate both enforcement and legitimacy, because the strongest operational targets are frequently those for which the causal chain is functionally compelling

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025, May 20). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions*.

³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁴ European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Provision of services*. Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

⁵ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus' involvement in it*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁷ Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (consolidated version of 20 July 2025).

but evidentially dispersed. Hybrid targeting is therefore analytically necessary, but never evidentially simple^{1,2}.

Beneficial ownership is one of the most persistent sources of attribution difficulty. If control is exercised through layered entities, nominee arrangements, family associations, shell structures, or opaque jurisdictions, the formal legal counterparty may reveal very little about the real allocation of benefit and influence. Directive (EU) 2024/1226 responds to this reality by criminalising conduct linked to the concealment of funds and economic resources that should be frozen and by strengthening cooperation and information exchange between authorities. The Commission's enhanced due-diligence guidance similarly frames circumvention in terms of recurring risk assessment, evolving techniques, and the need to understand business-partner structures rather than rely on surface documentation. In hybrid targeting, therefore, attribution cannot be reduced to name matching. It requires pattern recognition across ownership, control, benefit, routing, documentation, and transaction context. This is precisely why hybrid measures tend to be intelligence-intensive and why they place such heavy demands on both public authorities and private operators. The legal object may be a person or entity, but the evidentiary problem is often a network hidden behind that person or entity^{3,4}.

Attribution is also difficult because hybrid sanctions operate in spaces of mixed-use activity. The same port, vessel, adviser, payment infrastructure, or logistics corridor may serve lawful and unlawful purposes at different times or for different clients. The same intermediary may not be a dedicated sanctions-evasion platform, yet may still facilitate circumvention through selective transactions. This raises a profound problem of calibration. If authorities wait for direct proof of intentional evasion in every case, many hybrid measures will arrive too late to matter. If they move too early on the basis of weak indicators, they risk overreach, false positives, and legal contestability. The OFAC-led coalition advisory reflects this reality by speaking in the language of risk exposure and best practices rather than pretending that every suspicious pattern can be reduced to perfect evidential certainty. Hybrid targeting therefore often proceeds through managed uncertainty rather than absolute knowledge. That may be operationally rational, but it also explains why legitimacy constraints are more acute in Part Six than in simpler forms of sectoral restriction^{5,6}.

Third-country involvement further complicates attribution. The EU's effectiveness page states clearly that tackling circumvention through third-country jurisdictions has become a key priority, while the sanctions timeline repeatedly highlights cooperation with third countries and measures against entities outside Russia that directly support the war or facilitate circumvention. From an operational perspective, this is inevitable: the geography of sanctions evasion is transnational. From a legitimacy perspective, however, such targeting is delicate. It can be criticised as extraterritorial in political discourse even where the legal obligations are framed in terms of EU jurisdiction, EU operators, access to EU services, or the use of EU-linked infrastructures. It can also generate diplomatic friction with states that are not formal parties to the sanctions' coalition. Hybrid targeting therefore depends not only on evidence and law, but on careful framing of jurisdictional nexus and functional justification. The more a measure reaches beyond a direct Russia–EU dyad, the more important it becomes to show that the target is not a politically convenient proxy but a demonstrable enabling node^{7,8}.

¹ European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

³ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

⁴ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁶ European Commission. (2024, February 19). *Guidance on due diligence*.

⁷ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁸ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

These evidentiary difficulties feed directly into the question of proportionality. Hybrid measures are often defended precisely because they target the support system rather than only the primary act, but that same breadth can create the perception that the sanction is moving too far from the original objectionable conduct. If a vessel, company, service provider, or associated person is targeted not because of a direct contribution to aggression but because of its place in a facilitating network, then the normative case must explain why that link is sufficiently material to justify the resulting burden. General Court case law confirms that restrictive measures may extend to associated persons and entities in order to prevent circumvention and to increase pressure on the Russian authorities, but it also reaffirms that legal certainty, foreseeability, and proportionality remain applicable principles. The broader the targeting criterion becomes, the more important it is that objective criteria exist to discipline discretion. Hybrid sanctions are therefore strongest when their breadth is functional rather than speculative. Proportionality in this field does not require a direct causal link to the war in every case, but it does require a credible relationship between the measure and the prevention of circumvention or the disruption of war-sustaining capability^{1,2}.

Legal certainty is a related but distinct constraint. Hybrid targeting often proceeds by criteria such as association, facilitation, indirect benefit, or contribution to circumvention. Those criteria are operationally necessary because adaptation networks rarely announce themselves in explicit legal form. Yet they can also appear open-textured to affected parties. The judgment in *SBK Art v Council* is instructive here because it states that the principle of legal certainty requires EU legislation to be clear, precise, and foreseeable, while also holding that the association criterion limits the Council's discretion through objective criteria ensuring the degree of foreseeability required by EU law. In the same judgment, the General Court emphasised that the danger of circumvention through associated persons helps explain why measures can legitimately extend beyond actors directly linked to the situation in Ukraine. The implication is not that breadth and certainty are incompatible, but that breadth must be translated into administrable and reviewable criteria. Hybrid measures therefore require especially careful drafting and statement of reasons. Without that discipline, functional necessity can too easily drift into contestable over-inclusion³.

The problem of mistaken identity illustrates why legitimacy in hybrid sanctions cannot be reduced to strategic utility. The Council's 2024 Best Practices document devotes specific attention to claims concerning mistaken identity and stresses the need for further identifiers, cooperation among Member States and institutions, and transparent procedures to refute false positive matches. It also states that a transparent and effective de-listing procedure is essential to the credibility and legitimacy of restrictive measures and that de-listing is appropriate wherever the listing criteria are no longer met. These principles are especially important in hybrid cases, because network-oriented targeting often widens the circle of potentially affected actors. As the object of pressure shifts from direct perpetrators to associated networks, the risk of factual misidentification, outdated information, or insufficiently specific identifiers rises. Legitimacy therefore depends not only on correct strategic design, but on correct reversible administration. A hybrid regime that lacks robust correction mechanisms may still generate pressure, but it will do so at mounting legal and political cost⁴.

Humanitarian and civilian-impact considerations impose an additional layer of legitimacy discipline. The EEAS legality page states that EU sanctions never target the civilian population and that food, medicine, and emergency supplies do not fall under EU sanctions, while noting the existence of derogations and exemptions for humanitarian action and basic needs. The Council Best Practices document likewise emphasises humanitarian authorisations, priority handling where appropriate, and coordination in the granting of derogations. In hybrid sanctions, these safeguards become particularly important because network and infrastructure measures can affect broader operating environments rather than only named

¹ SBK Art 000 v Council, Case T-102/23, Judgment of the General Court of 30 April 2025.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

³ SBK Art 000 v Council, Case T-102/23, Judgment of the General Court of 30 April 2025.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

persons. A port, service ecosystem, payment channel, or logistics route may support lawful as well as unlawful activities. The more the sanction targets enabling structures, the more necessary it becomes to demonstrate that humanitarian pathways and basic civilian interests remain legally protected and administratively usable. Otherwise, the very sophistication of hybrid targeting may begin to erode its normative legitimacy. Legitimacy in this field therefore depends not only on striking the right targets, but on showing that the architecture of exceptions is genuine rather than merely formal^{1,2}.

Legitimacy also depends on the availability of judicial review. The EEAS pages on legality and sanctions types both emphasise that targeted persons and entities must have their fundamental rights respected, that they are informed of listing, that they may request de-listing, and that they may challenge their listing before the European courts. This matters particularly in hybrid sanctions because the measures often rely on relational criteria, association logic, or circumvention-risk indicators rather than on a single explicit prohibited act. Judicial review performs two functions here. It protects the rights of affected parties, and it also forces the sanctions system to maintain a defensible evidential and reasoning standard. In other words, review is not an external obstacle to effectiveness but part of long-run legitimacy. A hybrid regime without credible review would risk becoming progressively less trusted, both internally and externally. The more sophisticated the targeting logic becomes, the greater the need for equally sophisticated procedural safeguards^{3,4}.

Coalitional legitimacy is another constraint that should not be overlooked. The EEAS effectiveness page argues that sanctions work best when implemented by as many actors as possible and emphasises coordination with G7 partners and broader alignment efforts. This is not merely a question of effectiveness in the narrow sense. In hybrid sanctions, broad alignment also helps legitimise measures that reach into routes, intermediary jurisdictions, and service ecosystems extending beyond the territorial core of the sanctioning authority. Where coordination is strong, the measure appears less as unilateral regulatory ambition and more as collective defence of an agreed sanctions perimeter. Where coordination is weak, the same measure is more easily criticised as selective, geopolitical, or extraterritorial. Hybrid sanctions therefore depend for part of their legitimacy on coalition management and partner communication. Their cross-border nature requires a correspondingly wide justificatory base^{5,6}.

A further legitimacy difficulty arises from the preventive character of sanctions. The EEAS describes sanctions as preventive and non-punitive instruments that are part of a broader diplomatic approach. That description is conceptually important because hybrid measures often act before complete harm materialises or before a fully documented chain of support is publicly visible in every detail. Their rationale is not retrospective punishment but the disruption of enabling conditions. Yet this preventive logic can be difficult to communicate where affected actors insist that their own direct contribution to objectionable conduct has not been proven to the criminal-law standard. Hybrid sanctions therefore live in a tension between strategic prevention and evidential contestability. They are justified precisely because waiting for complete proof can make circumvention harder to stop, but this same rationale increases the burden on authorities to explain why preventive interference remains proportionate and reviewable. Preventive logic can strengthen hybrid sanctions operationally, but only if matched by high standards of reasoning and transparency^{7,8}.

In that sense, hybrid targeting should be understood as an exercise in calibrated relational pressure. It is broader than classic sectoral sanctions because the object of concern is broader. It is evidentially

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

² Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

³ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *What types of sanctions are in place*.

⁵ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁷ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *A peaceful tool of diplomacy*.

⁸ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

harder because adaptation systems are deliberately opaque. And it is more legitimacy-sensitive because it often acts on the basis of network function, association, or circumvention risk rather than on one simple front-end act. These features do not weaken the case for hybrid measures; on the contrary, they explain why such measures have become central in the Russia regime. But they do mean that success depends on a more exacting balance of effectiveness, proof, proportionality, transparency, and review than in many other sanction types. Hybrid measures are therefore strongest when they remain tightly connected to demonstrable enabling functions and when correction mechanisms remain active and credible. The real risk is not that hybrid targeting is conceptually unsound, but that it may become analytically or administratively over-extended if its legitimacy constraints are treated as secondary^{1,2,3}.

For analytical clarity, the main relationships between targeting logic, attribution difficulty, and legitimacy constraints can be summarised as follows.

Table 6.1.4-1. Targeting logic, attribution difficulties, and legitimacy constraints in hybrid sanctions

Target object	Why hybrid sanctions focus on it	Main attribution difficulty	Main legitimacy constraint	Analytical implication
Intermediary entities and facilitators	They preserve restricted capability through indirect trade, finance, procurement, and service chains	Functional involvement is often clearer than direct legal culpability	Need to show material enabling role rather than guilt by association	Classification should rest on network function, not merely formal proximity
Routes, ports, locks, airports, and vessels	They are the connective infrastructure of circumvention and rerouting	Evidence is dispersed across shipping data, routing anomalies, transshipments, and service records	Risk of affecting lawful mixed-use transport and third-country actors	Route targeting must be accompanied by clear evidential indicators and exceptions
Service ecosystems	Advisory, software, technical, compliance, and maritime services sustain adaptation capacity	Support may be indirect, modular, and partly substitutable	Breadth may appear over-expansive if service relevance is not carefully reasoned	Service targeting is strongest when linked to demonstrable capability sustainment
Ownership and opacity structures	Concealment of control and benefit is central to sanctions evasion	Beneficial ownership and indirect benefit are often difficult to prove conclusively	High risk of mistaken identity, outdated information, or insufficient identifiers	Strong de-listing, review, and correction procedures are indispensable
Third-country subsidiaries and partner jurisdictions	Many circumvention patterns rely on geographic relocation rather than legal compliance	Jurisdictional nexus and knowing facilitation may be contested	Measures may be criticised politically as extraterritorial if poorly framed	Coalition coordination and precise legal hooks increase legitimacy
Associated persons and network-linked actors	Network pressure may require widening the circle to prevent circumvention	Linkage may be real in functional terms but not direct in transactional terms	Proportionality and legal certainty become especially salient	Association-based targeting must rely on objective and foreseeable criteria

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, EU legal acts, EU best-practice guidance, coalition maritime-enforcement guidance, and cited case law

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

³ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

- Council of the European Union. (2025, May 20). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions*.
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.
- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.
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- Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (consolidated version of 20 July 2025).
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The matrix shows that the core issue is not whether hybrid sanctions are broader than classical measures; that point is already evident. The real issue is whether their broader reach can remain evidentially disciplined and normatively legitimate. A measure directed at an enabling system will almost always face a more complex proof structure than a measure directed at a single named transaction or sector. That is the price of moving closer to the real adaptation pathways used by the target. However, legitimacy can still be preserved if targeting criteria remain objective, if correction mechanisms remain open, if humanitarian and civilian safeguards remain operational, and if the public rationale links each measure to a demonstrable facilitating function rather than to vague suspicion. Hybrid sanctions therefore require a higher standard of administrative craftsmanship than simpler sanctions, not a lower one. In this sense, effectiveness and legitimacy are not opposing values in Part Six; they are mutually dependent conditions of durable pressure^{1,2,3}.

A final conclusion follows. Hybrid measures are directed at intermediaries, routes, service ecosystems, and facilitating structures because those are the loci where adaptation actually occurs once direct sanctions bite. They are therefore structurally more appropriate than purely sectoral tools for late-phase anti-circumvention strategy. Yet their operational sophistication comes with correspondingly higher burdens of proof, justification, and procedural fairness. The more the EU relies on association, facilitation, route-based risk, and network function, the more carefully it must preserve legal certainty, proportionality, de-listing capacity, humanitarian safeguards, and judicial review. The strategic advantage of hybrid sanctions lies in their ability to destabilise the support systems of sanctioned conduct. Their strategic vulnerability lies in the possibility that insufficiently evidenced or insufficiently calibrated use could weaken the very legitimacy that makes sustained sanctions pressure politically and legally durable. For the purposes of this report, hybrid targeting should therefore be understood as necessary, but legitimacy-constrained, network disruption^{4,5,6}.

¹ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

³ SBK Art 000 v Council, Case T-102/23, Judgment of the General Court of 30 April 2025.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁵ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *A peaceful tool of diplomacy*.

⁶ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

6.2. Review of Hybrid Instruments

6.2.1. Anti-Circumvention Measures and Controls on Intermediary Jurisdictions

Anti-circumvention measures should be treated as one of the most distinctively hybrid components of the EU sanctions regime against Russia because they are not limited to prohibiting a primary act; instead, they are designed to interrupt the adaptive pathways through which a prohibited act is reconstructed via other channels. In the current sanctions architecture, this means that the object of restriction is not only a shipment, a payment, or a named counterparty, but also the surrounding system of contractual, logistical, financial, corporate, and jurisdictional arrangements that keeps restricted activity operational. The EEAS has stated explicitly that tackling possible circumvention attempts, including through third-country jurisdictions, has become a key priority in order to ensure the full effectiveness of EU sanctions and guarantee that sanctioned goods do not reach Russia. That formulation is analytically important because it frames circumvention not as an accidental defect at the margins of the regime, but as a central battlefield of sanctions governance. Once that premise is accepted, anti-circumvention measures cease to be merely ancillary enforcement devices and become substantive restrictive instruments in their own right. They are hybrid because they combine legal norms, trade monitoring, contractual controls, due diligence obligations, private-sector screening, and differentiated treatment of third-country exposure. They also operate at several levels simultaneously: the EU legal order, the conduct of Union operators, the behaviour of subsidiaries outside the Union, and the risk environment of intermediary jurisdictions. In that sense, 6.2.1 does not address a narrow technical appendage to the sanctions' regime. It addresses one of the regime's principal adaptive innovations^{1,2}.

The rise of anti-circumvention measures reflects a broader shift in the empirical pattern of Russian adaptation. By 2023, the EU openly acknowledged that abnormal increases were appearing in third countries' imports of goods banned by the EU, including high-technology items. In a notable EEAS clarification, Josep Borrell stressed that the issue was not simply whether third countries were acting lawfully under their own legal orders, but whether EU operators, directly or indirectly, were enabling the rerouting of banned products and thereby undermining the effectiveness of restrictive measures. This distinction matters greatly. The anti-circumvention problem is not exhausted by the formal legal status of third-country conduct; it is located in the functional relationship between that conduct and EU-origin prohibitions. In practical terms, this means that intermediary jurisdictions become relevant when they serve as bridges between prohibited EU-origin activity and Russian end-use. The EU's response has therefore increasingly targeted not only the "what" of sanctions—the goods, services, or funds—but the "how" and "through whom" of continued access. Controls on intermediary jurisdictions are thus better understood as controls on rerouting ecologies. They are hybrid precisely because they are directed at chains of adaptation rather than at one discrete act^{3,4}.

The 11th sanctions package marked the decisive institutional turning point in this regard. The EEAS described that package as introducing a new anti-circumvention tool allowing the EU to restrict the sale, supply, transfer, or export of specified sanctioned goods and technology to certain third countries where there is a particularly high and persistent risk of circumvention. Conceptually, this was a major step. The EU moved beyond the assumption that sanctions effectiveness could be protected only through better enforcement of direct prohibitions, and instead created a framework for acting against high-risk external transmission channels themselves. The importance of that move lies less in the frequency with which the tool must be used and more in the change of strategic posture it embodies. The anti-circumvention instrument signalled that intermediary geographies had become part of the sanctions object. It also

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

demonstrated that sanctions policy had entered a stage where route substitution, jurisdictional arbitrage, and proxy trade were treated as systemic issues rather than marginal leakages. The move from direct transaction control to jurisdiction-sensitive circumvention control is one of the clearest indicators that EU sanctions against Russia have matured into a hybrid regime^{1,2}.

Yet the EU has simultaneously tried to keep this anti-circumvention turn within a politically defensible frame. The same 2023 EEAS clarification emphasised that EU sanctions are not extraterritorial and apply only to European entities, and that any effort to combat circumvention through third countries is therefore delicate and must avoid antagonising states that are not subject to European law. This caution is not rhetorical surplus. It is constitutive of the architecture. Controls on intermediary jurisdictions must be strong enough to affect rerouting, but not so crudely framed that they collapse into a politically self-defeating claim to universal jurisdiction. As a result, the EU has tended to build anti-circumvention controls through nexus-based techniques: obligations imposed on Union operators, restrictions linked to access to EU-origin goods or services, contractual clauses binding third-country counterparties, due diligence requirements attached to exports, and transaction bans on institutions using Russian circumvention infrastructure. This design is central to understanding why EU anti-circumvention measures are hybrid rather than simply extraterritorial. They operate through the governance of EU-linked economic relationships rather than through a direct assertion of legal power over the whole world. In practice, that makes them more administratively sustainable and politically more defensible, even if it also makes them slower and more dependent on operator compliance^{3,4}.

A central pillar of this architecture is the so-called “no re-export to Russia” clause in Article 12g of Regulation 833/2014. According to the Commission’s dedicated FAQ, Article 12g aims to combat the circumvention of EU export bans, more specifically the situation where goods exported to third countries are re-exported to Russia. This is a paradigmatic hybrid instrument. It does not prohibit only the initial export from the Union. It requires Union operators to project sanctions logic into their contracts with third-country commercial counterparties, thereby turning private contract law into an anti-circumvention transmission mechanism. In effect, the EU makes the Union operator responsible not only for its own direct transaction, but also for creating legally meaningful downstream barriers against onward re-export to Russia. The anti-circumvention effect thus arises through the interaction of public law, private contracting, and downstream commercial enforcement. This is not merely a trade rule with spillover consequences. It is a deliberately hybrid measure that externalises part of the sanctions’ perimeter into the contractual architecture of cross-border commerce^{5,6}.

The legal design of Article 12g also reveals how carefully the EU has tried to balance control and operability. Recital material associated with the 2024 amendment to Regulation 833/2014 states that, for contracts concluded before 19 December 2023, the obligation under Article 12g may be considered met if the contract contains a general clause prohibiting exportation and re-exportation of the relevant goods to jurisdictions targeted by Union restrictive measures and sets out adequate remedies in the event of breach. This is significant because it shows that the EU is not merely demanding a symbolic declaration. It expects sanctions logic to be embedded in the remedial structure of the contract itself. In other words, anti-circumvention is not framed only as a question of operator goodwill or abstract due care. It is framed as a matter of commercial architecture: clause design, breach consequences, allocative risk, and contractual discipline. This is one of the clearest examples in the Russia regime of how hybrid sanctions work by reorganising the legal infrastructure of trade rather than only banning

¹ European External Action Service. (2023, June 22). *EU adopts 11th package of sanctions against Russia for its continued illegal war against Ukraine*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

³ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2024, December 18). *“No re-export to Russia” clause*.

⁶ European Commission. (2024, February 22). *Frequently asked questions concerning the “No re-export to Russia” clause and sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

items. The Union is, in effect, requiring operators to build sanctions resilience into private legal instruments that govern third-country relations^{1,2}.

The 2024 amendments went further by widening the anti-circumvention concept beyond the simple re-export of goods. The official Journal recital states that Union operators must contractually prohibit their commercial counterparts in third countries from using, or allowing the use of, transferred intellectual property rights, trade secrets, or protected information in connection with common high priority items to be sold, supplied, or exported to Russia or for use in Russia. This is analytically important because it shows the EU moving from commodity control to knowledge-control and control-over-use. Anti-circumvention thus extends not only to the movement of physical goods but to enabling intangibles that can support Russian military or industrial capacity. This is a textbook hybrid move. It reaches into the interface between export control, contract design, intellectual property, and technology governance. It also indicates that intermediary-jurisdiction controls are no longer confined to obvious trade-routing issues. They increasingly seek to interrupt broader transfer-of-capability mechanisms that might operate through licensing, technical documentation, know-how, or other non-physical assets. The anti-circumvention regime thereby becomes more sophisticated and also more dependent on private-law discipline³.

A second major pillar is Article 12gb, which introduces enhanced due diligence obligations for operators manufacturing and/or trading with common high priority (CHP) items. The Commission's 2025 FAQ states that the purpose of this measure is to strengthen the due diligence of EU operators in response to the problem of re-exportation of CHP items. The measure applies not only to Union-based actors trading those items, but also—crucially—to legal persons, entities, and bodies outside the Union that are owned or controlled by EU actors, unless excluded by the Regulation. This is an exceptionally important development for the architecture of anti-circumvention. It means that the EU is no longer satisfied with controlling only the immediate outbound export from the Union. It is now requiring risk-identification and mitigation mechanisms to travel outward through corporate control relationships into third-country structures. This is a quintessential control on intermediary jurisdictions, but it is done through ownership nexus rather than through direct extra-territorial legislation. In operational terms, the measure converts the corporate group into a sanctions-governance channel^{4,5}.

The CHP due-diligence regime is also notable for its selective geography. The relevant FAQ states that Article 12gb does not apply to operators that only sell, supply, transfer, or export the relevant items within the Union or to partner countries listed in Annex VIII to Regulation 833/2014. This differentiation is significant. The EU is not treating all third-country destinations as identical risk environments. Instead, it is building a risk-stratified approach in which certain partner countries are effectively recognised as lower-risk environments for anti-circumvention purposes, while other jurisdictions remain subject to tighter controls. This approach is one of the most sophisticated features of the regime. It avoids the bluntness of a universalised suspicion model while still preserving a strong regulatory basis for targeting higher-risk re-export corridors. In practice, it also gives the EU leverage to structure external alignment through incentives, trust gradations, and functional partnership. Controls on intermediary jurisdictions thus become differentiated rather than undirected. That differentiation helps preserve proportionality and administrative efficiency while still supporting a network-based anti-circumvention strategy^{6,7}.

¹ European Commission. (2024, February 22). *Frequently asked questions concerning the “No re-export to Russia” clause and sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

² Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

³ Ibid.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

⁵ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

⁶ European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

⁷ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

Another important development is the move from identifying circumvention patterns to prohibiting specific trade outcomes that arise through third-country transformation. The current Consilium sanctions page states that the EU bans imports of refined petroleum products made from Russian oil and coming from third countries. This is a highly revealing evolution. In 2023, the EEAS had described this issue as a practical and moral dilemma: once Russian oil is refined in a third country, the resulting products are legally treated as originating there, yet in practical terms such trade can undermine the sanctions regime. The later shift towards explicit restriction shows how anti-circumvention can evolve from problem recognition to direct control over intermediary-jurisdiction trade channels. This is hybrid not only because it addresses indirect Russian revenue exposure, but because it targets a transformed output rather than the original input. It thereby attacks the rerouting-and-processing chain as a sanctions-relevant structure. In methodological terms, it confirms that intermediary-jurisdiction controls are not confined to goods “in transit”. They can also address downstream commodity laundering through transformation processes outside Russia^{1,2}.

Transport controls have likewise been used in anti-circumvention mode. The 2024 amendment to the sanctions’ regime states that, in order to minimise the risk of circumvention, Union operators that are owned 25% or more by a Russian natural or legal person should be prohibited from becoming a road transport undertaking or from transporting goods by road in the Union, including in transit, subject to specified exceptions. This is a notable example of the EU targeting intermediary capacity rather than only final destination. The measure does not merely ask whether the transported goods are prohibited. It asks whether the transport undertaking itself constitutes a circumvention vulnerability because of its ownership structure and role in the logistical chain. That is a strongly hybrid logic. Legal status, ownership transparency, routing capacity, and transit infrastructure are combined into one restrictive technique. The measure also requires road transport undertakings to disclose their ownership structure to national competent authorities upon request, thereby linking anti-circumvention to transparency obligations and investigatory access. This kind of control shows how the regime increasingly targets the organisational carriers of rerouting, not only the goods being rerouted³.

Financial connectivity has also become a central site of controls on intermediary jurisdictions. The 16th package introduced, for the first time, a transaction ban on credit or financial institutions established outside Russia that use the System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) of the Central Bank of Russia, explicitly identifying SPFS as a specialised financial messaging service developed to neutralise the effect of restrictive measures. This matters because it moves anti-circumvention controls into the infrastructure of signalling and settlement rather than only the front-end banking relationship. It also signals a willingness to target third-country institutions where they embed themselves in Russian substitution architecture. The current sanctions pages further indicate bans on EU operators’ engagement with the Russian “Mir” card system and the “faster payments system” (SBP), as well as transaction bans involving certain banks from third countries. Together these measures indicate a clear regulatory logic: if Russia attempts to externalise financial continuity through alternative messaging and payment ecosystems, the EU will increasingly treat those ecosystems themselves as sanctions-relevant enabling structures. Anti-circumvention therefore extends from goods and routes into financial infrastructures that facilitate the persistence of restricted activity^{4,5,6}.

Entity listings in third countries are a further component of this anti-circumvention toolkit. The Commission’s 17th-package statement notes that 31 new companies were added to the list of those providing direct or indirect support to Russia’s military-industrial complex or engaged in sanctions

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

³ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia’s full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures*.

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

circumvention, including companies established in Turkey, Vietnam, the UAE, Serbia, and Uzbekistan. The Council's corresponding statement similarly emphasises entities in Serbia, the UAE, Türkiye, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan that had been involved in the circumvention of export restrictions, including those relating to UAVs and machine tools. The significance of such listings extends beyond the individual names involved. They signal that intermediary jurisdictions are no longer treated merely as passive spaces through which circumvention happens. They are being translated into operationally differentiated risk environments in which specific firms can be isolated, tainted, or cut off where they perform enabling functions. This is not a general sanction on a third country. It is a selective, network-based intervention into the corporate nodes that make circumvention viable. Such measures therefore exemplify the EU's preference for functional targeting over broader geopolitical confrontation with non-aligned states^{1,2}.

The same logic was already visible in the 16th package. The Commission stated that the package imposed targeted export restrictions on 53 new companies supporting Russia's military-industrial complex or engaged in sanctions circumvention, including 34 companies in countries other than Russia. This shows that the EU is not waiting passively for circumvention networks to mature fully before responding. Instead, it is increasingly using listings and export-restriction extensions to destabilise intermediary corporate channels early enough to raise the cost of adaptation. That preventive character is important. Anti-circumvention in 6.2.1 is not merely reactive clean-up after leaks appear; it is increasingly structured as anticipatory disruption of the infrastructure through which future leakage would occur. The control of intermediary jurisdictions is therefore part of a forward-looking strategy of network pre-emption. This is one reason why anti-circumvention measures sit so centrally in the hybrid domain. They aim to alter the medium in which adaptation could take place, not only its already visible instances^{3,4}.

Controls on intermediary jurisdictions should therefore be understood less as territorial sanctions and more as sanctions on functional exposure. The relevant question is not whether a country is "friendly" or "hostile" in the abstract. The relevant question is whether particular jurisdictions, sectors, firms, subsidiaries, routes, or financial infrastructures are serving as bridges between EU-regulated restrictions and Russian end-use. This has major consequences for classification. It means that the anti-circumvention regime is not aimed at simple diplomatic punishment of third states. It is aimed at identifying the places where adaptation has become materially possible and then attaching obligations or restrictions at those points. That is why the EU's measures combine contract clauses, due diligence requirements, entity listings, payment-system restrictions, disclosure obligations, and differentiated treatment of destinations. The control is therefore granular rather than purely geopolitical. Hybrid sanctions in this field are best described as network governance under conditions of legal asymmetry^{5,6}.

A further defining feature of these measures is the externalisation of sanctions enforcement into private governance. Article 12g makes contractual clauses part of anti-circumvention architecture. Article 12gb makes enhanced due diligence a continuing governance obligation for operators handling CHP items. The Commission's broader sanctions FAQs are explicitly presented as guidance to national authorities, EU operators, and citizens for implementation and interpretation. This confirms that the EU is treating operators not only as addressees of sanctions, but as distributed enforcement nodes. Controls on intermediary jurisdictions thus work in large part by requiring EU-based firms to internalise geopolitical risk, trace downstream exposure, screen counterparties, and build sanctions resilience into group governance and transaction design. The state still sets the perimeter, but a significant portion of

¹ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025, May 20). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions*.

³ European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025, February 24). *Three years of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures*.

⁵ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

⁶ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

practical filtering and risk denial is delegated to the market. This is not a sign of weak enforcement. In hybrid sanctions, it is a core mechanism of enforcement^{1,2,3}.

The effectiveness logic of these anti-circumvention tools lies less in absolute closure than in controlled narrowing of usable channels. A third-country rerouting corridor need not be eliminated entirely in order for the sanction to matter. It is often sufficient that access becomes riskier, slower, more heavily documented, contractually constrained, or dependent on a smaller pool of more exposed intermediaries. This is exactly the kind of effect produced by no-re-export clauses, due diligence obligations, entity listings in third countries, and transaction bans on institutions using Russian substitute infrastructures. Each measure may appear limited in isolation. However, together they compress the operational space in which sanctioned trade, technology transfer, or payment continuity can be organised. Anti-circumvention controls are therefore cumulative by design. They are not aimed only at catching violators after the fact; they are aimed at forcing the Russian adaptation system into narrower and more fragile substitutes^{4,5}.

At the same time, these controls are heavily dependent on information quality. The Council's 2024 Best Practices document notes that implementation problems arise where the information on a designated person or entity is limited and stresses the urgency of further identifiers. In anti-circumvention work, this informational problem is even more acute, because the relevant object is often not a listed person as such but an evolving pattern of rerouting, indirect benefit, control, or facilitation. A jurisdiction can be high-risk without every operator in it being problematic. A company can be formally legitimate while still functioning as an evasion node. A counterparty may not appear suspicious until trade anomalies, route behaviour, ownership opacity, and product profile are read together. This makes anti-circumvention measures especially intelligence-dependent and gives them a strong evidentiary fragility if implementation capacity is weak. Controls on intermediary jurisdictions are therefore only as effective as the data systems, operator vigilance, and authority coordination that support them^{6,7}.

There is also a clear proportionality and legitimacy challenge. The EEAS has repeatedly stressed both that circumvention through third countries is a priority concern and that EU measures are not extraterritorial. This dual commitment creates a narrow path. The Union must act strongly enough to prevent its own sanctions from being neutralised, but carefully enough to avoid treating all trade with non-aligned jurisdictions as presumptively illegitimate. The anti-circumvention model developed so far reflects that tension. It prefers nexus-based techniques, differentiated country treatment, operator obligations, targeted listings, and contract-based controls rather than broad jurisdiction-wide embargoes on third countries. That is a strategically prudent design. It preserves the functional effectiveness of the regime while reducing the risk of overt diplomatic backlash and charges of uncontrolled extra-territoriality. Nonetheless, as anti-circumvention tools become denser and more intelligence-intensive, the line between necessary network control and over-extension will remain contested^{8,9}.

Directive (EU) 2024/1226 strengthens this architecture by pushing circumvention more firmly into the domain of punishable conduct. The Directive defines criminal offences and penalties for violations of Union restrictive measures and addresses concealment-linked behaviour, thereby reinforcing the

¹ European Commission. (2024, January 26). *Consolidated FAQs on the implementation of Council Regulation No 833/2014 and Council Regulation No 269/2014*.

² European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

³ European Commission. (2024, February 22). *Frequently asked questions concerning the "No re-export to Russia" clause and sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

⁷ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁸ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

⁹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

seriousness with which anti-circumvention is treated in EU law. For 6.2.1, the significance of the Directive is not limited to criminalisation itself. Its deeper significance lies in the fact that it supports the broader hybrid movement from formal prohibition to active management of concealment, facilitation, and evasion networks. Anti-circumvention measures against intermediary jurisdictions are more credible when the legal system treats concealment and evasion architecture as matters of serious offence rather than mere regulatory inconvenience. The Directive therefore underpins the harder edge of the hybrid regime. It helps ensure that contractual, informational, and due-diligence tools are nested within a stronger enforcement environment^{1,2}.

For analytical clarity, the principal anti-circumvention instruments and controls on intermediary jurisdictions can be summarised as follows.

Table 6.2.1-1. Anti-circumvention instruments and controls on intermediary jurisdictions in the EU sanctions regime against Russia

Instrument / control	Core legal or policy carrier	Immediate target	Operational logic	Why it is hybrid
Anti-circumvention tool (11th package)	11th package political-legal framework	High-risk third-country channels for specified sanctioned goods and technology	Allows targeted restriction where persistent circumvention risk emerges through third-country rerouting	It links direct export control with jurisdiction-sensitive external risk management
“No re-export to Russia” clause (Art. 12g)	Regulation 833/2014; Commission FAQ	Third-country contractual counterparties of Union operators	Requires contractual prohibition of re-export to Russia and adequate remedies in case of breach	It externalises sanctions logic into private contract law and downstream trade governance
CHP enhanced due diligence (Art. 12gb)	Regulation 833/2014; 2024/1745 amendment; Commission FAQ	Union operators and controlled entities outside the Union dealing with common high priority items	Requires risk-identification and mitigation mechanisms for re-export exposure, except for certain partner countries	It combines export control, ownership nexus, destination differentiation, and private compliance governance
Control of intangible enabling assets	2024/1745 recital logic	Third-country use of IP rights, trade secrets, and protected information tied to sensitive items	Prevents transferred intangible assets from supporting Russian access to restricted capabilities	It extends anti-circumvention from physical goods to knowledge, design, and know-how infrastructures
Refined products from Russian crude via third countries	Current EU Russia sanctions framework	Downstream commodity flows transformed in intermediary jurisdictions	Blocks indirect Russian-origin value recovery through third-country refining and re-export	It targets transformed output chains rather than only original Russian-origin input
Road transport ownership / transparency rules	2024/1745 amendment	Russian-owned or Russian-linked road transport undertakings in the Union	Narrows logistical circumvention channels by targeting ownership-linked transport infrastructure	It combines transit control, ownership scrutiny, and anti-circumvention transparency obligations
Controls on SPFS / Mir / SBP and certain third-country banks	16th package; current finance sanctions architecture	Third-country financial intermediaries linked to Russian substitute systems	Restricts use of alternative payment and messaging ecosystems created to neutralise sanctions	It targets enabling financial infrastructure rather than only direct banking relationships
Third-country enabler listings	16th and 17th package listings	Companies in third countries supporting Russia’s military-industrial	Isolates specific corporate nodes in intermediary jurisdictions without sanctioning whole states	It uses network-based selective targeting to destabilise rerouting and facilitation structures

¹ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673.*

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions.*

Instrument / control	Core legal or policy carrier	Immediate target	Operational logic	Why it is hybrid
		complex or engaged in circumvention		

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, EU legal acts, Commission guidance, and coalition-linked enforcement documentation

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- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions.*
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673.*

The table shows that the anti-circumvention regime is not composed of one master instrument, but of a layered toolkit aimed at different points in the adaptation chain. Some tools operate upstream, such as contract clauses and due diligence obligations that attempt to prevent leakage before it materialises. Others operate at the middle of the chain, such as listings of third-country enablers, transport ownership controls, and restrictions on substitute financial infrastructures. Still others operate downstream, such as the prohibition on imports of refined petroleum products made from Russian oil in third countries. Taken together, these measures show that the EU has moved decisively away from the view that sanctions effectiveness can be protected only at the point of direct export or direct payment. The new architecture is broader, more preventive, and more structurally aware. It aims to make intermediary

jurisdictions less useful as adaptation spaces without collapsing into indiscriminate antagonism towards third countries as such. That is precisely what makes these instruments hybrid^{1,2,3}.

A final conclusion follows. Anti-circumvention measures and controls on intermediary jurisdictions should be treated in this report as a core family of hybrid instruments because their main purpose is to degrade Russia's adaptive access to restricted goods, services, technologies, and payment channels by attacking the systems through which substitution is organised. They do not operate mainly by direct sectoral denial, nor merely by symbolic political signalling, nor solely by doctrinal legal prohibition. Their coercive force arises from the interaction of trade law, contract law, due diligence, ownership control, route management, corporate-group governance, financial-infrastructure restrictions, and selective external targeting. This makes them operationally indispensable in a long sanctions cycle, but also more administratively demanding and diplomatically sensitive than simpler measures. Their success depends on information quality, operator vigilance, differentiated country risk assessment, and the continued ability of the EU to maintain legitimacy while acting against circumvention through third-country space. In strategic terms, they are best understood as the regime's principal tools for narrowing the geography of evasion without claiming universal jurisdiction^{4,5,6}.

6.2.2. Logistics, Maritime Routing, and the Shadow Fleet as Hybrid Pressure Zones

Logistics, maritime routing, and the shadow fleet should be treated as core hybrid pressure zones because they sit at the intersection of trade, energy, finance, insurance, safety regulation, maritime surveillance, and sanctions enforcement. In the Russia case, maritime pressure is not limited to stopping a shipment or banning a vessel from a specific port. It operates by making the entire seaborne chain less reliable, less insurable, less transparent, and more expensive to sustain over time. This is why the maritime domain has become one of the most active sites of sanctions innovation since 2024–2025. The EU sanctions pages now treat vessels involved in Russia's shadow fleet, ship-to-ship transfers, and AIS manipulation as central objects of restrictive action, while the Price Cap Coalition frames maritime oil trade as a high-risk space linking legal, financial, logistical, environmental, and reputational exposure. The analytical importance of this development is straightforward. Once maritime transport becomes the main adaptation corridor for restricted oil and associated revenues, logistics cease to be a secondary implementation issue and become a substantive theatre of coercive pressure. In that environment, shipping is not just a neutral transport service. It is part of the enabling infrastructure of sanctions evasion and war-financing continuity. Maritime sanctions are therefore hybrid not because they touch many sectors incidentally, but because their restrictive force is inherently cross-domain^{7,8}.

The centrality of maritime routing follows from the structure of Russian adaptation under oil-related restrictions. If direct financial and commercial channels narrow, seaborne transport, ship registration, ship management, cargo documentation, intermediary ownership, and ship servicing become the practical means through which restricted trade can still be executed. The sanction target is therefore not merely the commodity itself, but the routing ecology that allows it to move while obscuring origin, price-cap compliance, beneficial ownership, and service dependencies. That is why the current EU sanctions framework no longer treats maritime restrictions as peripheral. The Council's sanctions page explicitly links the shadow fleet to the circumvention of the oil price cap and to Russia's energy revenues, while coalition advisories emphasise that the relevant risks arise across the whole maritime chain rather than at one single legal point. In practical terms, a tanker route is not simply a line on a map. It is a bundled

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

⁵ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

relationship involving insurer willingness, flag-state tolerance, port access, AIS behaviour, classification credibility, document integrity, crew arrangements, and counterparties prepared to bear sanctions risk. Once pressure is applied at several of those points simultaneously, the route itself becomes less dependable even if some voyages still occur. That is the operational hallmark of a hybrid pressure zone^{1,2}.

For this reason, the EU's maritime pressure strategy has progressively shifted from general transport restrictions to targeted interventions against the shadow fleet as an operational system. In the 16th package, the Commission stated that 74 additional vessels were targeted, bringing the total number of listed vessels to 153, while also introducing a new listing criterion targeting those who support the operations of unsafe oil tankers. In the 17th package, the EU listed 189 additional vessels, bringing the total to 342. In the 18th package, another 105 vessels were added, bringing the total to 444. The 19th package then brought the total number of listed vessels to 557, and in December 2025 the Council imposed restrictive measures on a further 41 vessels. The current Council sanctions page summarises the result as "almost 600 vessels so far". This sequence is analytically significant because it shows cumulative pressure not on one transaction but on the maritime infrastructure of evasion itself. The growth of listings is therefore not just quantitative escalation. It marks the consolidation of the shadow fleet as a defined object of hybrid sanctions policy^{3,4,5,6,7,8}.

Port access bans and bans on the provision of maritime services are especially important because they turn the physical geography of transport into a regulatory barrier. The current Council sanctions page states that the EU has banned access to EU ports for vessels that are part of Russia's shadow fleet transporting Russian crude oil or products made from Russian crude oil and responsible for circumventing the oil price cap, for vessels engaged in ship-to-ship transfers and suspected of breaching sanctions, and for vessels suspected of illegally interfering with or disabling their shipborne automatic identification system when transporting Russian oil. This is not merely a transport sanction in the narrow sense. It is a way of making EU-controlled maritime nodes unavailable to vessels whose operational profile itself is part of sanctions evasion. The ban therefore has a broader effect than denying a single port call. It degrades route planning, bunkering options, service availability, and the overall credibility of the vessel in future commercial interactions. Once a vessel becomes known as sanctions-exposed, the route it travels becomes more difficult to insure, finance, support, and legitimise. Port access restrictions thus act as nodes of wider route contamination^{9,10}.

The servicing dimension reinforces this effect. The Council's package statements repeatedly describe targeted vessels as being subject not only to port access bans but also to bans on the provision of a broad range of services related to maritime transport. This is crucial because maritime viability depends on a dense services layer: insurance, classification, emergency maintenance, crewing, payments, documentation, cargo handling, and ancillary technical support. Once services are restricted, the vessel is not simply excluded from one location. It is pushed into a weaker ecosystem of substitute providers that may be less reputable, more expensive, or more exposed to scrutiny. The Commission's targeted-vessels FAQ confirms that exceptions for port access and services are framed narrowly around maritime safety or urgent prevention of serious harm, such as offloading dangerous or polluting cargo, and even then are subject to strict conditions. This demonstrates that the service ban is intended to be robust, while still preserving emergency carve-outs necessary for safety and environmental protection. The

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2024, February 1). *Price Cap Coalition Oil Price Cap (OPC) Compliance and Enforcement Alert*.

³ European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, July 18). *EU adopts 18th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁶ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁷ Council of the European Union. (2025, December 18). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 41 vessels of the Russian shadow fleet*.

⁸ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ European Commission. (2025). *Sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

hybrid effect is clear. Law directly restricts service provision, but the larger coercive outcome is route destabilisation and capability erosion across the maritime chain^{1,2,3}.

Insurance is one of the most powerful hybrid choke points in this maritime regime. The updated Price Cap Coalition advisory treats recent developments in maritime oil trade as exposing stakeholders to increased safety, environmental, economic, reputational, financial, logistical, and legal risks. This framing is important because it shows that the insurance problem is not only one of sanctions compliance in the narrow formal sense. Insurers and related actors are asked to respond to a risk cluster in which sanctions exposure interacts with vessel age, opaque ownership, false documentation, high-risk routing, and questionable safety practices. The commercial logic of marine insurance therefore aligns with sanctions logic in a way that magnifies pressure beyond what a simple legal ban would achieve. A vessel that struggles to obtain reliable protection and indemnity coverage, or that can only do so through lower-trust arrangements, becomes less commercially usable and more expensive to deploy. Insurance thus converts legal suspicion into operational cost. That is exactly the sort of cross-domain transmission mechanism that defines hybrid sanctions^{4,5}.

Flagging and classification are equally important because they concern the legal identity and technical credibility of the vessel itself. The Price Cap Coalition advisory states that vessels in the shadow trade are often older ships operating past their traditional lifespans, that they are frequently registered with flag states that fail to meet their international obligations, and that there is an increased risk of falsified or fraudulent registration. EU sanctions also moved against vessels certified by the Russian Maritime Register of Shipping, irrespective of flag, and Commission FAQs explain that from 8 April 2023 vessels with RMRS certification are prohibited from accessing EU ports and locks. This means that the EU has not limited itself to visible flag-state identity alone. It has also targeted the certification ecosystem that underpins vessel legitimacy and operational acceptance. Flagging, registration, and classification therefore become part of the sanctions' battlefield. Hybrid pressure arises because maritime legality, technical certification, and sanctions enforcement are made to reinforce one another. A vessel with weak flag credibility or compromised certification becomes not only legally exposed but commercially suspect^{6,7,8}.

Opacity of ownership is another defining feature of maritime hybrid pressure. The Price Cap Coalition compliance alert lists opaque shipping and ancillary costs, third-country supply chain intermediaries, and complex and irregular corporate structures among the principal evasion methods associated with the oil price cap. This matters because a vessel's practical role in sanctions evasion may be obscured by shell companies, management entities, nominee structures, or rapidly changing ownership records. Direct legal responsibility may therefore be difficult to establish in a simple linear fashion. Yet the commercial and regulatory response does not depend solely on definitive courtroom-level proof in advance of every decision. It depends on whether the vessel and its network display a risk profile associated with evasion. Hybrid sanctions thus work through ownership opacity in two directions at once. Opacity helps the evasion network survive, but it also raises the commercial suspicion that drives

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025, May 20). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions*.

² Council of the European Union. (2025, July 18). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 18th package of economic and individual measures*.

³ European Commission. (2025, June 30). *Targeted vessels*.

⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁵ European Commission. (2024, February 1). *Price Cap Coalition Oil Price Cap (OPC) Compliance and Enforcement Alert*.

⁶ European Commission. (2023, July 24). *Access to EU ports*.

⁷ European Commission. (2025). *Article 5aa of Council Regulation 833/2014 — State-owned enterprises*.

⁸ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

de-risking, service withdrawal, and route exclusion. The result is a self-reinforcing pressure dynamic in which concealment increases the very risk penalties that make maritime operations harder to sustain^{1,2}.

Maritime tracking is a further core mechanism of hybrid pressure. The Commission's ports FAQ explains that monitoring of the port-access ban is conducted via the Union Maritime Information and Exchange System, which links to EQUASIS and supports Member States with near real-time tracking and situational maritime awareness. The same FAQ notes that any attempt to circumvent sanctions through change of flag can be identified through the IMO number, which remains constant throughout a vessel's service life, together with onboard documentation such as the synopsis report tracking flag changes. This is analytically important because it shows that sanctions enforcement in the maritime sphere is not based only on legal designation lists. It also depends on technical tracking infrastructures, data integration, and the ability to follow vessel identity across changing external appearances. Maritime tracking thus converts transparency infrastructure into a coercive instrument. A vessel may attempt to reflag or restructure, but its continuity can still be reconstructed through persistent identifiers and shared surveillance systems. The hybrid effect lies in the combination of law, digital monitoring, shipping databases, and operator action³.

AIS manipulation is a particularly important element within this tracking environment. The current Council sanctions page identifies vessels suspected of illegally interfering with or disabling their shipborne automatic identification system when transporting Russian oil as subject to EU port-access restrictions. This criterion matters because AIS behaviour is not simply a navigational detail. In the sanctions' context, it becomes an evidentiary signal of concealment and route opacity. When AIS is disabled or irregularly used, regulators and market actors are more likely to infer elevated sanctions risk, hidden ship-to-ship transfers, cargo obfuscation, or deliberate evasion. The effect is not only enforcement-oriented. It is also commercial, because counterparties, insurers, and service providers read AIS anomalies as warning signs of unacceptable exposure. Hybrid pressure therefore emerges from a technical behaviour that bridges maritime safety, route visibility, and sanctions credibility. The vessel is penalised not solely because of its cargo, but because of how it behaves within the maritime information environment^{4,5}.

Ship-to-ship transfers and voyage irregularities belong to the same logic. The Council sanctions page explicitly includes vessels engaged in ship-to-ship transfers and suspected of breaching sanctions among those facing port access restrictions. The Price Cap Coalition compliance alert, meanwhile, identifies voyage irregularities as one of the main evasion methods that stakeholders should monitor. These practices are significant because they make routes harder to read and cargo histories harder to verify. They also allow sanctioned trade to be broken into segments that appear less suspicious when viewed separately than when viewed as a whole. Hybrid sanctions respond by treating the pattern itself as sanctions-relevant. Route anomalies, unexplained transshipments, and irregular voyage behaviour become part of the restrictive logic rather than only of retrospective investigation. This raises the pressure on operators who might previously have treated such behaviour as commercially inconvenient but not legally determinative. In the hybrid regime, irregularity itself becomes a pressure multiplier^{6,7}.

Documentation controls are equally central because maritime trade depends on attestations, bills of lading, origin claims, proof of insurance, and related documents that can either confirm or disguise price-cap compliance and cargo origin. The Price Cap Coalition compliance alert identifies falsified documentation and attestations as a key evasion method. The 2024 advisory similarly frames responsible documentation and best practices as part of preventing and disrupting sanctions evasion.

¹ European Commission. (2024, February 1). *Price Cap Coalition Oil Price Cap (OPC) Compliance and Enforcement Alert*.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

³ European Commission. (2023, July 24). *Access to EU ports*.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025). *Sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁷ European Commission. (2024, February 1). *Price Cap Coalition Oil Price Cap (OPC) Compliance and Enforcement Alert*.

This means that documentary scrutiny is no longer just an administrative afterthought. It is a coercive mechanism in its right. A cargo that can only move through weak, inconsistent, or suspicious paperwork becomes harder to finance, insure, service, and receive. Here again, law works through the market rather than above it. Once documentation integrity becomes part of the sanctions' perimeter, every intermediary handling the shipment becomes a potential point of friction. Hybrid pressure is therefore reproduced through paperwork, verification, and evidentiary hygiene as much as through headline prohibitions^{1,2}.

Route disruption is the wider cumulative effect produced by all of these layers. A vessel may still travel, but its route becomes longer, more circuitous, more dependent on non-EU ports, less supported by trusted service providers, and more vulnerable to sudden interruption. This is why maritime sanctions often underperform when assessed only through binary metrics such as whether exports continue. The more important effect is usually the degradation of route quality and route resilience. A fleet that can move only through higher-risk corridors, less reputable flags, thinner insurance, and more opaque counterparties is operationally weaker even if it is not fully immobilised. The Commission's 17th-package statement explicitly notes that coordinated vessel listings and partner-country efforts are making it increasingly difficult to replace sanctioned vessels and that exporting oil has become more complex and costly for the Kremlin. That observation captures the essence of maritime hybrid pressure. The goal is not necessarily perfect closure. It is structured deterioration of transport capability^{3,4}.

The shadow fleet also functions as a safety and environmental pressure zone, and this matters analytically because non-sanctions regulatory logics amplify the sanctions effect. The 2024 Price Cap Coalition advisory states that recent developments in maritime oil trade expose stakeholders to increased safety and environmental risks, and that vessels in shadow trade may fabricate or neglect surveys and inspections and lack regulatory certificates required under international conventions. This creates a situation in which the same vessel may be unattractive for several reasons at once: sanctions risk, insurance risk, environmental liability risk, and safety risk. Hybrid pressure intensifies precisely when these logics converge. Market actors do not need to separate perfectly whether they are withdrawing for sanctions reasons or for maritime prudence. In practice, those reasons reinforce each other. This gives shadow-fleet measures a wider radius of effect than a narrowly legalistic reading would suggest. It also explains why maritime hybrid sanctions can remain effective even when some counterparties are willing to tolerate sanctions risk alone. They may still refuse because the broader operational profile of the vessel is unacceptable⁵.

Coalition coordination is another decisive multiplier. The Price Cap Coalition advisory is addressed jointly to government stakeholders and private-sector actors, and the Commission's 17th-package statement notes that vessels were identified together with Member States and the European Maritime Safety Agency. This is not a minor implementation detail. It shows that maritime sanctions depend on coordinated detection, shared intelligence, and common risk signalling. If one jurisdiction designates vessels but others continue to provide permissive services, routes remain more resilient. If shipping intelligence, risk flags, and service-denial practices are shared, the operational environment becomes much harder to navigate. Coalition coordination therefore turns scattered national measures into a denser maritime compliance zone. It also strengthens legitimacy, because the restrictive response appears less like unilateral opportunism and more like collective defence of an agreed sanctions

¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

² European Commission. (2024, February 1). *Price Cap Coalition Oil Price Cap (OPC) Compliance and Enforcement Alert*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025, May 20). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions*.

⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

perimeter. In the maritime field especially, coordination is not supplementary to effectiveness. It is one of its constitutive conditions^{1,2}.

The EU’s maritime regime also illustrates how hybrid pressure moves from direct cargo restriction to broader infrastructure governance. The infrastructure transaction ban applies to listed ports and locks in Russia, and the EU has complemented targeted-vessel designations with broader restrictions affecting ports, locks, and related maritime infrastructures. This means that the object of pressure is not only the moving vessel, but also the fixed nodes through which maritime trade is organised. Once ports, locks, and servicing environments become sanctions-relevant, Russia’s maritime adaptation problem becomes deeper and more structural. It can no longer be solved only by finding another ship. It increasingly requires rebuilding a whole ecosystem of access, servicing, documentation, and payments under more hostile conditions. Hybrid pressure is strongest when mobile and fixed infrastructure are targeted together. That is exactly the direction in which the EU maritime architecture has evolved^{3,4}.

From an effectiveness perspective, maritime hybrid pressure should therefore be judged less by absolute immobilisation and more by cumulative degradation. A sanctions regime that doubles, then redoubles, the number of targeted vessels; contaminates servicing channels; increases insurer caution; narrows port access; monitors AIS and flag history; and treats shadow routing as a multi-risk phenomenon is not merely signalling disapproval. It is systematically raising the cost of maritime adaptation. The effect is especially important in a long conflict, because repeated adjustments force Russia and its intermediaries into progressively more opaque, less scalable, and less resilient substitutes. This is consistent with the Council’s current presentation of shadow-fleet measures as intended to dismantle operational capacity and reduce oil revenues supporting the war economy. It is also consistent with coalition guidance that focuses on best practices for private actors precisely because private decisions cumulatively shape the shipping environment. In other words, the maritime regime works because the route becomes a hostile system, not only because the law forbids one voyage^{5,6,7}.

For analytical clarity, the main maritime channels of hybrid pressure can be summarised as follows.

Table 6.2.2-1. Maritime channels of hybrid pressure in the EU sanctions regime against Russia

Channel	Immediate restrictive mechanism	Direct operational effect	Secondary hybrid effect	Strategic result
Port access	Ban on access to EU ports and locks for targeted vessels, Russian-flagged vessels, and certain high-risk vessels	Denial of physical entry to EU-controlled maritime nodes	Route contamination, loss of commercial flexibility, higher dependence on non-EU alternatives	Narrows the geography of feasible maritime trade
Vessel servicing	Ban on a broad range of maritime-transport related services	Reduced access to insurance, classification, maintenance, payments, and ancillary support	Degrades vessel usability and increases substitution costs	Weakens the operational capacity of the shadow fleet
Insurance and financial cover	Heightened sanctions, legal, reputational, and safety risk	Harder and costlier access to reliable cover	De-risking by market actors beyond the legal minimum	Raises voyage costs and reduces

¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

² European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ European Commission. (2025, March 20). *Infrastructure transaction ban*.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025, May 20). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁷ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

Channel	Immediate restrictive mechanism	Direct operational effect	Secondary hybrid effect	Strategic result
	for insurers and service providers			legitimacy of shipping operations
Flagging and classification	Restrictions linked to Russian flagging, RMRS certification, and scrutiny of registration practices	Lower legal and technical credibility of vessels	Greater suspicion by ports, insurers, and counterparties	Undermines the legal-operational identity of the vessel
Ownership opacity	Scrutiny of complex or irregular corporate structures and ancillary costs	Higher compliance burden and more frequent red flags	Self-reinforcing withdrawal by commercial partners	Makes concealment a source of operational fragility
Tracking and AIS	Monitoring through maritime information systems; targeting of AIS manipulation	Better detection of concealed routing and flag changes	Technical irregularities become commercial risk signals	Increases visibility of evasion patterns
Route behaviour	Targeting of ship-to-ship transfers and voyage irregularities	Disruption of evasive logistics patterns	Higher uncertainty for all actors in the chain	Converts routing itself into a sanctions-sensitive variable
Safety and environmental exposure	Advisory focus on unsafe vessels, failed inspections, and environmental risk	Non-sanctions regulatory risk converges with sanctions risk	Multiple independent reasons to avoid shadow-fleet business	Expands pressure beyond strict legal prohibition
Coalition coordination	Joint EU-G7/coalition guidance and coordinated identification of vessels	More consistent screening and fewer permissive gaps	Shared signals amplify private-sector caution	Makes sanctions pressure denser across jurisdictions

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and Price Cap Coalition maritime advisories

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.
- European Commission. (2023, July 24). *Access to EU ports*.
- European Commission. (2024, February 1). *Price Cap Coalition Oil Price Cap (OPC) Compliance and Enforcement Alert*.
- European Commission. (2025, June 30). *Targeted vessels*.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

The chronology of EU shadow-fleet targeting in 2025 also shows how quickly the maritime layer of the regime intensified.

Table 6.2.2-2. Expansion of EU shadow-fleet vessel targeting in 2025

Action / package	Date	Additional vessels targeted	Cumulative total after action	Maritime significance
16th package	24 February 2025	74	153	Added new listing criterion targeting support for unsafe oil-tanker operations
17th package	20 May 2025	189	342	Largest-ever package up to that point; port access ban and ban on provision of services expanded sharply
18th package	18 July 2025	105	444	Further shadow-fleet and value-chain pressure, combined with lower oil price cap

Action / package	Date	Additional vessels targeted	Cumulative total after action	Maritime significance
19th package	23 October 2025	Not specified in the summary cited	557	Further clamp-down on shadow fleet alongside broader energy, services, and anti-circumvention measures
Additional Council action	18 December 2025	41	c. 598 by arithmetic from cited totals; the Council’s current sanctions page summarises this as “almost 600”	Continued pressure on non-EU tankers and shadow-fleet value-chain nodes

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of Council and Commission package statements

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025, December 18). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 41 vessels of the Russian shadow fleet.*
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions.*
- European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, July 18). *EU adopts 18th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*

These tables confirm that maritime pressure has evolved from a supporting function into a full-spectrum hybrid instrument. The EU has not relied on a single decisive maritime ban. Instead, it has built a cumulative system in which designations, services prohibitions, port-access controls, flag and certification scrutiny, document checks, ownership-risk indicators, and coalition advisories reinforce each other. That cumulative structure explains why the maritime regime cannot be understood adequately as a mere subsection of energy sanctions. It is an independent pressure environment, albeit one closely connected to oil revenue and trade continuity. The pressure works not only because ships are listed, but because listed ships become harder to operate within a trustworthy commercial and regulatory system. That is the essence of a hybrid pressure zone^{1,2,3}.

A final conclusion follows. Logistics, maritime routing, and the shadow fleet should be classified in this report as hybrid pressure zones because sanctions in this area operate through the structured interaction of shipping law, port control, vessel servicing, insurance, flagging, ownership transparency, maritime tracking, and coalition compliance practices. The coercive effect is not exhausted by any one legal prohibition. It emerges from the progressive degradation of route reliability, vessel credibility, service availability, and commercial trust. This makes maritime pressure especially well-suited to long-duration sanctions strategy, since it can raise costs and weaken adaptability even where complete physical closure remains unattainable. It also explains why the shadow fleet has become such a prominent focus of EU package design in 2025. The fleet is not merely a transport workaround. It is a multi-layered enabling infrastructure for revenue continuity, price-cap circumvention, and sanctions adaptation. Targeting it therefore strikes at one of the most important operational systems sustaining Russia’s external economic resilience under sanctions^{4,5,6}.

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions.*

² European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*

³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors.*

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions.*

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025, December 18). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 41 vessels of the Russian shadow fleet.*

⁶ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors.*

6.2.3. Technology–Service Ecosystem Controls and Dual-Use Support Restrictions

Technology–service ecosystem controls should be treated as one of the clearest hybrid instrument families in the EU sanctions regime because they do not act only by blocking the export of a physical item. Their deeper function is to interrupt the combination of software, technical assistance, maintenance, spare parts, engineering support, data environments, and compliance-mediated service access through which industrial capability is designed, operated, repaired, upgraded, and reproduced. In the Russia case, this matters especially because access to advanced technology is rarely reducible to a single shipment. What sustains capability over time is an ecosystem: design tools, enterprise management systems, technical testing, updates, servicing, components, integration know-how, and the legal-commercial relations that permit all of these to continue. Once sanctions act against that ecosystem rather than only against one goods flow, they become distinctly hybrid. The pressure then operates through simultaneous restrictions on technology transfer, on the services needed to use technology, and on the information, systems required to organise production and maintenance. The result is not merely lower import availability. It is degradation of industrial continuity itself. That is why the technology–service field belongs centrally in Part Six rather than only in the economic or legal sections^{1,2}.

The starting point is the dual-use and advanced-technology export-control layer. The current Council sanctions page states that the EU has imposed export restrictions on dual-use and advanced technology items for hundreds of entities, including many located outside Russia and directly supporting Russia’s war. The Commission’s export-related restrictions FAQ explains that the Commission services, in coordination with international partners, identified a number of dual-use goods and advanced technology items whose export to Russia is prohibited and which were found in Russian military systems on the battlefield in Ukraine or are critical to the development, production, or use of those systems. These include integrated circuits, radio-frequency transceiver modules, and items essential for manufacturing and testing electronic components recovered from the battlefield. This is important because it shows that the EU is not operating only from abstract technology-policy assumptions. The sanctions architecture has become increasingly forensic and battlefield-informed. Export restrictions therefore target not just high technology in the generic sense, but the specific technology stack that feeds Russia’s war-relevant industrial and weapons systems. That empirical grounding strengthens both the precision and the strategic rationale of the regime^{3,4}.

The Common High Priority (CHP) items regime is particularly revealing because it translates export control into an ecosystem logic. The Commission explains that CHP items are prohibited dual-use goods and advanced technology items used in Russian military systems found on the battlefield in Ukraine or critical to the development, production, or use of those systems, and that they include integrated circuits, radio-frequency transceiver modules, items for manufacturing and testing printed-circuit-board electronics, and items used in manufacturing high-precision complex metal components. The same materials state that the CHP list is intended to support due diligence and targeted anti-circumvention actions by customs and enforcement agencies of partner countries. This is highly significant. It means that the EU is not treating dual-use control as a simple customs boundary. It is transforming a list of battlefield-relevant technologies into a governance tool that shapes exporter diligence, partner-country screening, and risk awareness across the supply chain. The technology control thus becomes hybrid because it operates through law, industry due diligence, customs

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

³ European Commission. (2025). *Export-related restrictions — Frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

intelligence, and third-country cooperation simultaneously. It does not simply stop at “no export”. It creates a wider regime of suspicion and control around the relevant technological ecosystem^{1,2}.

The structure of the CHP list further underlines this point. The Commission’s export-related FAQ states that the list is divided into four tiers containing a total of 50 HS codes and includes items involved in Russian weapons systems such as the Kalibr cruise missile, the Kh-101 cruise missile, the Orlan-10 UAV, and the Ka-52 helicopter. The list includes microelectronics, wireless-communications-related electronics, discrete electronic components, connectors, navigation equipment, digital cameras, bearings, and optical components. This breadth matters because it shows that the sanctions target not only dramatic high-end platforms, but also the mid-level and component-level goods without which design, testing, assembly, and repair cannot reliably continue. Hybrid pressure in this area therefore works through cumulative incompleteness. A military-industrial or industrial system need not lose access to every single input to become materially degraded. It is enough that critical nodes within its technological stack become scarcer, harder to source, or harder to integrate. The logic is one of capability erosion through technological disarticulation³.

Yet export controls alone do not explain why this field is hybrid. The next layer is the service and software environment that allows technology to be used productively after acquisition. The Council’s sanctions timeline states that the 12th package introduced a ban on the provision of software services for enterprise management and industrial design. The Commission’s software FAQ explains that Article 5n(2b) covers software for the management of enterprises and software for design and manufacture, and that the prohibition aims to further hamper Russia’s capacities in its industrial sector. This is a decisive step beyond ordinary goods controls. By restricting not only hardware and dual-use items but also enterprise-management and industrial-design software, the EU shifted from controlling inputs to controlling coordination and production architecture. This is particularly significant because modern industrial resilience depends as much on digital organisation as on material inventory. A factory or engineering network without stable access to planning, lifecycle, maintenance, and design software is not merely inconvenienced. Its continuity is structurally impaired^{4,5}.

The specific categories of software covered make this even clearer. The Commission’s FAQ lists enterprise-resource planning (ERP), customer-relationship management (CRM), business intelligence (BI), supply-chain management (SCM), enterprise data warehouse (EDW), computerised maintenance management systems (CMMS), project-management software, and product-lifecycle management (PLM), as well as accounting, fleet-management, logistics, and human-resources software, within the prohibited enterprise-management category. It further lists building information modelling (BIM), computer-aided design (CAD), computer-aided manufacturing (CAM), and engineer-to-order (ETO) software in the design and manufacturing category. These are not niche or peripheral tools. They are the digital backbone through which firms plan production, coordinate suppliers, manage inventories, schedule maintenance, design products, and integrate engineering changes. The sanction effect is therefore broader than denial of software licences as such. The deeper effect is fragmentation of the information environment required for industrial continuity. Where ERP, SCM, CMMS, CAD, CAM, and PLM become inaccessible, the sanctioned system loses not only functionality but also coherence across departments and stages of production. This is precisely what makes the instrument hybrid: it targets data architecture, management processes, and manufacturing continuity together⁶.

Software updates and upgrades are equally important in this regard. The same Commission FAQ states that the prohibition on enterprise-management and design/manufacture software covers software

¹ European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

² European Commission. (2024). *List of common high priority items*.

³ European Commission. (2025). *Export-related restrictions — Frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline — Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.

⁵ European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

updates, and that assistance or advice relating to software updates and upgrades, as well as bespoke software updates and upgrades, were already subject to the prohibition on IT consultancy services. This detail is crucial because the sanction is not confined to initial software acquisition. It also affects the time dimension of industrial maintenance and digital continuity. A sanctioned enterprise might retain legacy software in the short run, but if it cannot obtain updates, upgrades, or related advisory support, the system gradually loses security, compatibility, efficiency, and manufacturer-supported usability. In modern production environments, the denial of updates is a form of delayed disruption. It does not always halt activity immediately, but it erodes reliability over time and complicates integration with surrounding systems. Hybrid pressure thus operates not just through possession but through lifecycle interruption^{1,2}.

The services layer is broader still. The Commission's services FAQ, updated on 22 January 2026, confirms that a wide range of business-relevant services may not be provided to the Government of Russia or to entities established in Russia, and that EU entities, including subsidiaries of Russian companies established in the EU, are bound by EU sanctions and cannot provide the listed services or software to their Russian parents. It also clarifies that services to non-Russian entities may become prohibited where those services are actually intended for the benefit of a Russian parent or other entity established in Russia. This matters because technology continuity in a modern industrial system rarely depends on software alone. It depends on advisory support, troubleshooting, implementation, integration, maintenance planning, and problem-solving interactions that often take the form of services rather than tangible goods. The technology-service ecosystem is therefore constrained not only by export bans but by the prohibition on the expert relationships that sustain usability. Hybrid pressure here works by disconnecting technology from the service environment necessary to make it productive³.

Technical assistance is one of the strongest expressions of this logic. The consolidated Decision text available via EUR-Lex states that it is prohibited to provide technical assistance, brokering services, or other services related to dual-use goods and technology and to the provision, manufacture, maintenance, and use of those goods and technology to persons or entities in Russia or for use in Russia. This language is analytically fundamental because it makes clear that the EU is not satisfied with restricting the goods themselves. It also restricts support related to their manufacture, maintenance, and use. In other words, the sanctions attack the knowledge and operational interface that turns a good into sustained capability. This is the essence of a hybrid technology-service restriction. The ban reaches into the full lifecycle of controlled technology: acquisition, deployment, operation, maintenance, and repair. It thereby constrains not just access, but continuity⁴.

Aviation and space restrictions illustrate this lifecycle approach with particular clarity. The Council's explanatory sanctions page states that the EU banned the export to Russia of goods and technology from the aviation and space industries and that this means Russian airlines cannot buy aircraft, spare parts, or equipment for their fleet and cannot perform the necessary repairs or technical inspections. The same page adds that insurance services, maintenance services, and technical assistance related to these goods and technology are also prohibited. This is a compact but powerful statement of the ecosystem logic. Aircraft continuity depends on spare parts, inspections, maintenance, and associated services no less than on the initial airframe or component. When all these layers are restricted together, the effect is far greater than a simple goods embargo. The sanctions strike at the practical ability to keep complex systems airworthy and compliant over time. That is a paradigmatic hybrid pressure mechanism⁵.

The same reasoning applies beyond aviation. Industrial continuity in capital-intensive sectors depends on a repeated cycle of spare parts, calibration, maintenance, testing, technical advice, and system-

¹ European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

² European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Frequently asked questions on provision of services concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 October 2025).

⁵ Council of the European Union. (2025). *EU sanctions against Russia: Questions and answers*.

specific know-how. Even where a sanctioned entity retains legacy machinery or previously acquired software, the inability to obtain replacement parts, vendor updates, or qualified technical assistance can progressively make the installed base less reliable and less productive. In such cases, the sanction effect is often delayed but cumulative. Output may continue in the short term, yet downtime increases, repair intervals lengthen, maintenance becomes improvised, and compatibility with newer processes declines. This is especially important in dual-use and advanced-technology sectors, where production tolerances are tighter and substitution is more difficult. Hybrid sanctions exploit exactly this vulnerability. By restricting support functions around the core technology, they turn continuity into a progressively more fragile achievement. This is one reason why the technology–service ecosystem is more analytically revealing than a simple inventory-based view of sanctions^{1,2}.

Spare-parts dependency is therefore more than a procurement issue. In a hybrid framework, it is a structural dependency through which sanctions convert technology denial into system degradation. Many high-value industrial and defence-relevant systems can continue operating only if critical components are replaced predictably and if maintenance schedules are supported by reliable technical data. Where spare parts are scarce, operators may resort to cannibalisation, lower-quality substitutes, or extended use beyond recommended service intervals. That may preserve minimal functionality for a time, but it generally reduces safety margins, efficiency, and long-run durability. The sanctions architecture exploits this by preventing the full technology stack from reproducing itself normally. This pressure is especially strong when combined with bans on software updates, servicing, inspections, and technical assistance. Under those conditions, spare-parts dependency ceases to be just a supply-chain problem and becomes a continuity constraint built into the whole industrial environment^{3,4}.

The anti-circumvention side of the ecosystem is also essential. Regulation 2024/1745 and the Commission’s CHP due-diligence FAQ require operators dealing in CHP items to implement due diligence mechanisms capable of identifying and assessing risks of exportation to Russia and mitigating those risks. The FAQ also states that these obligations apply not only to persons and entities directly trading such items, but also to persons or entities that own or control legal persons established outside the Union which sell, supply, transfer, or export CHP items or goods listed in Annex XLVIII. This is a major extension of the technology-control architecture. It means that the EU is not only restricting direct exports, but is also requiring firms to manage the risk that their controlled non-EU structures may become conduits for Russian access. The technology–service ecosystem thus becomes governed across corporate groups and across jurisdictions. This is a highly hybrid form of restriction because it links export controls, ownership nexus, due diligence, and third-country governance into one operating system^{5,6}.

The same amendment goes further by addressing intangible capability transfer. Regulation 2024/1745 states that operators must contractually prohibit commercial counterparts in third countries from using, or allowing the use of, transferred intellectual property rights, trade secrets, or protected information in connection with CHP items that are intended for export to Russia or for use in Russia. This is one of the clearest examples of hybridisation in the entire sanctions regime. The EU is no longer restricting only objects or direct services; it is also regulating the informational and legal means through which technological capability could be reproduced abroad and then channelled to Russia. In effect, the sanctions regime extends into industrial know-how governance. This is especially relevant for manufacturing continuity, because advanced industrial capability often depends as much on design files, process information, protected know-how, and proprietary methods as on the shipment of

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *EU sanctions against Russia: Questions and answers*.

² Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 October 2025).

³ Council of the European Union. (2025). *EU sanctions against Russia: Questions and answers*.

⁴ European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁵ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

⁶ European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

hardware. By targeting those intangibles, the EU aims to prevent third-country technology-service ecosystems from becoming shadow extension platforms for Russia^{1,2}.

This is also where data and service fragmentation become analytically important. The software restrictions cover ERP, SCM, EDW, CMMS, PLM, CAD, CAM, and other systems that allow firms to integrate planning, maintenance, design, manufacturing, and logistics. When access to these systems is interrupted, the effect is not simply the absence of one digital tool. The likely consequence is fragmentation across functions that previously relied on shared platforms, shared data models, or coordinated update cycles. This does not automatically mean total shutdown, and the evidence available publicly does not support a claim of universal collapse. However, it does support the inference that industrial continuity becomes harder to sustain where the sanctioned entity loses access to integrated software and related services. Workarounds may exist, including local substitutes, legacy systems, or segmented replacements, yet these are typically less efficient, less interoperable, or more difficult to support. The sanction effect here is therefore best understood as disintegration pressure on the organisational fabric of industrial activity. That is a distinctly hybrid mechanism because it acts through information architecture rather than only through goods denial^{3,4}.

The supply-chain dimension reinforces this interpretation. A joint 2024 guidance note hosted by the Commission explains that Russian proliferators operate as transshipment agents and divert dual-use technologies and controlled goods from third countries to Russia, and that all parts of the supply chain—including exporters, re-exporters, manufacturers, distributors, resellers, financial institutions, logistics companies, transportation providers, freight forwarders, warehouse operators, and customs brokers—should be aware of diversion risks and adopt appropriate mitigation measures. This broad supply-chain framing is highly revealing. It shows that the EU and partners do not view technology leakage as a matter for exporters alone. The entire supporting ecosystem, including service providers and logistics actors, is treated as relevant to the preservation or breakdown of sanctions integrity. That is exactly the logic of a hybrid instrument. The controlled good is only one node. What matters is whether the broader ecosystem continues to function as a diversion-capable pathway^{5,6}.

The interaction with third-country entities and controlled subsidiaries is especially important in this context. Regulation 2024/1745 notes that where Regulation 833/2014 requires Union operators to ensure that legal persons, entities, and bodies established outside the Union that they own or control conduct certain actions to prevent exportation or re-exportation of goods or technology to Russia, such requirements should be pursued to the extent permitted by the legislation of the third country where the entity is established. This clause reveals both the ambition and the limit of the EU model. The ambition is to prevent the externalisation of technology and service provision through corporate groups and foreign affiliates. The limit is that the EU still proceeds through ownership nexus and corporate obligation rather than through an unrestricted claim to regulate all third-country conduct directly. This makes the measure both hybrid and legally disciplined. It operates through the governance of connected entities rather than through a universal embargo on all possible channels⁷.

The result is a set of industrial continuity constraints that are broader than traditional export controls. A factory, repair base, or engineering operation does not need to be denied every component to experience deterioration. It may be enough that it loses stable access to key battlefield-relevant goods, to upstream

¹ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

² European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

³ European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁴ European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Frequently asked questions on provision of services concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁵ European Commission. (2024, September 30). *Preventing Russian export control and sanctions evasion*.

⁶ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁷ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

design/manufacturing software, to maintenance and technical assistance, to spare parts and inspection capacity, and to the integrated data environment required for coordination. Sanctions in this area therefore work through layered incompleteness. Each missing layer raises the burden on the others and weakens the ability of the system to absorb shocks. This is one reason why technology–service ecosystem controls can be more durable than attempts at absolute closure. They force the target to manage permanent degradation rather than only one-time interruption^{1,2,3}.

For analytical clarity, the main channels of technology–service ecosystem pressure can be summarised as follows.

Table 6.2.3-1. Technology–service ecosystem controls and dual-use support restrictions in the EU sanctions regime against Russia

Channel	Immediate restrictive mechanism	Direct operational effect	Secondary hybrid effect	Strategic consequence
Dual-use and advanced-technology export controls	Prohibition on export of battlefield-relevant and dual-use items	Loss or narrowing of access to critical components and technologies	Forces sourcing through riskier, costlier, or lower-quality substitutes	Degrades technological renewal and weapons/industrial capability
CHP items regime	Battlefield-informed list plus due-diligence and anti-circumvention architecture	Enhanced scrutiny of sensitive electronics and related inputs	Export control becomes a multi-actor governance system involving exporters, customs, and partner countries	Compresses the most war-relevant technology channels
Enterprise-management software bans	Restrictions on ERP, CRM, BI, SCM, EDW, CMMS, PLM and related suites	Reduced access to integrated planning, maintenance, logistics, and lifecycle software	Data and process fragmentation across firms and production systems	Weakens organisational coherence and industrial management capacity
Design/manufacturing software bans	Restrictions on BIM, CAD, CAM, ETO and related suites	Reduced access to design, modelling, and manufacturing software	Slows design iteration, engineering changes, and industrial integration	Constrains production modernisation and technical adaptation
Updates and upgrade support bans	Prohibition extends to software updates; related advice already restricted through IT consultancy ban	Legacy systems become harder to secure, support, and integrate over time	Lifecycle disruption without immediate total shutdown	Creates delayed but cumulative technological degradation
Technical assistance and related services restrictions	Bans on technical assistance, brokering, and services related to manufacture, maintenance, and use	Loss of vendor/adviser support for operation, repair, and deployment	Technology becomes less usable even where still physically available	Converts goods denial into capability denial
Spare parts, maintenance, and inspection restrictions	Sectoral bans such as those affecting aviation/space goods and related maintenance services	Harder replacement, repair, inspection, and certification	Encourages cannibalisation, improvised repair, and lower reliability	Erodes safe and sustainable operation of complex systems
IP/trade-secret anti-circumvention controls	Contractual prohibition on use of IP rights or trade secrets in connection with CHP items for Russia	Harder reproduction of capability via intangible know-how transfer	Extends sanctions from hardware into industrial knowledge systems	Limits third-country shadow replication of sensitive capability

¹ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 October 2025).

² Council of the European Union. (2025). *EU sanctions against Russia: Questions and answers*.

³ European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

Channel	Immediate restrictive mechanism	Direct operational effect	Secondary hybrid effect	Strategic consequence
Corporate-group due diligence	Obligations extend to controlled entities outside the EU trading CHP items	Wider compliance perimeter across group structures	Restricts use of subsidiaries as rerouting channels	Narrows indirect access through third-country corporate networks
Supply-chain risk governance	Diversion-risk guidance for exporters, service providers, logistics actors, and customs brokers	More actors screen for misuse and transshipment	Private governance and public control reinforce one another	Makes ecosystem-wide leakage harder to organise at scale

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and EUR-Lex legal texts

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025). *EU sanctions against Russia: Questions and answers*.
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Timeline - Packages of sanctions against Russia since February 2022*.
- Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 October 2025).
- Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.
- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.
- European Commission. (2024). *List of common high priority items*.
- European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.
- European Commission. (2024, September 30). *Preventing Russian export control and sanctions evasion*.
- European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.
- European Commission. (2025). *Export-related restrictions — Frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.
- European Commission. (2026, January 22). *Frequently asked questions on provision of services concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

The table shows that the EU’s technology regime is no longer best described as a set of export prohibitions narrowly understood. It has evolved into a layered system in which goods controls, software restrictions, service bans, update denial, maintenance disruption, corporate-group obligations, and know-how controls interact to constrain industrial continuity. This is why the category of “technology–service ecosystem controls” is analytically more accurate than a simple label such as “high-tech export controls”. The relevant object of restriction is not just the item crossing the border, but the ecosystem that allows the item to be designed, integrated, repaired, managed, and scaled in production. In the Russia case, this is especially significant because wartime adaptation depends heavily on substitution through third countries, repurposing of civilian technologies, and the continued functioning of fragmented but resilient procurement networks. The EU’s response has therefore moved closer to the full lifecycle of capability rather than remaining at the level of customs prohibition alone. That evolution is one of the clearest expressions of hybrid sanctions design in the whole regime^{1,2,3}.

A final conclusion follows. Technology–service ecosystem controls and dual-use support restrictions should be understood in this report as hybrid instruments because their coercive effect is generated through the interaction of export law, software and service denial, technical-assistance bans, spare-parts dependency, lifecycle disruption, data fragmentation, and anti-circumvention governance across

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2025). *Export-related restrictions — Frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.

³ European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

third countries and corporate groups. Their strategic value lies in the fact that they do not require perfect closure to matter. It is enough that Russian industrial and military-relevant systems are forced to operate with thinner technological integration, weaker servicing environments, more fragile maintenance cycles, and a more difficult path to reproduction of capability. In that sense, these sanctions are not merely restrictive at the border. They are degrading in the interior of the production system. That makes them highly significant for long-war pressure, because they target not only current procurement but also the institutional and technical continuity on which future adaptation depends^{1,2,3}.

6.2.4. Network-Based Listings and Restrictions on Facilitation Infrastructures

Network-based listings and restrictions on facilitation infrastructures represent one of the clearest expressions of hybrid sanctions design because they are aimed not only at a primary violator, but at the mixed public–private ecology that enables sanctioned activity to continue under adaptive conditions. In the EU–Russia case, this ecology includes brokers, shipping managers, financial conduits, crypto-service nodes, front-type corporate vehicles, logistics operators, para-state institutions, and entities acting on behalf of or at the direction of sanctioned actors. The strategic logic is straightforward: once direct sectoral restrictions begin to bite, the sanctioned system increasingly depends on networks of facilitation rather than on overt, one-step transactions. If restrictive policy continues to target only the primary state body or only the formal front-end company, the adaptive system survives through intermediaries. The EU has responded by progressively building a regime that isolates not just originators of restricted activity, but also the enabling nodes that move funds, mask ownership, maintain routing, manage payment substitutes, or provide institutional cover. This makes listings more relational and more infrastructural. It also makes them more hybrid, because the effect is generated through the interaction of asset freezes, transaction bans, service restrictions, compliance red flags, ownership criteria, and third-country exposure. In this field, the target is the support network itself^{4,5}.

This shift from actor-based to network-based sanctioning can be seen in the legal architecture itself. The consolidated text of Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP repeatedly extends prohibitions not only to listed Russian entities, but also to legal persons or bodies established outside the Union that are owned for more than 50% by such entities, and to legal persons or bodies acting on behalf of or at the direction of them. These formulations appear in relation to major credit institutions, publicly controlled entities, and other sanctioned categories. This is analytically important because it codifies the idea that functional proxies and controlled intermediaries can be as relevant as the nominal primary actor. The law is therefore not confined to naming one institution and leaving the rest to inference. It embeds network logic directly into the operative scope of prohibitions. This makes it possible to reach mixed corporate structures, intermediary companies, and directional proxies without having to redescribe each one as a direct state organ. In practical terms, this is one of the core legal devices through which hybrid sanctions are able to map onto the reality of modern evasion and facilitation networks⁶.

The same direction is visible in the asset-freeze regime. The consolidated text of Regulation (EU) No 269/2014, as reflected in the available EUR-Lex snippet, states that natural and legal persons subject to an asset freeze shall undertake their best efforts to ensure that any legal person, entity, or body that they own or control does not participate in activities that undermine the restrictive measures. Even though that wording belongs to a different legal instrument family than the sectoral prohibitions in Regulation 833/2014 and Decision 2014/512/CFSP, it reinforces the same operational logic. The sanctions regime is no longer concerned only with the listed person in isolation. It is concerned with the conduct of the

¹ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 October 2025).

² European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

³ European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁶ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).

wider controlled network around that person. This is crucial for understanding why listings in Part 6.2.4 must be analysed as network-based. The coercive intention is not exhausted by freezing one account or banning one transaction. It is to prevent listed actors from maintaining operational relevance through controlled off-balance vehicles, affiliates, or direction-based structures^{1,2}.

The 16th package made this network turn especially visible. The Commission stated that the package imposed targeted export restrictions on 53 new companies supporting Russia's military-industrial complex or engaged in sanctions circumvention, including 34 companies in countries other than Russia. It also added 83 listings, including 48 individuals and 35 entities, specifically mentioning actors supporting the Russian military complex, active in sanctions circumvention, Russian crypto-asset exchanges, and the maritime sector. In addition, the 16th package introduced another new criterion for listing individuals and entities that are part of Russia's military and industrial complex, support it, or benefit from it. This language is revealing. The targets are not only producers of weapons or state ministries in a narrow sense. They include those who support or benefit from the wider industrial complex, which is a relational rather than purely sectoral category. The regime therefore begins to map chains of support rather than just front-end production³.

The same package also moved decisively against financial and crypto facilitation nodes. According to the Commission, the 16th package added 13 financial institutions to the list of entities subject to the prohibition on specialised financial messaging services, added 3 banks to the transaction ban because of their use of the Russian SPFS system to circumvent EU sanctions, and extended the transaction ban to enable the EU to list financial institutions and crypto-asset providers that participate in the circumvention of the Oil Price Cap and facilitate transactions with listed vessels of the shadow fleet. This is a highly developed example of network-based sanctioning. The target is not simply a Russian bank performing a direct prohibited act. The target is the enabling financial circuitry that keeps sanctioned shipping, oil revenue, and substitute payment ecosystems functioning. The inclusion of crypto-asset providers in this logic is especially significant because it shows that the EU no longer treats digital financial nodes as peripheral. They are now explicitly recognised as potential sanctions-enabling intermediaries in the maritime-energy-finance nexus⁴.

The 17th package deepened this approach. The Commission stated that it added 31 new companies to the list of those providing direct or indirect support to Russia's military-industrial complex or engaged in sanctions circumvention, including 18 companies established in Russia and 13 established in third countries, specifically in Turkey, Vietnam, the UAE, Serbia, and Uzbekistan. The same package also used new criteria related to shadow-fleet enablers and the military industry, both adopted in the 16th package, and listed a Russian shipping company, Joint Stock Company Volga Shipping, as an important revenue-generating actor. This package is a particularly useful example because it shows how network-based listings merge several functions at once: anti-circumvention, third-country facilitation control, shadow-fleet disruption, and revenue-denial. It is not just a matter of "more listings". It is a matter of selecting actors because of the role they play in a wider support network⁵.

By December 2025, this logic was applied even more explicitly to shadow-fleet enablers. The Council announced sanctions on five individuals and four entities responsible for supporting Russia's shadow fleet and its value chain. The listed individuals were described as businessmen linked directly or indirectly to major Russian state-owned oil companies Rosneft and Lukoil, while the listed entities were shipping companies based in the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, and Russia that owned or managed tankers already subject to restrictive measures. This is almost a paradigmatic illustration of a mixed public-private support network. State-owned oil interests, privately organised shipping services, foreign-based companies, and value-chain facilitation are targeted together because their combined

¹ Regulation (EU) No 269/2014 (consolidated version of 16 September 2025).

² Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).

³ European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

function sustains Russian revenue generation. The listings are therefore not primarily symbolic. They are directed at the operational chain that allows crude oil and petroleum products to continue moving under opaque and high-risk conditions¹.

This is why network-based listings are analytically different from ordinary individual designations. A traditional listing may isolate a politically important person, a military supplier, or a state body. A network-based listing attempts to degrade the continuity of a support system by isolating the brokers, ownership links, shipping managers, finance channels, or service entities through which restricted activity is organised. In such a system, some actors are clearly public, some clearly private, and many are mixed or para-state. The Russian war economy relies heavily on this mixed zone, where state-owned or state-linked actors interact with private intermediaries, foreign corporate vehicles, insurers, traders, and logistics firms. The EU's listing practice in 2025 increasingly reflects that reality. It is no longer sufficient to treat the "state" and the "market" as separate sanctioning terrains. The relevant target is the interface between them^{2,3}.

State-owned and para-state infrastructures illustrate this especially well. The Commission's FAQ on Article 5aa explains that the provision prohibits the conclusion of new contracts with listed Russian state-owned enterprises, the execution of existing ones after the relevant cut-off, or the provision of any sort of economically valuable benefit to such entities. The same FAQ gives the Russian Maritime Register of Shipping as an example of an entity subject to the transaction ban and explains that the measure prohibits carrying out transactions, including economically valuable benefits, to that registry. It also discusses Sovcomflot, which became subject to an asset freeze under Regulation 269/2014 while remaining embedded in the wider Article 5aa logic. This shows that para-state institutions such as registers, registries, and state-owned shipping or energy companies are not treated only as formal public bodies. They are treated as infrastructural support nodes within wider public-private networks⁴.

The network logic is even more visible in the financial sphere. Transaction bans under the sanctions' regime do not stop at directly listed Russian banks. The consolidated Decision extends prohibitions to entities established outside the Union whose proprietary rights are owned more than 50% by certain listed Russian institutions, and to any legal person, entity, or body acting on behalf of or at the direction of them. This makes sense from an operational perspective, because modern sanctions evasion rarely relies on direct use of a named sanctioned bank once that route has been closed. It relies on substitute banks, controlled affiliates, off-network processors, and direction-based proxies. The EU's legal design therefore allows it to isolate not only the core node but also the finance-adjacent network around it. This is one of the reasons why transaction bans in 6.2.4 should be understood as restrictions on facilitation infrastructures rather than only on single institutions⁵.

The 19th package added a particularly strong set of illustrations in this area. The Commission stated that the package targeted key sectors including energy, finance, the military-industrial base, special economic zones, as well as enablers and profiteers of the war of aggression. It also announced measures against important third-country operators enabling Russia's revenue streams, specifically sanctioning Chinese entities—two refineries and an oil trader—that are significant buyers of Russian crude oil. In addition, the anti-circumvention section of the same statement reports that the package added 45 entities to the list of those providing direct or indirect support to Russia's military-industrial complex or engaged in sanctions circumvention, including 17 entities established in third countries, notably in China, India, and Thailand. This is an unmistakable move toward network-based and

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025, December 15). *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 9 shadow fleet enablers*.

² Ibid.

³ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia's war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, November 21). *State-owned enterprises*.

⁵ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).

geography-sensitive sanctioning. The targets are chosen not only because of nationality or formal status, but because of their function in revenue extraction, military support, and circumvention¹.

Crypto-service nodes represent one of the most notable innovations of the 19th package. The Commission states that the EU imposed full-fledged sanctions on the developer of the widely used rouble-backed stablecoin A7A5, on the Kyrgyz issuer of that coin, and on a related major trading platform; that it prohibited the use of that cryptocurrency; and that it directly targeted a cryptocurrency exchange in Paraguay that had played a key role in circumventing existing restrictions. It further described this as a significant evolution in the EU’s sanctions regime and added that EU operators are banned from providing crypto services and certain fintech services that enable Russia to develop its own financial infrastructure and possibly circumvent sanctions. This is a textbook hybrid instrument family. Stablecoins, issuers, exchanges, and fintech support are neither simply “banks” nor merely “technology firms.” They are facilitation nodes that allow money movement, asset storage, and transaction continuity in sanction-sensitive environments. By targeting them directly, the EU extends sanctions pressure into a domain where public regulation and private digital infrastructure are tightly intertwined².

The same package also demonstrates the increasing centrality of third-country financial conduits. The Commission states that the 19th package introduced transaction bans on five third-country banks in Central Asia that support Russia’s war economy and frustrate the effectiveness of EU sanctions. It also states that new bans were imposed on Russia’s Mir payment card and SBP fast payment system, and that four new financial institutions in Belarus and Kazakhstan using the Russian SPFS system were listed. This is important because it shows how the EU now maps payment substitution not just as a Russian domestic issue, but as a cross-border infrastructure problem. Payment cards, fast-payment systems, messaging substitutes, and third-country banks are all treated as sanctions-relevant enablers when they help Russia preserve financial continuity. The object of pressure is therefore not one payment transaction but the substitute ecosystem that could normalise such transactions at scale^{3,4}.

Special economic zones (SEZs) are another form of facilitation infrastructure that became much more visible in late 2025. The 19th package states that such zones are designed to attract foreign investment and play a critical role in economic growth and infrastructure development, and that the package proposes a prohibition on entering into new contracts with entities established within certain Russian SEZs. It also states that two zones—Alabuga and Technopolis Moscow—are subject to a ban that also applies to existing contracts, essentially forcing divestment. The consolidated Decision text is even more explicit. It prohibits new and, for certain zones, continuing participations, joint ventures, branches, representative offices, and supply contracts for goods, services, intellectual property rights, or trade secrets, and it extends the prohibitions to legal persons outside the zones that are owned or controlled by entities located within them. This is a powerful example of infrastructure-focused sanctioning. The target is not merely a company, but a state-backed industrial ecosystem designed to organise capital, services, technology, and production in support of the war effort^{5,6}.

Third-country infrastructure nodes are also increasingly within scope. The 19th package states that the extension of the port infrastructure ban will enable the EU to list ports in third countries that are instrumental to the Russian war effort. The consolidated Decision text likewise refers to transaction bans with ports and locks in third countries used for the transfer of UAVs or missiles and related technology or components in support of Russia’s war. This is a striking development because it makes clear that the EU is willing to treat logistics infrastructures outside Russia as sanctions-relevant facilitation nodes where their function is sufficiently war-linked. The measure is not aimed at a third country in the abstract. It is aimed at infrastructure whose operational role makes it part of the support network. This is precisely

¹ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁶ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).

the logic of hybrid sanctions: infrastructure is targeted because it facilitates an effect that direct sanctions are intended to prevent^{1,2}.

Service-related facilitation infrastructures have also expanded in scope. The 19th package states that the EU introduced service bans blocking Russian access to advanced digital capabilities within the Union, including certain space-based services and AI services, and that a new prior-authorisation requirement will apply to any non-prohibited services to the Russian government. These measures belong in this section because they show that facilitation infrastructures are not only financial or logistical. They also include high-value service layers that enable planning, targeting, coordination, digital operations, and institutional resilience. When such services are restricted, the effect extends beyond the immediate contract. It affects the quality and adaptability of the broader support environment available to Russian state and para-state actors. The service ban therefore functions as a network control even where the direct addressee is formally the government³.

These examples show why the category of “facilitation infrastructure” is analytically useful. It captures entities and systems that are neither primary producers nor purely passive channels. They actively organise, normalise, or protect the performance of transactions and operations that sanctions seek to constrain. A broker, a crypto exchange, a payment system, a port, a shipping manager, a registry, a special economic zone, or a state-owned logistical service may each appear different in legal form. Yet all can function as enabling nodes that sustain Russian adaptation under sanctions. Network-based listings are therefore not arbitrary proliferation. They are attempts to map that common functional role across heterogeneous institutional forms. This is why 6.2.4 cannot be reduced to a list of “more entities sanctioned”. Its real subject is the increasing infrastructural intelligence of the regime^{4,5}.

The main operational advantage of network-based listings is that they attack substitution capacity rather than only direct conduct. If a bank is sanctioned but substitute banks remain open, the payment problem is only partially solved. If a vessel is listed but its managers, registry support, financiers, and service providers remain untouched, the route remains more resilient than necessary. If a sanctions-evading stablecoin can still circulate through offshore issuers and exchanges, financial pressure leaks into alternative infrastructure. By targeting the network rather than only the front-end node, the EU raises the cost of reconstruction after each restriction. This makes the adaptive cycle itself more fragile. It also explains why such measures are increasingly prominent as the sanctions’ regime matures^{6,7}.

At the same time, this strategy creates a more demanding burden of evidence and calibration. The more the EU sanctions mixed public–private and third-country networks, the greater the need to justify why a particular company, platform, bank, or infrastructure is a genuine enabler rather than merely a distant commercial actor. The regime partly addresses this through objective legal criteria such as ownership thresholds, direction-based language, transaction bans, and sector-specific annexes. It also addresses it by targeting concrete functional links: use of SPFS, support for the shadow fleet, significant buying of Russian crude, support to the military-industrial complex, or participation in sanctions circumvention. Even so, network-based sanctions remain more complex than direct actor sanctions. Their strength lies in functional realism. Their vulnerability lies in the fact that functional realism must be continuously evidenced and legally maintained^{8,9}.

For analytical clarity, the main categories of network-based listings and facilitation restrictions can be summarised as follows.

¹ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).

² European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁸ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).

⁹ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

Table 6.2.4-1. Typology of network-based listings and restrictions on facilitation infrastructures

Node type	Representative EU instrument	Typical 2025 example	Functional role in the support network	Why this is hybrid rather than a simple listing
Third-country military-industrial enablers	Asset freezes, export restrictions, circumvention-linked entity listings	31 companies added in the 17th package, including firms in Türkiye, Vietnam, the UAE, Serbia and Uzbekistan	Provide direct or indirect support, procurement, or rerouting for Russia’s military-industrial complex	Targets cross-border support chains rather than only Russian producers
Shadow-fleet value-chain enablers	Asset freezes, vessel-related criteria, shadow-fleet enabler listings	Five individuals and four entities sanctioned in December 2025; UAE/Vietnam/Russia shipping companies and businessmen linked to Rosneft/Lukoil	Sustain opaque transport, tanker management, and revenue continuity	Combines state-linked energy actors, private shipping firms, and high-risk logistics practices
Financial conduits	Transaction bans, messaging-service prohibitions, SPFS-linked measures	3 SPFS-linked banks in 16th package; 5 Central Asian banks and 4 Belarus/Kazakhstan institutions in 19th package	Preserve payment continuity outside ordinary sanctioned banking channels	Targets substitute financial architecture, not only named Russian banks
Crypto and fintech nodes	Listings, transaction bans, use prohibitions, crypto-service bans	A7A5 developer, Kyrgyz issuer, related trading platform, Paraguay exchange, crypto-service ban in 19th package	Enable offshore value transfer and alternative settlement outside ordinary finance	Integrates sanctions into digital financial infrastructure and offshore exchange ecosystems
Para-state service and registry structures	Transaction bans and related prohibitions	Russian Maritime Register of Shipping; Sovcomflot under Article 5aa/269 logic	Provide institutional cover, technical legitimacy, and logistical continuity	Targets infrastructures that are public, quasi-public, and commercially operational at once
Special economic zones and associated entities	Contract bans, divestment-style restrictions, owned/controlled entity extensions	Alabuga and Technopolis Moscow in 19th package; owned/controlled entities beyond the zone also covered	Concentrate investment, services, IP, logistics, and industrial capacity for war-relevant activity	Restricts ecosystem platforms rather than one firm or one shipment
Third-country infrastructure nodes	Port and lock transaction bans, infrastructure listings	Extension of port infrastructure ban to third-country ports instrumental to the war effort	Provide physical transfer points for sensitive goods and military-related logistics	Makes external infrastructure part of the sanctions perimeter based on function
Advanced service nodes	Service bans, authorisation requirements	Space-based services, AI services, stricter controls on services to Russian government in 19th package	Preserve digital capability, planning, and institutional support	Extends sanctions from goods and money into high-value enabling services

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission package statements, and EUR-Lex legal texts

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025, December 15). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 9 shadow fleet enablers.*
- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions.*
- Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).
- European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*

The evolution across 2025 package cycles can also be summarised more compactly.

Table 6.2.4-2. Escalation of network-based sanctions instruments in 2025

Package / action	Main network-based innovation	Types of nodes targeted	Strategic direction
16th package (24 February 2025)	New listing criteria for military-industrial support; crypto and maritime-related listings; SPFS-linked transaction bans	53 new companies, 34 outside Russia; 83 listings including crypto exchanges and maritime actors; 3 banks using SPFS	Shift from direct sanctions to network-aware disruption of support ecosystems
17th package (20 May 2025)	Third-country enabler listings and shadow-fleet enabler criteria operationalised	31 companies, including 13 in third countries; Volga Shipping; broader shadow-fleet criteria	Consolidation of mixed public-private and cross-border support network targeting
19th package (23 October 2025)	Strong expansion into crypto, third-country banks, SEZs, Chinese revenue enablers, AI/space services, and ports	Stablecoin developer/issuer/platform, offshore exchange, 5 third-country banks, 4 SPFS-linked institutions, Chinese refineries/oil trader, SEZ entities, ports in third countries	Full-spectrum targeting of facilitation infrastructures rather than only direct sanctioned actors
Council action (15 December 2025)	Shadow-fleet value-chain enabler designations	5 individuals linked to Rosneft/Lukoil and 4 shipping companies in UAE, Vietnam and Russia	Explicit move toward value-chain sanctioning as a mature network-control strategy

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of Commission and Council 2025 sanctions announcements

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025, December 15). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 9 shadow fleet enablers.*
- European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*

The two tables show that network-based sanctioning is not an incidental by-product of package accumulation. It has become a deliberate sanctions design principle. The regime increasingly targets not only state ministries or headline corporations, but also the connective organisations that enable payments, logistics, digital finance, offshore exchange, third-country processing, industrial clustering, and shadow-fleet operations. This has two consequences. First, it makes the sanctions regime more realistic in relation to how Russia actually adapts. Second, it increases administrative and evidentiary complexity, because these nodes are often mixed in ownership, mixed in geography, and mixed in public-private character. Network-based listings are therefore more demanding to build and defend, but also more likely to disrupt the adaptive medium in which circumvention survives^{1,2}.

A final conclusion follows. Network-based listings and restrictions on facilitation infrastructures should be understood in this report as a mature hybrid instrument family aimed at degrading the mixed public-private systems through which Russia preserves operational continuity under sanctions. Their defining feature is not simply that “more entities” are listed. It is that the entities are selected because of their functional position within enabling networks: shipping managers around the shadow fleet, SPFS-linked banks, crypto exchanges and stablecoin infrastructures, third-country industrial suppliers, para-state registries, SEZ-based production ecosystems, and service nodes linked to digital or strategic capability. Such measures are more precise than broad jurisdiction-wide penalties and more effective than sanctions focused only on the direct state actor. At the same time, they demand continuous evidentiary discipline, since the boundary between facilitation and mere commercial proximity can be contested.

¹ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*

² Council of the European Union. (2025, December 15). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 9 shadow fleet enablers.*

Used carefully, however, they allow the EU to strike not only at Russia’s immediate transactions, but at the architecture that keeps those transactions possible^{1,2,3}.

6.3. Effectiveness Assessment

6.3.1. Criteria and Indicators of Hybrid-Sanctions Effectiveness

The assessment of hybrid-sanctions effectiveness requires a measurement framework different from the one used for classical political or purely sectoral economic sanctions. In a hybrid regime, the decisive effect often does not appear first in aggregate trade collapse, GDP contraction, or immediate budgetary crisis. It appears earlier and more clearly in the disruption of enabling systems: routes become less reliable, lawful channels narrow, documentation burdens intensify, servicing becomes more difficult, and substitution moves into riskier or lower-quality networks. The EEAS explicitly treats sanctions effectiveness as inseparable from implementation breadth and from tackling circumvention through third countries, while the Commission’s due-diligence guidance frames the key problem as the emergence of complex circumvention techniques across high-risk sectors and complex supply chains. This means that a suitable indicator framework must focus not only on end-state macroeconomic outcomes, but also on meso-level degradation of operational continuity. Hybrid sanctions are effective when they make adaptation slower, costlier, less lawful, less transparent, and less scalable. They are less effective when adaptation remains smooth, low-cost, documentable, and reproducible through stable substitute networks. The central methodological implication is therefore that effectiveness should be assessed through friction indicators and network-degradation indicators, not through binary “stopped/did not stop” assumptions^{4,5}.

A first criterion is therefore route disruption. In hybrid sanctions, a route is not simply a physical path by which goods or oil move from one place to another. It is a composite of transport availability, serviceability, insurability, documentation integrity, port access, permissive flagging, and counterparties willing to assume legal and reputational risk. If sanctions meaningfully disrupt routes, the target’s adaptation capacity weakens even if some volumes continue to move. The Commission’s 17th-package statement provides a clear illustration of this logic: EU vessel listings, together with actions by partner countries, were described as making it increasingly difficult to replace sanctioned vessels and making Russian oil exports more complex and costly. The same statement reports a decrease in volumes transported and in the number of ships carrying Russian oil, and notes that deliveries on EU-listed vessels had fallen by 76%. This shows why route disruption is a superior hybrid indicator to simple export prohibition counting. It measures not whether one channel was formally banned, but whether the transport ecology became materially less usable. Effective hybrid sanctions should therefore be expected to show fewer stable routes, more frequent rerouting, reduced capacity on sanctioned vessels, and greater dependence on degraded substitutes^{6,7}.

A second criterion is the escalation of transaction costs. This criterion is central because hybrid sanctions rarely require perfect interdiction to produce real pressure. It is often enough that a transaction must now pass through riskier intermediaries, more opaque documentation chains,

¹ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP (consolidated version of 24 December 2025).

² European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ Council of the European Union. (2025, December 15). *Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Council sanctions 9 shadow fleet enablers*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁶ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁷ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

additional brokers, weaker payment infrastructures, or costlier insurance and compliance layers. The Commission's 17th-package statement explicitly says that exporting oil has become more complex and costly for the Kremlin as listed vessels can no longer operate business as usual. In analytical terms, this is exactly the sort of outcome hybrid sanctions are meant to produce. Transaction-cost escalation can manifest through higher freight premia, more expensive insurance, larger discounts demanded by counterparties, increased use of intermediaries, or more costly financing arrangements. It can also appear through indirect commercial effects, such as the need to offer more favourable terms to attract higher-risk service providers. A useful hybrid-sanctions indicator, therefore, is not just whether a good still moves, but at what price, through how many hands, and under what compensating risk premium. When transactions remain possible only at persistently worse terms, the sanctions regime is exerting real hybrid pressure^{1,2}.

A third criterion is time delay. Hybrid sanctions operate not only through cost, but through time as a coercive variable. Due-diligence requirements, route verification, end-use checks, ownership screening, contract redesign, software substitution, and repeated documentary review all slow the execution of transactions and services. The Commission's due-diligence guidance requires operators to conduct recurring risk assessments, to map products and transactions vulnerable to circumvention, and to monitor contractual arrangements, customers, business partners, processing, and end-use. Each of these measures has a temporal consequence. A transaction that once moved within a short and predictable commercial cycle may now require repeated review, escalation, and sometimes competent-authority engagement. From a hybrid perspective, this matters because delayed execution reduces flexibility, complicates inventory planning, weakens industrial scheduling, and lowers the reliability of adaptive channels. Accordingly, time delay should be measured not as a trivial inconvenience but as an indicator of systemic friction. An effective hybrid regime produces more waiting points, more decision bottlenecks, and more frequent interruption between planning and completion^{3,4}.

A fourth criterion is quality degradation. This is especially important in hybrid sanctions because the target may maintain nominal continuity by switching to lower-grade substitutes, older vessels, less capable software, weaker technical assistance, unverified components, or improvised maintenance cycles. The question of effectiveness is therefore not only whether a good, service, or route still exists, but whether its quality, safety, reliability, or interoperability has declined. The Price Cap Coalition advisory describes shadow-trade vessels as frequently older ships operating past traditional lifespans, with weak maintenance and regulatory-risk profiles, while the Commission's aviation explanation emphasises that the loss of spare parts, maintenance services, and technical assistance affects the ability to perform repairs and inspections. The same logic applies across industry: when sanctioned actors substitute with lower-trust providers or lower-quality inputs, apparent continuity may mask real deterioration. Hybrid sanctions are effective when they force this quality downgrade, because degraded quality raises downstream failure rates, safety risks, and long-run inefficiency. Quality degradation should therefore be assessed as a substantive effectiveness signal, not dismissed as a secondary side effect^{5,6}.

A fifth criterion is the shrinking of lawful options. This criterion is highly valuable because it captures the difference between adaptation through ordinary commercial means and adaptation through progressively more dubious or constrained channels. The more lawful, high-trust, well-insured, well-documented, and serviceable channels are removed, the more the target must rely on opaque, high-risk, or fragile alternatives. The Council's sanctions page now explicitly frames anti-circumvention through

¹ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

³ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2025). *EU sanctions against Russia: Questions and answers*.

third countries as a key priority and describes measures such as the “no re-export to Russia” clause, enhanced due diligence for common high priority items, restrictions on vessels, bans on Mir and SBP, and limits connected to SPFS-linked financial institutions. Each of these measures narrows the set of lawful or commercially normal options. Hybrid-sanctions effectiveness should therefore be inferred where ordinary commercial pathways contract and where workarounds increasingly require legally or reputationally compromised infrastructures. A reduction in lawful options is not merely a legal metric. It is an operational indicator of how narrow and precarious the adaptation space has become^{1,2}.

A sixth criterion is increased compliance friction. This is particularly important because hybrid sanctions depend heavily on decentralised private-sector transmission. The Commission’s due-diligence guidance expressly states that EU operators should identify and assess circumvention risks on a recurring basis, follow open-source information on evolving techniques, and calibrate compliance programmes to business model, geography, customers, business partners, and staff. The guidance also gives concrete examples such as sudden export surges to previously marginal third-country destinations, freight-forwarder exposure, and easy product miscoding. This means that the sanctions regime itself expects growing friction as part of effective implementation. Increased compliance friction can therefore be observed in more intensive screening, additional documentation requests, extra layers of legal and commercial approval, more frequent refusal of borderline business, and greater divergence between what is legally arguable and what is commercially acceptable. In hybrid terms, this friction is not evidence of failure. It is one of the main ways the sanctions perimeter expands beyond the literal text of the prohibition. A useful indicator framework should thus measure compliance friction as a deliberate transmission effect rather than merely as a burden on firms^{3,4}.

A seventh criterion, though more difficult to interpret, is the visibility profile of networks. The user’s proposed indicator of “visibility reduction of networks” is analytically important, but it must be handled with caution. In some cases, reduced visibility of a sanctions-sensitive network may indicate that lawful, open, and well-documented channels have been displaced and that the network has retreated into more opaque and fragile forms. In that sense, reduced visibility can be a symptom of pressure. But the same development can also be an enforcement problem, because it may mean that the network has become harder to observe, harder to map, and harder to disrupt. The Commission’s due-diligence guidance and anti-circumvention materials repeatedly emphasise complex financial schemes, falsified origins, miscategorisation, and reliance on third-country jurisdictions. These patterns show that opacity is both a target response and a measurement complication. Accordingly, visibility reduction should never be treated as a standalone success indicator. It should be assessed only together with route disruption, cost escalation, lawful-option shrinkage, and other evidence that the move into opacity reflects stress rather than successful stabilisation^{5,6}.

This leads to a broader methodological rule: no single indicator should be treated as decisive in the hybrid field. Route disruption without cost escalation may indicate temporary rerouting rather than meaningful pressure. Cost escalation without time delays may still leave adaptation operationally manageable. Visibility reduction without evidence of lawful-channel shrinkage may simply reflect better evasion rather than weaker capability. Conversely, moderate changes across several indicators at once can be more significant than a dramatic movement in only one variable. Hybrid sanctions should therefore be assessed through indicator clusters rather than through isolated signals. The Commission’s due-diligence approach implicitly supports this logic, because it instructs operators to examine not only counterparties but also routes, contractual arrangements, end-use, and transaction

¹ Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

³ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁴ European Commission. (2024, January 26). *Consolidated FAQs on the implementation of Council Regulation No 833/2014 and Council Regulation No 269/2014*.

⁵ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁶ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

context. In analytical terms, the same principle should guide effectiveness assessment at report level. A strong hybrid-sanctions effect is visible where several forms of friction and degradation reinforce one another^{1,2}.

Another necessary distinction is between immediate indicators and lagging indicators. Immediate indicators include listing-induced route withdrawal, rising compliance checks, cancelled service provision, and delays in transaction execution. Lagging indicators include persistent quality erosion, cumulative inability to replace sanctioned vessels or parts, falling use of listed ships, or long-term dependence on degraded substitute infrastructures. The 17th-package statement is useful here because it captures both kinds of effects at once. It links immediate action—the listing of 189 additional vessels and the ban on services—to lagging effects such as the increasing difficulty of replacing sanctioned vessels and the growing complexity and cost of oil exports. A sound analytical framework for Part 6.3.1 should therefore separate indicators by temporal horizon. Otherwise, premature judgments may be made either that sanctions “failed” because activity continued in the short run, or that they “succeeded” because initial disruption occurred even though adaptation later stabilised. Hybrid sanctions are best assessed over time as degradation pathways, not as one-off events³.

The evidence base for these indicators should also be differentiated by level. Some indicators are observable through official package statements, guidance, or sanctions FAQs. Others require customs or enforcement data, shipping intelligence, insurance-market signals, or partner-country reporting. The Commission’s due-diligence guidance emphasises open-source information, strategic risk assessment, and typologies of circumvention. The EEAS effectiveness page emphasises coalition building and third-country alignment. These sources suggest that hybrid-sanctions measurement should combine regulatory evidence, market evidence, and network evidence. Regulatory evidence includes new listing criteria, service bans, and due-diligence obligations. Market evidence includes cost increases, service withdrawal, insurer retreat, and substitution into lower-quality channels. Network evidence includes rerouting, third-country surges, ownership opacity, and the growth or decline of facilitation nodes. The strongest assessment results arise when these evidence families point in the same direction^{4,5}.

It is also necessary to distinguish between effectiveness for disruption and effectiveness for visibility. Some hybrid instruments aim primarily to make activity harder and more expensive. Others aim to make it more detectable and therefore less deniable. These goals overlap but do not always move together. Maritime tracking, persistent vessel identifiers, and flag-state outreach improve visibility; routing through opaque intermediaries reduces it. Due-diligence obligations increase documentary exposure; digital finance substitutes may decrease formal traceability. For this reason, a good indicator system should not treat observability and disruption as identical. Rather, it should ask whether visibility is improving in ways that support disruption, or whether disruption is pushing activity into darker zones that require better enforcement capability. This distinction helps interpret the user’s indicator of network-visibility reduction more precisely. Visibility reduction is most meaningful when it is paired with other signs that the network is not only harder to see but also more fragile and more costly to maintain^{6,7}.

For that reason, the assessment of hybrid sanctions should not be reduced to macroeconomic counterfactuals such as “Did Russian GDP collapse?” or “Did all exports stop?” Hybrid measures are often designed precisely to avoid dependence on total closure. Their function is to degrade, narrow, fragment, and strain. The Commission’s technology, software, and maritime materials show that the EU

¹ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

increasingly acts against support ecosystems, not just flows. The more relevant question for 6.3.1 is therefore whether these ecosystems remain able to reproduce restricted activity in a stable, lawful, high-quality, low-friction way. If the answer is no—even though some activity persists—hybrid sanctions may be judged effective within their own operational logic. That does not mean strategic success is automatic or complete. It means the measurement framework must be aligned to the mechanism of the instrument^{1,2,3}.

Therefore, the main criteria and indicator families can be structured as follows.

Table 6.3.1-1. Core criteria and indicators for assessing the effectiveness of hybrid sanctions

Criterion	Primary indicator family	Typical observable signs	Interpretation rule	Main caveat
Route disruption	Shipping and trade-routing change	Fewer stable routes, reduced use of listed vessels, rerouting through longer or riskier paths, fewer lawful transfer points	Stronger disruption indicates weaker adaptation resilience	Some rerouting may reflect temporary adjustment rather than durable degradation
Transaction-cost escalation	Cost and risk-premium growth	Higher freight/insurance/compliance costs, larger intermediary margins, worse commercial terms, higher discounting	Sustained cost inflation is a core sign of hybrid pressure	Cost data may be partial or non-public
Time delays	Execution and approval lag	Longer document cycles, more screening time, slower delivery, delays in servicing or payments	Delay is coercively relevant when it affects reliability and planning	Short-term delays may later be normalised by adaptation
Quality degradation	Reliability and performance loss	Older vessels, weaker software support, poorer substitutes, lower maintenance quality, more fragile servicing	Declining quality shows degradation even when activity persists	Quality decline is sometimes difficult to quantify uniformly
Shrinking lawful options	Legal and commercially normal channel contraction	Fewer usable compliant routes, services, banks, platforms, insurers, or counterparties	Narrow lawful-option sets indicate rising dependence on compromised substitutes	Some lawful alternatives may persist in limited form
Increased compliance friction	Screening and due-diligence intensity	More documentation, more checks, more refusals, more internal escalations, over-compliance	Friction is a transmission mechanism of sanctions, not merely an implementation cost	Excess friction may also affect legitimate trade and humanitarian activity
Network visibility / opacity shift	Observability of facilitation patterns	More concealment, more shell structures, more AIS irregularities, more complex routing	Useful only when interpreted together with other pressure indicators	Visibility reduction alone may indicate stronger evasion rather than stronger sanctions

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and coalition enforcement documentation

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2025). *Russia’s war against Ukraine: EU sanctions*.
- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.
- European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

¹ European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

² European Commission. (2025, June 30). *Targeted vessels*.

³ European Commission. (2025). *Export-related restrictions — Frequently asked questions concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’ involvement in it*.

- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions.*
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors.*

A second table is useful to separate strong, moderate, and ambiguous readings of the user’s proposed indicators.

Table 6.3.1-2. Interpretive use of key hybrid-sanctions indicators

Indicator movement	Strong evidence of effectiveness when...	Only moderate evidence when...	Ambiguous or weak evidence when...
Routes are disrupted	Volume shifts away from lawful/high-trust channels and replacement routes are fewer, longer, or less serviceable	Rerouting occurs but equivalent alternative capacity appears quickly	Routes change but overall logistical resilience remains stable
Costs rise	Higher costs are sustained and linked to reduced replaceability or weaker intermediaries	Costs rise only temporarily during adjustment	Higher costs are easily absorbed without operational strain
Delays increase	Delays affect planning, maintenance, delivery reliability, or revenue collection	Delays are present but mostly administrative	Delays disappear quickly as new routines stabilise
Quality declines	Lower-quality substitutes affect safety, precision, interoperability, or continuity	Quality falls at the margins but core functions remain stable	Quality appears unchanged despite sanctions pressure
Lawful options shrink	Actors increasingly depend on opaque or high-risk channels	Some lawful channels remain but become narrower	Lawful and commercially normal alternatives remain abundant
Compliance friction increases	Screening and refusals materially narrow adaptation pathways	Friction rises mainly for low-risk or legitimate trade	Friction burdens operators but leaves core evasion networks intact
Network visibility declines	Reduced visibility coincides with route, cost, and quality deterioration, implying stressed opacity	Opacity grows, but enforcement visibility also improves in parallel	Opacity grows without other signs of degradation, suggesting successful concealment

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and coalition enforcement documentation

Sources:

- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention.*
- European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia.*
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions.*
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors.*

Taken together, the two tables show that hybrid-sanctions effectiveness is best understood as structured degradation of adaptation systems. The most reliable evidence is not a single spectacular break, but the simultaneous deterioration of routes, costs, timing, quality, lawful optionality, and compliance ease. In that sense, the ideal hybrid-sanctions dashboard is neither purely legal nor purely macroeconomic. It is operational. It asks whether the target can still organise restricted activity through stable, well-documented, high-quality, low-friction channels. When the answer progressively becomes

negative, the sanctions regime is exerting real hybrid pressure even if adaptation has not been eliminated altogether^{1,2,3}.

A final conclusion follows. For the purposes of this report, hybrid-sanctions effectiveness should be assessed through a composite indicator logic centred on route disruption, transaction-cost escalation, time delays, quality degradation, shrinking lawful options, increased compliance friction, and carefully qualified changes in network visibility. These indicators are more appropriate than crude macro-outcome tests because they correspond to the actual mechanism by which hybrid measures operate. Their common analytical denominator is friction. Hybrid sanctions are effective when they turn adaptation from an orderly and scalable commercial process into a fragmented, slower, costlier, riskier, and lower-quality one. That is the measurement baseline that should govern the next subsections of 6.3^{4,5}.

6.3.2. Comparative Strengths of Hybrid Measures

The comparative strength of hybrid measures lies first in their flexibility. Unlike broader sanction forms that often require a major redesign of sectoral architecture in order to respond to new evasion patterns, hybrid instruments can frequently be added as targeted amendments, annex updates, guidance layers, transaction bans, due-diligence obligations, or listing-criteria extensions within the existing framework of Regulation 833/2014 and related instruments. The EU's sanctions architecture against Russia illustrates this clearly: the anti-circumvention tool of the 11th package, the "no re-export to Russia" clause, enhanced due diligence for common high priority items, targeted-vessel rules, SPFS-linked bank restrictions, crypto measures, and special-economic-zone controls were all introduced as evolutionary additions rather than as a wholesale replacement of the regime. This modularity gives hybrid sanctions a structural advantage in a long conflict. It allows the regime to adapt to evasion without repeatedly reopening the entire sanctions system from first principles. In policy terms, this is one of the main reasons hybrid measures have become increasingly central as the sanctions cycle has matured^{6,7,8}.

A second comparative strength is adaptive responsiveness. Hybrid measures are especially well suited to environments in which evasion methods evolve faster than stable sectoral redesign can reasonably follow. This point is directly visible in official EU language. The EEAS states that tackling circumvention, including through third-country jurisdictions, has become a key priority for ensuring the full effectiveness of sanctions, while Commission and EEAS materials repeatedly present new packages as responses to lessons learned from implementation and to increasingly sophisticated evasion patterns. President von der Leyen's October 2025 statement that, as evasion tactics grow more sophisticated, sanctions will adapt to stay ahead, captures the logic succinctly. Hybrid sanctions are comparatively strong because they are built for that moving-target environment. They do not require the assumption that the original structure of evasion will remain constant. Instead, they are designed to absorb feedback and respond incrementally^{9,10,11}.

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁶ European External Action Service. (2023, June 22). *EU adopts 11th package of sanctions against Russia for its continued illegal war against Ukraine*.

⁷ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

⁸ Council Regulation (EU) 2025/395 of 24 February 2025 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

⁹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

¹⁰ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

¹¹ Statement by President von der Leyen on the 19th package of sanctions against Russia. (2025, October 22).

A third strength is cross-domain reach. Traditional sanctions categories often operate most clearly in one primary field: diplomacy, trade, finance, or law. Hybrid measures, by contrast, can reach across several domains without requiring a separate sanctions regime for each one. The general sanctions architecture maintained by the Commission explicitly lists anti-circumvention tools, contractual re-export prohibitions, technical-assistance bans, intellectual-property and trade-secret restrictions, transport measures, maritime-service restrictions, and business or IT consultancy bans as elements of one evolving framework. That means the EU can act simultaneously on goods, services, routes, documentation, financial conduits, and corporate behaviour. The comparative advantage here is obvious: one adaptive problem can be targeted from several operational directions without the legal and political delay that a wholly separate regime redesign might entail. Hybrid sanctions are therefore especially powerful where the target’s adaptation strategy is itself multi-channel¹.

A fourth strength is the ability to close loopholes precisely. This is perhaps the most distinctive comparative advantage of hybrid measures. The 11th package’s anti-circumvention tool was specifically presented as allowing restrictions on the export of sanctioned goods to third countries with a continued and particularly high risk of circumvention. The value of such a tool lies not in broadening sanctions indiscriminately, but in allowing the EU to act against a concrete leakage point while preserving the broader structure of the regime. Similarly, the “no re-export to Russia” clause of Article 12g and the enhanced due-diligence obligations of Article 12gb address identified pathways of diversion without requiring a full reclassification of all third-country trade as presumptively unlawful. This form of calibrated closure is one of the main reasons hybrid measures compare favourably with blunt across-the-board restrictions^{2,3,4}.

A fifth comparative strength is that hybrid measures strengthen the anti-circumvention architecture cumulatively rather than episodically. The EEAS explains that sanctions work best when implemented by as many actors as possible and stresses the importance of coalition-building and implementation. The Commission’s due-diligence guidance, meanwhile, frames the problem as recurrent and evolving, requiring operators to stay alert to emerging patterns and to adjust their risk assessments accordingly. This means that hybrid sanctions do not usually function as isolated fixes. Their comparative advantage is that each new measure can reinforce earlier ones: due diligence supports contractual controls, contractual controls support customs and export controls, targeted-vessel measures support price-cap enforcement, and financial-node restrictions support all of them by reducing substitute payment capacity. Hybrid strength is therefore systemic. It lies in the ability to thicken the anti-circumvention architecture without replacing it^{5,6}.

A sixth strength is that hybrid measures are particularly effective against networked adaptation rather than only against direct prohibited conduct. The modern Russian sanctions-avoidance environment is characterised by rerouting, proxy trade, substitute payment systems, offshore or third-country entities, crypto-service nodes, shadow shipping, and mixed public–private support structures. Hybrid measures are comparatively strong because they can target those support systems directly. The 19th package provides a good example. It expanded sanctions into crypto platforms, additional banks in third countries, entities in special economic zones, and companies in Russia and third countries providing direct or indirect support to the military-industrial complex. This kind of targeting is stronger than a narrow direct-ban model because it degrades the architecture of substitution itself^{7,8}.

¹ European Commission. (2025). *Sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

² European External Action Service. (2023, June 22). *EU adopts 11th package of sanctions against Russia for its continued illegal war against Ukraine*.

³ European Commission. (2024, December 18). *“No re-export to Russia” clause*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

⁵ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁶ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁷ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁸ Statement by President von der Leyen on the 19th package of sanctions against Russia. (2025, October 22).

A seventh strength is selective intensity. Hybrid measures often permit the EU to intensify pressure where the evasion or support function is strongest without requiring a comparable increase in sanctions intensity across the whole regime. The 17th package, for example, concentrated heavily on shadow-fleet vessels and third-country enablers, while the 19th package added crypto, third-country banks, SEZs, and Chinese oil-related entities. These steps reflect not just escalation, but focused escalation. That is a comparative advantage because it allows pressure to be allocated to the most strategically relevant nodes. In analytical terms, hybrid measures are strong where the objective is not universal restriction but concentrated degradation of the most valuable adaptive channels^{1,2}.

An eighth strength is compatibility with coalition-based enforcement. The EEAS explicitly states that sanctions work best when implemented by as many actors as possible and notes EU coordination with like-minded third states, especially in G7 format, on key measures such as the oil price cap. Hybrid measures are particularly suited to that environment because they can be aligned functionally even where legal systems are not identical. Best practices for maritime due diligence, red flags for trade diversion, or scrutiny of alternative payment infrastructures do not require perfect regulatory identity to be effective. They require convergence of risk signalling and operational restraint. Hybrid measures therefore compare favourably with narrower legal tools that depend more heavily on exact formal symmetry across jurisdictions. Their strength lies in operational alignability^{3,4}.

A ninth strength is that hybrid measures can preserve broader regime continuity while still tightening specific controls. This is particularly clear in the price-cap framework. The Commission's general sanctions page explains that the G7 oil price cap was specifically designed to further reduce Russia's revenues while keeping global energy markets stable through continued supplies. That is an important comparative advantage. Rather than choosing only between full embargo and no action, the hybrid model allows the EU and partners to regulate routes, services, price-compliance conditions, shadow-fleet access, and maritime support in a way that exerts pressure while avoiding some of the destabilisation risks that a maximal closure strategy might entail. In other words, hybrid measures are often stronger where strategic constraint must be balanced against market-stability concerns^{5,6}.

A tenth strength is granular reversibility. Because hybrid measures are often annex-based, criteria-based, or guidance-mediated, they can in many cases be tightened, expanded, clarified, or narrowed without abandoning the structure into which they were inserted. This does not mean they are politically easy to reverse, but it does mean they are administratively more adjustable than all-or-nothing redesigns. The repeated package amendments to Regulation 833/2014 demonstrate that the EU can add or refine clauses, annexes, due-diligence obligations, service restrictions, and targeted infrastructures within the same legal chassis. That is a comparative institutional strength. It allows the regime to respond to feedback, jurisprudence, partner coordination, and enforcement experience in a more modular fashion^{7,8}.

An eleventh strength is that hybrid measures can externalise part of the sanctions' perimeter into private governance without formally expanding extraterritorial claims. Article 12g is a good example because it requires Union operators to contractually prohibit re-exportation to Russia of sensitive goods and technology. Article 12gb is another because it imposes due-diligence obligations on operators dealing with CHP items and, in defined circumstances, on controlled entities outside the Union. The result is powerful: the EU strengthens the downstream resilience of its sanctions through contracts, governance

¹ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

² European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ European Commission. (2025). *Sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁷ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

⁸ Council Regulation (EU) 2025/395 of 24 February 2025 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

processes, and risk assessments rather than only through border-stop logic. This is a comparative advantage because it allows loopholes to be narrowed through private-law and compliance channels rather than only through public-law expansion^{1,2,3}.

A twelfth strength is the capacity to use the same measure both preventively and disruptively. Traditional sanctions are often discussed as either blocking an activity or punishing it after the fact. Hybrid measures often do both at once. The Commission's due-diligence guidance and CHP guidance are preventive because they require operators to map vulnerabilities and stop diversion before it occurs. At the same time, targeted-vessel listings, transaction bans on SPFS-linked banks, and crypto-platform restrictions are disruptive because they remove already active nodes from the operational network. This dual-use character is an important strength. It means the same hybrid architecture can be used both to close detected gaps and to deter the formation of new ones^{4,5,6}.

A thirteenth strength is the ability to link old sanctions domains to new enabling technologies without conceptual rupture. The 19th package's move into crypto platforms, crypto transactions, fintech services, and alternative payment-system connections is a good example. Instead of constructing a completely separate "digital sanctions regime", the EU incorporated these nodes into the existing Russia sanctions framework as circumvention-relevant facilitators. This demonstrates a practical advantage of hybrid measures: they are not locked into twentieth-century distinctions between banking, trade, transport, and communications. They can absorb new enabling technologies into the same anti-circumvention logic. That gives them comparative strength in a rapidly changing technological environment^{7,8}.

A fourteenth strength is better fit with the actual architecture of Russian adaptation. The official materials repeatedly show that circumvention relies on third-country jurisdictions, substitute financial systems, shadow-fleet operations, offshore or foreign entities, and support to the military-industrial complex through direct or indirect channels. Hybrid measures are comparatively stronger than narrower forms because they are designed to intervene where the adaptation actually occurs. They target intermediaries, not only principals; infrastructure, not only flows; and services, not only goods. In comparative terms, this means hybrid measures are usually more realistic instruments for late-stage sanctions competition than broad but static bans that assume the original trade structure remains unchanged^{9,10,11}.

A fifteenth strength is greater compatibility with proportional escalation. Because hybrid measures can often be added through targeted clauses, annexes, or criteria, they are better suited to incremental tightening than many broader sanctions types. This matters strategically. It allows policymakers to escalate pressure in response to new evidence or new evasion patterns without immediately resorting to maximalist moves that might be politically harder to sustain or economically more destabilising. The sequence from the 11th package to the 19th package illustrates exactly this kind of progressive thickening. The regime became denser and more adaptive without losing institutional continuity. That is a comparative strength in long-duration coercive policy^{12,13}.

¹ European Commission. (2024, December 18). "No re-export to Russia" clause.

² European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

³ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

⁴ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

⁶ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Statement by President von der Leyen on the 19th package of sanctions against Russia. (2025, October 22)

⁹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

¹⁰ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

¹¹ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

¹² European External Action Service. (2023, June 22). *EU adopts 11th package of sanctions against Russia for its continued illegal war against Ukraine*.

¹³ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

A sixteenth strength is that hybrid measures tend to generate multiplier effects across the compliance system. The Commission’s due-diligence and consolidated FAQ materials are addressed not only to governments but to operators, and they explicitly aim to shape risk assessment, screening, contractual design, and refusal practices. This means that a formally limited hybrid measure may have an operational reach much wider than its textual perimeter. Once firms internalise elevated circumvention risk, lawful options narrow, due-diligence burdens rise, and borderline transactions become commercially unattractive. In comparative terms, this gives hybrid sanctions a force-multiplying advantage: the regime can intensify through guidance, red flags, and targeted obligations without having to legislate a brand-new prohibition for every emerging technique^{1,2}.

A seventeenth strength is durability. Hybrid measures often create lasting friction even where the immediate banned object can still be sourced through alternative channels. This is visible in maritime and technology cases. The 17th package states that listed-vessel measures made replacement more difficult and exports more costly. The software and CHP due-diligence regimes, meanwhile, impose continuing constraints on updates, management systems, downstream re-export, and third-country governance. The comparative strength here is not dramatic one-off interruption but sustained erosion of normality. In a prolonged confrontation, that is often more strategically valuable than a single sharp shock that can later be absorbed^{3,4,5}.

An eighteenth and final comparative strength is strategic coherence. Hybrid measures do not sit outside the sanctions’ regime; they make the regime more internally coherent by connecting separate domains that would otherwise leave gaps between them. Anti-circumvention, due diligence, shadow-fleet targeting, no-re-export clauses, SPFS-related measures, crypto restrictions, and SEZ controls all reinforce the same underlying objective: to prevent Russia from reconstructing restricted capabilities through indirect, opportunistic, or infrastructural substitutes. In that sense, hybrid sanctions strengthen the regime not only tactically but architecturally. They reduce the mismatch between a static legal prohibition and a dynamic evasion environment. That is their deepest comparative advantage^{6,7,8}.

For analytical clarity, the comparative strengths can be summarised as follows.

Table 6.3.2-1. Comparative strengths of hybrid measures in the EU sanctions regime against Russia

Comparative strength	Operational meaning	Illustrative EU mechanism	Why this is stronger than a narrower single-domain response
Flexibility	Measures can be added as amendments, annexes, criteria, FAQs, or bans within the existing framework	11th package anti-circumvention tool; 12g; 12gb; targeted-vessel and crypto additions	Closes gaps without rebuilding the entire sanctions regime
Adaptability	Regime can respond to new evasion methods as they emerge	19th package response to sophisticated financial loopholes and crypto platforms	Better suited to moving-target evasion than static sectoral bans

¹ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

² European Commission. (2024, January 26). *Consolidated FAQs on the implementation of Council Regulation No 833/2014 and Council Regulation No 269/2014*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European Commission. (2024, February 6). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on software concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items*.

⁶ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁷ European Commission. (2025). *Sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁸ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

Comparative strength	Operational meaning	Illustrative EU mechanism	Why this is stronger than a narrower single-domain response
Cross-domain reach	One sanctions logic can act on trade, services, finance, logistics, and compliance simultaneously	Technical-assistance bans, software restrictions, SPFS-linked measures, maritime-service bans	Greater operational coverage than isolated trade or finance restrictions
Loophole closure	Specific leakage points can be targeted precisely	“No re-export to Russia” clause; anti-circumvention tool; third-country bank transaction bans	Reduces circumvention without indiscriminate over-expansion
Anti-circumvention reinforcement	New measures thicken and reinforce earlier controls	Due diligence + contractual clauses + listings + targeted-vessel rules	Creates cumulative architecture rather than one-off patching
Network realism	Targets actual adaptation channels rather than only direct actors	Third-country enabler listings; shadow-fleet enablers; crypto-service nodes	Better fits how sanctioned activity is preserved in practice
Coalition alignability	Operational risk signals can be shared across partners	G7 oil price cap and coalition maritime advisories	More scalable internationally than highly formalistic legal symmetry
Proportional escalation	Pressure can be intensified step-by-step	11th → 16th → 17th → 19th package layering	Allows tightening without immediate resort to maximalist redesign
Durability	Friction persists over time even if some activity continues	Update bans, due diligence, vessel listings, service denials	Produces sustained degradation rather than only one-off shock
Strategic coherence	Links separate sanctions domains into a more integrated regime	Anti-circumvention, finance, shipping, software, and infrastructure controls	Reduces the gap between prohibition and real adaptation pathways

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and EUR-Lex legal texts

Sources:

- Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.
- Council Regulation (EU) 2025/395 of 24 February 2025 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.
- European Commission. (2024, December 18). “No re-export to Russia” clause.
- European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items.*
- European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025). *Sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine.*
- European External Action Service. (2023, June 22). *EU adopts 11th package of sanctions against Russia for its continued illegal war against Ukraine.*
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions.*
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. (2024, October 21). *Updated Price Cap Coalition Advisory for the Maritime Oil Industry and Related Sectors.*

A second matrix helps show why hybrid measures strengthen the anti-circumvention architecture without replacing it.

Table 6.3.2-2. How hybrid measures strengthen the anti-circumvention architecture without full regime redesign

Existing sanctions base	Typical loophole	Hybrid add-on measure	Resulting improvement
Export bans on sensitive goods	Re-export through third countries	Article 12g “no re-export to Russia” clause	Adds downstream contractual restraint without changing the basic export ban
Export bans on CHP items	Re-export via subsidiaries or distributors	Article 12gb enhanced due diligence	Adds governance and monitoring without rebuilding the underlying goods list
Banking restrictions	Use of substitute payment and messaging systems	SPFS-linked bank transaction bans; Mir/SBP-related measures	Narrows financial workarounds while preserving core sanctions structure
Oil transport restrictions	Use of shadow fleet and shadow servicing	Targeted-vessel listings; port/service bans; coalition maritime guidance	Converts maritime adaptation into a higher-friction and higher-cost activity
Entity listings	Continued support through affiliates and proxies	Network-based listings of enablers, shadow-fleet facilitators, third-country support firms	Extends pressure from primary actors to support nodes
Sectoral trade and service bans	Migration into digital or crypto-enabled workaround channels	Crypto-platform and fintech restrictions in 19th package	Updates the same regime for new infrastructure rather than inventing a separate one
Revenue and industrial restrictions	Concentration of activity in protected industrial platforms	SEZ restrictions and owned/controlled-entity extensions	Pushes sanctions into war-relevant industrial ecosystems without redesigning the whole sectoral regime

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission package statements, and EUR-Lex legal texts

Sources:

- Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.
- Council Regulation (EU) 2025/395 of 24 February 2025 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.
- European Commission. (2024, December 18). “No re-export to Russia” clause.
- European Commission. (2025, July 23). *Enhanced due diligence for operators manufacturing and/or trading with CHP items.*
- European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*
- European Commission. (2025). *Sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine.*

Taken together, these tables show that the greatest comparative advantage of hybrid measures is not simply that they are “broader.” Their real advantage is that they can absorb operational feedback, respond to circumvention with targeted add-ons, and make separate sanctions domains reinforce one another without abandoning the legal and institutional continuity of the regime. That makes them unusually well suited to a protracted sanctions contest in which the target’s adaptation mechanisms are diverse, transnational, and constantly evolving. Hybrid sanctions are thus comparatively strong not because they replace political, economic, legal, or compliance measures, but because they connect and intensify them^{1,2}.

A final conclusion follows. The comparative strengths of hybrid measures consist in their flexibility, adaptive responsiveness, cross-domain reach, loophole-closing precision, cumulative reinforcement of anti-circumvention architecture, and ability to tighten pressure without full redesign of the sanctions’ regime. In the EU–Russia case, these strengths have already become visible through the layering of the 11th, 16th, 17th, and 19th packages and through the integration of contractual, financial, maritime,

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions.*

² European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia.*

software, due-diligence, and network-based tools into one evolving framework. This does not mean hybrid measures are costless or universally sufficient. It means they are comparatively better suited than narrower instruments to a long-running contest of evasion and counter-evasion. For the purposes of this report, they should therefore be treated as the most operationally agile segment of the current sanctions' regime^{1,2,3,4}.

6.3.3. Structural Limits, Enforcement Risks, and Unintended Effects

The comparative strengths of hybrid measures do not eliminate their structural limits. On the contrary, many of their advantages arise precisely because they operate in terrains where sanctions are hardest to stabilise: indirect trade, mixed public–private networks, third-country routing, substitute financial infrastructures, and layered service ecosystems. This means that hybrid sanctions are often strongest where proof is least linear, enforcement is least uniform, and legitimate commercial activity is most difficult to separate cleanly from sanctions-relevant facilitation. The EU itself implicitly recognises this difficulty. The EEAS states that implementation and enforcement remain the responsibility of the Member States, while the Commission's due-diligence guidance is framed as support for operators confronting increasingly complex and opaque circumvention schemes. The regime is therefore structurally dependent on a distributed architecture of national authorities, private actors, and partner-country cooperation rather than on a single central enforcement command. That gives hybrid sanctions reach, but it also makes them vulnerable to fragmentation, uneven capacity, and evidentiary asymmetry. Their main risks are thus not accidental administrative defects. They are built into the same cross-domain complexity that gives the instruments their operational value^{5,6}.

The first structural limit is attribution. Hybrid measures are designed to act against enabling systems, but enabling systems are often composed of actors whose role is indirect, modular, or partially deniable. A freight forwarder may handle both legitimate and questionable cargoes. A financial intermediary may process transactions that look ordinary on their face while still functioning as part of an evasion ecosystem. A crypto platform may not be a state entity, yet it may materially support circumvention. The Commission's September 2023 note states plainly that Russia has deployed increasingly elaborate and opaque schemes to circumvent sanctions and that EU operators must identify and assess circumvention risks when dealing with third countries. That is a strong indication that the EU itself does not expect attribution to rest on simple one-step factual patterns. In hybrid sanctions, the strongest operational targets are often those for which functional relevance is clearer than direct legal culpability. This makes attribution more realistic in strategic terms, but also more vulnerable to challenge in legal and political terms^{7,8}.

A 2nd structural limit is evidentiary dispersion. The Commission's due-diligence guidance explains that operators must assess risks on a recurring basis, using open-source information on the evolution of circumvention techniques, and that relevant risks arise especially in high-risk sectors and complex supply chains. This is an important admission about the nature of the evidence problem. The regime depends not only on definitive proof of a violation but also on evolving red-flag constellations, trade anomalies, business-partner profiles, route behaviour, and shifts in third-country demand. Such evidence can be strategically persuasive, but it is often fragmented across customs data, shipping

¹ European External Action Service. (2023, June 22). *EU adopts 11th package of sanctions against Russia for its continued illegal war against Ukraine*.

² European Commission. (2025, February 24). *EU adopts 16th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁵ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁶ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁷ European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks*.

⁸ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

information, contractual behaviour, ownership structures, and compliance intelligence. That makes hybrid enforcement more intelligence-intensive than many traditional sanctions categories. It also means that evidentiary gaps are not rare exceptions; they are a normal feature of the field. A network may be strongly suspected on functional grounds before its full structure is demonstrable in publicly usable form¹.

A 3rd structural limit follows directly from the institutional design of EU sanctions enforcement: fragmented implementation across Member States. The EEAS states that EU countries are responsible for enforcing sanctions within their borders, that they assess violations and take action, and that the Commission oversees implementation and enforcement across Member States. The Commission's due-diligence guidance confirms the same point by stating that it is for Member States to implement and enforce sanctions, while the Commission seeks to ensure uniform implementation throughout the Union. The Council's 2024 Best Practices document makes the fragmentation even more explicit by describing itself as a set of non-exhaustive, non-binding recommendations of a general nature that must remain compatible with Union and national law. In practical terms, this means that hybrid sanctions depend on a multi-layered enforcement field in which guidance, national discretion, competent-authority capacity, and legal culture all matter. This is a workable structure for a union of states, but it also means that enforcement consistency cannot be assumed automatically. Hybrid sanctions are therefore structurally exposed to uneven vigilance, uneven resources, and uneven interpretation^{2,3,4}.

The 4th limit is that fragmented enforcement is not merely institutional; it is also epistemic. Member States do not all observe the same transactions, possess the same customs exposure, or have the same industry specialisation. Some are more exposed to maritime routing, others to dual-use exports, others to finance, logistics, or humanitarian licensing. This is one reason the 2024 Best Practices emphasise coordination and information-sharing, and why the 2024 Directive requires accurate, consistent, and comparable statistical data to support strategic and operational planning. The Directive also requires cooperation through and with Europol, Eurojust, the European Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Commission. These provisions are not signs of complete harmonisation; they are evidence that fragmentation is real enough to require systematic correction. Hybrid sanctions are unusually dependent on such correction because cross-domain circumvention often becomes visible only when separate fragments of information are combined. Where that combination is slow or incomplete, enforcement lags behind adaptation^{5,6}.

A 5th structural risk is partner divergence beyond the EU. The EEAS states that sanctions work best when implemented by as many actors as possible, that the EU seeks to build the broadest coalitions of countries to align with its measures, and that coordination with like-minded third states has become especially important since the full-scale invasion. The strength of that statement is also a signal of vulnerability. If sanctions work best when implemented broadly, they work less well when partner alignment is partial, slow, selective, or transactional. Hybrid measures are particularly exposed to this problem because they often rely on third-country routing, third-country banking, offshore service providers, and external logistics infrastructure. A limited gap in partner alignment may therefore create a disproportionately large loophole for network-based adaptation. This does not mean the coalition strategy has failed. It means the effectiveness of hybrid sanctions is more tightly tied to partner behaviour than many more domestically enforceable sanctions types⁷.

¹ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.; European Commission. (2023).

³ Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention.

⁴ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

⁷ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

The 6th structural limit is the non-extraterritorial character of EU sanctions. The EEAS clarification from May 2023 states explicitly that EU measures have no extraterritorial effect, meaning they apply only to European entities, and that this is precisely why circumvention through third countries is a delicate issue. It further states that the EU must tread carefully and avoid antagonising countries that are not subject to European law. This is a principled and politically necessary position, but it creates a built-in limit for hybrid sanctions. The EU can regulate EU operators, EU-linked services, EU ports, EU contracts, and EU-based financial or service relationships. It cannot simply compel all non-EU actors to conform in the same way. This means that anti-circumvention architecture must work through nexus, leverage, incentives, and selective restrictions rather than through universal command. Hybrid measures are therefore structurally stronger than purely direct sanctions in dealing with transnational evasion, but they are still bounded by the Union's jurisdictional model^{1,2}.

A 7th limit is substitution. Hybrid sanctions are designed precisely because direct bans often push adaptation into alternative channels. Yet this means that every successful restriction also creates pressure for evasion to move elsewhere: into shadow fleets, substitute banks, crypto-service nodes, front companies, special economic zones, or alternative software and servicing ecosystems. The EU's own package evolution confirms this repeatedly. The 17th package highlighted the need to add more third-country enablers and more shadow-fleet vessels, while the 19th package expanded sharply into crypto platforms, third-country banks, SEZs, and new service restrictions. This evolutionary pattern demonstrates the strength of hybrid sanctions, but it also reveals a structural limit: substitution never disappears as a challenge. Each round of control changes the terrain of adaptation, but rarely abolishes the need for the next round. Hybrid sanctions are therefore engaged in an ongoing contest of substitution and counter-substitution^{3,4}.

The 8th structural risk is that substitution can produce a paradox of opacity. When lawful and well-documented channels are narrowed, sanctions-sensitive activity may move into less visible or less standardised environments. That may increase cost and fragility, which is one sign of success. But it may also make monitoring harder, which is one source of enforcement risk. The Commission's circumvention guidance and the EEAS clarification both point to increasingly complex and opaque techniques, including third-country rerouting, abnormal trade surges, and harder-to-trace transactions. This means that a reduction in the visibility of a network is analytically ambiguous. It can indicate growing pressure on lawful channels, but it can also indicate that the network has migrated into darker operational space. Hybrid sanctions therefore face a structural measurement problem: some of their success mechanisms also make their effects harder to observe with confidence^{5,6}.

A 9th limit concerns over-compliance. Hybrid measures frequently increase uncertainty for lawful operators because the risks of error, misclassification, and indirect benefit are difficult to assess in real time. Over-compliance becomes likely when firms withdraw from activities that might still be legally permissible because the cost of careful differentiation is too high. The Commission's October 2025 FAQ on refined products obtained from Russian crude is unusually explicit on this point: it states that the relevant presumption should hold unless there is significant evidence to the contrary because the objective is to ease the administrative burden on customs authorities and importers and to avoid unintended consequences on the EU's security of supply by over-compliance with Article 3ma. This is a particularly valuable source because it shows the EU acknowledging over-compliance not as a

¹ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁵ European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks*.

⁶ European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.

theoretical possibility but as a practical policy risk. Hybrid sanctions are therefore structurally prone to generate commercial caution beyond the strict perimeter of the law¹.

A 10th unintended effect is spillover to legitimate operators. The same Commission materials that encourage enhanced vigilance also make clear that operators across high-risk sectors and complex supply chains must repeatedly reassess customers, business partners, transactions, routes, and end-use exposure. For large firms with mature compliance departments, this is burdensome but often manageable. For smaller firms, more specialised exporters, freight forwarders, or service providers, the administrative cost can be proportionately much higher. The result may be market exit, avoidance of lawful trade, or over-reliance on simplified refusal strategies. This does not mean the sanctions are wrong. It means that hybrid enforcement externalises a considerable share of the screening burden onto legitimate economic actors. In a regime built around decentralised vigilance, that burden is part of how pressure is transmitted. But it is also one of the regime's main unintended costs^{2,3}.

An 11th unintended effect concerns security-of-supply and commercial continuity in legitimate sectors. The refined-products FAQ is again instructive because the Commission explicitly balanced anti-circumvention goals against the need to avoid administrative burdens that could generate unintended consequences for EU supply security. This is a reminder that hybrid sanctions often operate in infrastructure-rich systems where lawful and unlawful flows are not perfectly separable. Energy, shipping, finance, logistics, and software are not marginal sectors. They are core systems of everyday commercial life. A hybrid sanction can therefore be well-designed in anti-circumvention terms and still generate collateral strain if legal operators cannot distinguish risk cases quickly and reliably enough. In such sectors, unintended effects may appear not as dramatic legal disputes but as cautious commercial withdrawal, delayed deliveries, or reduced willingness to engage in lawful but higher-risk trade⁴.

A 12th limit concerns humanitarian and basic-needs spillovers. The EEAS legality page states that EU sanctions regimes contain derogations and exemptions for humanitarian action and that standard exemptions exist to allow designated persons to meet basic needs or access medical care and medicines. The Council's 2024 Best Practices go further by stating that humanitarian authorisation requests should, where appropriate, be treated with priority, and that humanitarian purposes include delivering or facilitating assistance such as medical supplies, food, transfers of humanitarian workers, and evacuations. These safeguards are important, but the very fact that they must be emphasised shows the risk they address. Hybrid sanctions can affect service systems, logistics, payments, and administrative channels that legitimate and humanitarian operators also need. The more complex the anti-circumvention architecture becomes, the more important it is that exemption pathways remain usable in practice rather than merely available in theory^{5,6}.

A 13th structural risk is the possibility of false positives and mistaken identity. Network-based and facilitation-oriented measures widen the perimeter of relevant actors, which inevitably raises the chance that a person or entity is connected to a sanctions-sensitive pattern without being correctly identifiable or properly distinguishable from others. The Council's Best Practices recognise this directly. They provide procedures for cases of mistaken identity and state that a transparent and effective de-listing procedure is essential to the credibility and legitimacy of restrictive measures, not least because de-listing may be appropriate in cases of mistaken listing, later factual changes, or the disappearance of listing criteria. This is a significant limitation for hybrid sanctions in particular, because they often rely

¹ European Commission. (2025, October 29). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on import ban on refined products obtained from Russian crude oil concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.*

² European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention.*

³ European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks.*

⁴ European Commission. (2025, October 29). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on import ban on refined products obtained from Russian crude oil concerning sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.*

⁵ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions.*

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24).*

on ownership links, associated entities, direction-based conduct, and facilitation roles rather than on one direct end-use act. The broader the network logic becomes, the more demanding the correction machinery must be^{1,2}.

A 14th limit concerns legal certainty and proportionality in enforcement design. Directive (EU) 2024/1226 repeatedly emphasises that penalties for sanctions violations should be effective, dissuasive, and proportionate, and it requires comparable statistical data and stronger cooperation precisely because the regime must move beyond symbolic prohibition into enforceable practice. Yet this also shows that the EU is aware that sanction enforcement cannot be intensified indefinitely without standards that discipline it. Hybrid sanctions, by design, often push enforcement into areas where facilitation and violation are functionally close but legally distinct. If proof thresholds become too loose, proportionality suffers; if they remain too strict, deterrence weakens. The resulting tension is not easily resolved. It is a built-in problem of operating against complex support networks through legal means³.

A 15th enforcement risk lies in capacity asymmetry between public authorities and private gatekeepers. The Commission's due-diligence materials place heavy responsibility on exporters, intermediaries, and other operators to detect red flags, map vulnerable products and activities, monitor business partners, and adjust controls to changing techniques. The EEAS likewise notes that financial institutions bear significant responsibility in adhering to the regulations. This can be effective where private actors are sophisticated, well resourced, and strongly supervised. It is less effective where firms have limited compliance capacity, weak specialised knowledge, or little leverage over downstream partners. Hybrid sanctions therefore risk becoming unevenly transmitted: strongest where private compliance is advanced, weaker where it is thinner or more formalistic. This asymmetry is one reason why the same legal instrument may generate very different practical results across sectors and jurisdictions^{4,5}.

A 16th structural limit is the tension between data-sharing needs and legal constraints. The Council's Best Practices stress that recommendations must remain compatible with Union and national law, including data-protection law. At the same time, the same document and the 2024 Directive emphasise the value of information-sharing, statistical recording, whistleblowing, and coordination among authorities. Hybrid sanctions require more data integration than simpler sanctions types because their targets are often visible only as patterns across transactions, routes, entities, and jurisdictions. But precisely because these patterns involve sensitive financial and commercial information, legal and procedural constraints may slow or complicate information use. This is another example of how hybrid sanctions face limits born from the very governance standards they are designed to uphold^{6,7}.

A 17th limitation is interpretive ambiguity in the evidence of success itself. When hybrid sanctions push activity into more opaque and fragmented channels, some outcomes can be read in opposite ways. A decline in the use of lawful routes may indicate that the regime is biting. But it may also mean that monitoring becomes more difficult because activity has migrated into more obscure pathways. More documentation requests may show increased compliance friction, but they may also slow legitimate commerce disproportionately. Even cost escalation can be strategically ambiguous if the targeted side is able to absorb the added expense over time. This does not make evaluation impossible. It means

¹ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

³ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

⁴ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁵ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁶ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

⁷ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

evaluation must remain multi-indicator and cautious. Hybrid sanctions are hardest to assess precisely where they are most operationally sophisticated^{1,2}.

An 18th, and final limit, is strategic fatigue. The 2023 EEAS clarification framed circumvention as an issue the EU would increasingly have to address “at home,” while the 2025 EEAS page framed effectiveness as a permanent goal rather than a one-off achievement. Those formulations reveal a broader truth: hybrid sanctions require continuous updating, continual operator guidance, ongoing package maintenance, and repeated recalibration as loopholes move. This makes them more adaptable than static sanctions, but it also makes them administratively demanding and politically maintenance-intensive. A regime that depends on frequent annex changes, refreshed due-diligence expectations, additional network-based listings, and new infrastructure restrictions is powerful, but it also requires sustained institutional attention. Hybrid measures are therefore not a low-cost alternative to broader sanctions. They are a high-management form of coercive governance^{3,4}.

For analytical clarity, the principal structural limits and risks can be summarised as follows.

Table 6.3.3-1. Structural limits and enforcement risks of hybrid sanctions

Limit / risk	Core mechanism	Why it arises strongly in hybrid sanctions	Main practical consequence
Attribution difficulty	Functional role clearer than direct culpability	Hybrid measures target enabling nodes, not only primary actors	Higher legal and evidentiary contestability
Evidentiary gaps	Information dispersed across routes, contracts, ownership, customs, finance	Networked circumvention is multi-layered and partly opaque	Slower enforcement and greater dependence on inference
Fragmented EU enforcement	Member States implement and enforce; best practices are non-binding	Cross-domain measures require different national capacities and interpretations	Uneven implementation and compliance asymmetry
Partner divergence	Sanctions work best with broad alignment, but third-country support varies	Hybrid measures often depend on third-country routes, banks, and service nodes	Loopholes persist where alignment is partial
Jurisdictional limits	EU sanctions are not extraterritorial	Hybrid adaptation often occurs outside the Union	Reliance on nexus-based rather than universal control
Substitution effects	New controls push activity into other channels	Hybrid pressure constantly reshapes adaptation rather than ending it once	Recurring need for new packages and add-ons
Over-compliance	Operators withdraw beyond strict legal minimum	Complex risk environments raise the cost of precise differentiation	Burden on lawful operators and potential supply distortions
Legitimate-operator spillovers	Compliance burdens and delays fall on non-violating actors too	Hybrid sanctions externalise much screening to the market	Higher administrative costs and lawful-trade friction
Humanitarian spillovers	Restrictions may affect service, payment, and logistics chains needed for aid	Network-targeting can touch channels also used for exempt purposes	Pressure for effective, usable derogations and fast authorisations
False positives / mistaken identity	Broader network targeting increases identification risk	Ownership, direction, and facilitation links are harder to delimit	Need for de-listing and correction mechanisms

¹ European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks.*

² European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia.*

³ Ibid.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions.*

Limit / risk	Core mechanism	Why it arises strongly in hybrid sanctions	Main practical consequence
Capacity asymmetry	Public authorities and private firms do not have equal resources or expertise	Hybrid sanctions rely on decentralised vigilance	Stronger effects in well-policed sectors, weaker in thin-capacity areas
Data-governance tension	Need for more information-sharing meets legal and procedural constraints	Hybrid networks are visible only through integrated data	Friction between enforcement ambition and rule-of-law safeguards

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and EUR-Lex legal texts

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) – Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.
- European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks*.
- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.
- European Commission. (2025, October 29). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on import ban on refined products obtained from Russian crude oil concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.
- European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

A second matrix helps distinguish structural limits from unintended effects, since they should not be analytically collapsed.

Table 6.3.3-2. Distinguishing structural limits, enforcement risks, and unintended effects in hybrid sanctions

Category	Typical problem	Best indicator that the problem is present	Why it matters analytically
Structural limit	Attribution and evidentiary incompleteness	Repeated reliance on red flags, indirect indicators, and evolving typologies	Shows that the target object is inherently harder to prove than direct violations
Structural limit	Fragmented Member State enforcement	Need for non-binding best practices, harmonisation directives, and comparable statistics	Indicates that enforcement coherence is not automatic
Structural limit	Partner divergence	Official emphasis on coalition breadth and third-country coordination	Reveals dependence on actors outside the EU legal core
Enforcement risk	Over-compliance	Official concern to avoid excessive burdens on authorities and importers	Shows that deterrence can exceed intended perimeter
Enforcement risk	Mistaken identity / false positives	Need for de-listing, judicial review, and cross-Member State notification	Indicates that broader targeting increases correction needs
Enforcement risk	Capacity asymmetry	Heavy reliance on operator due diligence and recurring risk assessments	Suggests that implementation quality may vary by firm and sector

Category	Typical problem	Best indicator that the problem is present	Why it matters analytically
Unintended effect	Spillovers to legitimate operators	Higher compliance costs, delays, refusals, and documentation burdens	Demonstrates that pressure is partly transmitted through lawful commerce
Unintended effect	Humanitarian and basic-needs friction	Need for exemptions, derogations, priority treatment, and contact points	Shows that cross-domain restrictions can affect protected channels unless actively managed
Unintended effect	Migration into opacity	Greater use of opaque networks and harder-to-read patterns	Can mean both pressure success and monitoring difficulty at the same time

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and EUR-Lex legal texts.

Sources:

- Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.
- European Commission. (2023, September 7). *Sanctions: Commission publishes guidance to help European operators assess sanctions circumvention risks*.
- European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.
- European Commission. (2025, October 29). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on import ban on refined products obtained from Russian crude oil concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.
- European External Action Service. (2023, May 19). *Some clarifications on the circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

Taken together, these tables show that the limits of hybrid sanctions are not mainly conceptual. They are operational and institutional. Hybrid measures fit the real architecture of circumvention better than many narrower tools, but they also rely more heavily on distributed evidence, decentralised enforcement, partner cooperation, and private compliance capacity. That makes them powerful, but also management-intensive and vulnerable to uneven execution. Their unintended effects are not incidental noise around an otherwise clean system. They are the predictable by-products of acting against enabling networks rather than only against direct transactions or named state organs^{1,2,3}.

A final conclusion follows. The structural limits of hybrid sanctions consist above all in attribution difficulty, fragmented enforcement, evidentiary gaps, partner divergence, and persistent substitution pressure, while their main enforcement risks and unintended effects include over-compliance, spillovers to legitimate operators, humanitarian friction, false positives, and migration into more opaque networks. These constraints do not negate the value of hybrid measures. They explain the conditions under which such measures can succeed or fail. In practical terms, hybrid sanctions work best when anti-circumvention intelligence, national enforcement capacity, partner alignment, de-listing safeguards, and exemption mechanisms are all strong enough to carry the burdens that cross-domain sanctioning creates. Where those supports are weak, the regime risks becoming simultaneously over-

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

³ Council of the European Union. (2024, July 3). *Restrictive measures (Sanctions) — Update of the EU Best Practices for the effective implementation of restrictive measures (11623/24)*.

inclusive for lawful actors and under-inclusive for real facilitators. That tension should be treated as one of the central analytical findings of 6.3 rather than as a peripheral implementation issue^{1,2,3}.

6.3.4. 2026–2030 Outlook: Durability Conditions, Erosion Risks, and Recalibration Triggers

The 2026–2030 outlook for hybrid sanctions should be framed neither in maximalist nor in minimalist terms. The most plausible strategic baseline is not the complete closure of Russian adaptation pathways, but the sustained degradation of those pathways through faster updates, better network visibility, stronger partner coordination, and more disciplined feedback loops. This starting point is also consistent with the current institutional situation. As of March 2026, the EU has not abandoned the existing sanctions architecture; instead, it is still building on it incrementally. The Commission proposed a 20th package on 6 February 2026, and the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 February 2026 confirmed that work on that package was still ongoing while the broader pressure strategy against Russia remained active. This already suggests the likely trajectory for the period to 2030: hybrid measures will remain effective only if they continue to evolve faster than the networks, they seek to constrain^{4,5}.

A first durability condition is therefore faster update cycles. Hybrid sanctions lose effectiveness when the legal and operational response moves more slowly than evasion. The official sanctions-guidance architecture now shows clear movement in the opposite direction. The Commission's consolidated sanctions FAQs were updated on 13 March 2026, and the guidance-documents page explicitly offers RSS feeds so operators can receive updates whenever guidance changes. In addition, the oil-price-cap guidance states that the crude-oil price cap is now subject to an automatic and dynamic review mechanism, with Commission notices every six months and earlier assessments where justified by market or geopolitical developments. These are not marginal administrative details. They indicate that the EU increasingly understands update speed itself as part of sanctions effectiveness. A hybrid regime that updates slowly invites arbitrage; a hybrid regime that updates quickly raises uncertainty for circumvention networks and shortens the life cycle of loopholes^{6,7,8}.

The strategic meaning of faster update cycles extends beyond mere legal housekeeping. In the period to 2030, many of the most relevant Russian adaptation channels are likely to remain fluid: shadow-fleet routing, alternative payment infrastructures, proxy trade through third countries, crypto-linked settlement tools, and distributed technology procurement. In such an environment, a slow-moving sanctions regime risks becoming historically accurate but operationally late. By contrast, one that can revise guidance, adjust annexes, review price-cap parameters, and respond to new enabling nodes on a rolling basis is more likely to preserve pressure. The proposal for the 20th package is revealing in this respect. Even before adoption, it signals an intention to add more shadow-fleet listings, further financial restrictions, and broader maritime-service constraints. The important point for the outlook is not only the substance of that proposal, but the fact that the regime continues to adapt in-package rather than waiting for a strategic reset. Durability will therefore depend heavily on whether the EU can normalise shorter iteration cycles without sacrificing legal precision^{9,10,11}.

A 2nd durability condition is network mapping. The next phase of hybrid sanctions will remain viable only if the EU and its partners continue shifting from actor-by-actor targeting towards system-level mapping

¹ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024, April 24). *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures and amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*.

² European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

³ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁴ Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6).

⁵ Foreign Affairs Council, 23 February 2026. (2026, February 23).

⁶ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the FAQs on sanctions against Russia and Belarus*.

⁷ European Commission. (n.d.). *Guidance documents*.

⁸ European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.

⁹ Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6).

¹⁰ Foreign Affairs Council, 23 February 2026. (2026, February 23).

¹¹ European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.

of facilitators, routes, ownership chains, software-service dependencies, payment substitutes, and third-country enablers. The official logic for this already exists. The Commission's due-diligence guidance instructs operators to conduct recurring risk assessments, identify products and activities vulnerable to circumvention, and monitor customers, business partners, contractual arrangements, processing, and end-use. The 2025 and 2026 package statements show that the EU is already targeting networks rather than only principals: shadow-fleet vessels, SPFS-linked institutions, crypto platforms, third-country companies, and special economic zones. The implication for 2026–2030 is clear. Where network mapping improves, hybrid sanctions are likely to remain disruptive. Where it stagnates, the regime will increasingly strike only visible fragments while more adaptive support structures move elsewhere^{1,2,3}.

This network-mapping requirement is not only analytical; it is organisational. The relevant question for 2026–2030 is whether the EU can keep connecting separate fragments of information before evasion patterns stabilise. Hybrid sanctions work best when routes, beneficial ownership, payment conduits, maritime irregularities, and service dependencies are read together rather than in isolation. The criminal-enforcement framework is relevant here. The EUR-Lex summary of Directive (EU) 2024/1226 states that the directive sets minimum EU-wide rules for defining criminal offences and penalties for violation and circumvention of restrictive measures, closes loopholes, and requires cooperation among national authorities, the Commission, the European Public Prosecutor's Office, Eurojust, and Europol. This means that the EU has already recognised that sanctions effectiveness depends on institutionalised cross-body cooperation, not only on more prohibitions. For the outlook period, the strength of network mapping will therefore depend not only on intelligence quality, but on whether these cooperative channels become routine and operationally fast⁴.

A 3rd durability condition is data-sharing. Hybrid sanctions are unusual in that their targets often become visible only when separate datasets are combined: customs anomalies with shipping information, ownership opacity with transaction patterns, port access with AIS behaviour, or software-service restrictions with trade rerouting. The same EUR-Lex summary of Directive (EU) 2024/1226 makes clear that the directive is designed to make it easier to investigate and prosecute violations and circumvention, and that Member States must establish jurisdiction and cooperate with EU bodies. The broader implication is that by 2030 the sanctions regime will need not just more data, but faster circulation of relevant data across enforcement communities. Where data-sharing remains fragmented, hybrid sanctions will continue to suffer from evidentiary delay. Where it improves, loophole closure becomes more timely and more defensible. In that sense, data-sharing is not a supporting administrative technique. It is one of the core preconditions of long-run hybrid effectiveness^{5,6}.

A 4th durability condition is partner coordination. The EEAS explicitly states that sanctions work best when implemented by as many actors as possible and that the EU works with international partners, especially within the G7, to strengthen effectiveness. The oil-price-cap guidance confirms that by 15 April 2026, and every six months thereafter, the Commission will assess the functioning of the mechanism in coordination with the Price Cap Coalition. The proposed 20th package also points in the same direction: the Commission's February 2026 statement says that a full maritime-services ban for Russian crude is proposed to be enacted in coordination with like-minded partners after a G7 decision. These facts matter because the most important hybrid channels—shadow shipping, offshore finance, digital payment substitutes, and third-country facilitation—are transnational by definition. The long-run durability of hybrid sanctions will therefore depend not only on internal EU coherence, but on whether

¹ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

² European Commission. (2025, October 23). *EU adopts 19th package of sanctions against Russia*.

³ European Commission. (2025, May 20). *EU adopts 17th package of sanctions against Russia*.

⁴ *Criminal offences and penalties for the violation of EU restrictive measures*. (2024). EUR-Lex summary of Directive (EU) 2024/1226.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

coordination with partners remains operational, frequent, and specific enough to compress alternative jurisdictions and substitute infrastructures^{1,2,3}.

A 5th durability condition is proportionality and legitimacy safeguarding. Hybrid sanctions are structurally more vulnerable to contestation than direct sectoral bans because they often act against facilitators, routes, infrastructures, and mixed public–private support nodes rather than against one obvious state actor. The EEAS legality page states that EU sanctions regimes are regularly reviewed and, if necessary, amended; that listed persons may request de-listing and challenge listings before the European courts; and that the EU is committed to avoiding unintended impacts on humanitarian action, with derogations and exemptions for basic needs and medical care. These features are not ornamental. They are central to long-run durability because a network-based regime without credible review, correction, and humanitarian safeguards risks undermining the legitimacy on which continued political support depends. Between 2026 and 2030, hybrid sanctions are likely to remain sustainable only if proportionality safeguards are maintained as part of the architecture rather than treated as political concessions⁴.

This proportionality condition also matters instrumentally. One of the major risks identified in Part 6.3.3 was over-compliance and spillover to legitimate operators. If lawful actors begin to treat the sanctions regime as opaque, arbitrary, or administratively unmanageable, the result may be indiscriminate withdrawal from lawful activity, humanitarian friction, or politically corrosive market effects. The EEAS legality page and the Commission’s FAQ-and-guidance architecture together suggest a better model: continuous clarification, visible review, clear derogation logic, and the use of updating mechanisms to prevent uncertainty from hardening into structural distrust. For the period to 2030, hybrid sanctions will be more durable where pressure is paired with interpretive maintenance. In this respect, legal certainty is not a constraint on effectiveness. It is one of its conditions^{5,6}.

A 6th durability condition is feedback-based adjustment. This is perhaps the single most important operational feature of a durable hybrid regime. The oil-price-cap guidance is explicit: the Commission will assess the functioning of the mechanism, report to the Council, and propose amendments as appropriate, while earlier review may occur if justified by market, geopolitical, or other relevant developments. This is not merely a price-cap technicality. It is a model of how hybrid sanctions should function generally between 2026 and 2030. Measures should not be judged only at the moment of adoption; they must be monitored for real-world effect, for unintended consequences, for partner adherence, and for new evasion techniques. Where feedback loops are formalised and timely, hybrid measures remain adaptable. Where they are absent, sanctions may remain legally in force while operationally stale⁷.

This logic of feedback-based adjustment also implies that the EU’s future strength will depend on how well it integrates guidance updates, package amendments, enforcement experience, and market intelligence. The guidance-documents page makes this institutional possibility visible by explicitly structuring notifications and updates through topic-specific RSS feeds. The consolidated FAQs updated on 13 March 2026 show that this is not theoretical; interpretive maintenance is already occurring. The likely durable model for 2026–2030 is therefore not one in which sanctions are periodically reinvented, but one in which the regime becomes more continuously managed. Hybrid sanctions will remain effective where feedback can be converted rapidly into clarifications, annex changes, or targeted new measures. They will erode where feedback accumulates faster than institutions can process it^{8,9}.

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

² European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.

³ Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6).

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the FAQs on sanctions against Russia and Belarus*.

⁷ European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.

⁸ European Commission. (n.d.). *Guidance documents*.

⁹ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the FAQs on sanctions against Russia and Belarus*.

Against these durability conditions stand several identifiable erosion risks. The first is update lag. If package negotiations, legal drafting, or guidance revision take too long, targeted networks gain time to professionalise new workarounds. The current state of the 20th package is instructive here. On 6 February 2026, the Commission set out proposed new measures; on 23 February 2026, the Council confirmed that work was still ongoing. There is nothing abnormal in this politically. But analytically it shows that even in a highly active regime, the tempo of institutional decision-making remains slower than the tempo of some private adaptation. Between 2026 and 2030, hybrid sanctions will lose relative strength wherever this gap widens^{1,2}.

A 2nd erosion risk is substitution into more opaque and more technologically agile channels. The February 2026 proposal already points to the direction of travel: additional shadow-fleet vessels, a proposed full maritime-services ban for Russian crude, and further restrictions linked to LNG tankers and icebreakers. The fact that these areas required further action suggests that the adaptive system had not stood still after the 19th package. This is the structural reality of hybrid sanctions. Every successful constraint on one enabling network increases the incentive to shift into another. Over 2026–2030, this means that durability will depend less on whether substitution occurs—it will—and more on whether substitute channels become steadily narrower, weaker, and more costly over time. If new substitute infrastructures stabilise faster than controls expand, erosion will set in³.

A 3rd erosion risk is partner divergence. The EEAS effectiveness page is explicit that sanctions work best when broadly implemented, and the oil-price-cap guidance assumes continuing Price Cap Coalition coordination. But this also means that divergence in partner priorities, enforcement intensity, or willingness to absorb economic costs would weaken the regime disproportionately in the hybrid domain. Maritime insurance, payment systems, third-country banks, crypto infrastructures, and trade-routing hubs do not require universal non-cooperation to become useful to Russia; they require only enough permissive space. The long-run outlook is therefore conditional. If coalition coordination remains dense and practical, hybrid measures can continue to compress that space. If it frays, the same measures may remain formally impressive but operationally porous^{4,5}.

A 4th erosion risk is compliance fatigue and uneven transmission. Hybrid sanctions rely heavily on operators, intermediaries, insurers, service providers, and other gatekeepers to screen, refuse, document, and escalate. The Commission's due-diligence guidance places substantial responsibility on operators to conduct recurring risk assessments and to remain alert to evolving techniques. That reliance is powerful when firms are capable and alert. It becomes a vulnerability when capacity is thin, when firms become desensitised by volume and complexity, or when commercial incentives begin to outweigh caution at the margins. A durable regime through 2030 will therefore require not only stricter rules, but also ongoing compliance usability. Hybrid sanctions erode when operator vigilance becomes formalistic rather than substantive^{6,7}.

A 5th erosion risk is safeguard decay. The EEAS legality page emphasises regular review of sanctions, access to de-listing, judicial challenge, humanitarian carve-outs, and avoidance of unintended impacts on the civilian population. These safeguards are part of the regime's normative foundation. If they become harder to access in practice, or if increasingly complex hybrid measures are not matched by equally clear review and exemption channels, long-run political and legal support may weaken. Hybrid sanctions can survive legal contestation and political pressure only if they remain visibly rule-bound. By

¹ Foreign Affairs Council, 23 February 2026. (2026, February 23).

² Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6).

³ Ibid.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.

⁶ European Commission. (2023). *Guidance for EU operators: Implementing enhanced due diligence to shield against Russia sanctions circumvention*.

⁷ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the FAQs on sanctions against Russia and Belarus*.

2030, one of the most important tests of durability will therefore be whether the regime can continue to harden against circumvention without hardening into procedural opacity¹.

These durability conditions and erosion risks can be synthesised in the following matrix.

Table 6.3.4-1. Durability conditions and erosion risks for hybrid sanctions, 2026–2030

Dimension	Durability condition	Why it matters	Main erosion risk if weak
Update tempo	Faster package amendments, FAQ revisions, dynamic technical reviews	Shortens the life cycle of loopholes and keeps pace with adaptation	Update lag allows circumvention networks to stabilise before controls adjust
Network intelligence	Continuous mapping of facilitators, routes, payment substitutes, and service ecosystems	Keeps pressure directed at real adaptation channels rather than obsolete targets	Visible fragments are hit while functional networks migrate elsewhere
Data-sharing	Faster circulation of enforcement, customs, financial, and maritime information	Reduces evidentiary delay and supports timely intervention	Fragmented visibility produces slower, weaker, and more contestable enforcement
Partner coordination	Practical alignment with G7 and like-minded partners on shipping, finance, and anti-circumvention	Compresses alternative jurisdictions and substitute infrastructures	Divergence recreates viable external channels for rerouting and settlement
Safeguards	Review, de-listing, humanitarian derogations, and clearer interpretive guidance	Preserves legitimacy, legal defensibility, and political sustainability	Over-compliance, contestation, and procedural distrust weaken the regime
Feedback loops	Regular assessment of functioning, implementation, and unintended effects	Allows recalibration without full regime redesign	Measures remain formally in place but operationally stale

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and EUR-Lex materials

Sources:

- European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the FAQs on sanctions against Russia and Belarus.*
- European Commission. (n.d.). *Guidance documents.*
- European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap.*
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions.*
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions.*
- Criminal offences and penalties for the violation of EU restrictive measures. (2024). *EUR-Lex summary of Directive (EU) 2024/1226.*
- Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6).
- Foreign Affairs Council, 23 February 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2026/02/23/>

The next analytical step is to identify recalibration triggers. In a durable hybrid regime, recalibration should not occur only after obvious failure. It should be triggered when operational indicators show that the current control mix is losing traction or producing disproportionate side effects. The oil-price-cap model offers the clearest current template. The 15 January 2026 guidance states that the Commission will assess not only implementation and expected results, but also international adherence, informal alignment, and potential impact on the Union and its Member States, and that earlier review may occur where oil-market developments, geopolitical circumstances, or other relevant considerations justify it. This is a useful prototype for hybrid sanctions more generally. Recalibration triggers should therefore

¹ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions.*

include not only adversary adaptation, but also coalition slippage, implementation overload, and collateral strain¹.

A first trigger should be operational saturation of existing measures. If shadow-fleet listings continue to grow but route substitution stabilises rather than deteriorates, or if newly listed nodes are rapidly replaced by functionally equivalent ones, the regime should be recalibrated toward the next layer of enabling infrastructure rather than repeating the same listing model. The 20th-package proposal itself reflects this logic: it did not simply suggest “more of the same”, but proposed movement toward a full maritime-services ban for Russian crude, further shadow-fleet listings, and new restrictions on services linked to LNG tankers and icebreakers. That suggests a practical recalibration principle for 2026–2030: when a targeted node becomes easily replaceable, the regime must move toward the infrastructure that makes replacement possible².

A 2nd trigger should be evidentiary thickening without enforcement conversion. If more intelligence, guidance, red flags, and partner information accumulate but are not translated into timely action, the regime risks becoming descriptively sophisticated and operationally passive. Directive (EU) 2024/1226 was explicitly designed to make investigation and prosecution easier and to close legal loopholes. By 2026–2030, one test of recalibration will therefore be whether new intelligence architectures are actually shortening enforcement cycles. If they are not, reform may be required not only in sanctions design but in enforcement process, data use, or institutional coordination³.

A 3rd trigger should be widening partner divergence. The more hybrid sanctions depend on coalition geography, the more recalibration will become necessary when important external jurisdictions start absorbing the functions previously blocked elsewhere. The EEAS effectiveness page points to coalition breadth as a strength; analytically, the same fact means that loss of breadth is a warning sign. If 2026–2030 brings more permissive financial conduits, shipping jurisdictions, or service hubs outside the EU–G7 orbit, the regime will need to respond with either tighter nexus-based controls, more network-based listings, or stronger incentives for alignment⁴.

A 4th trigger should be rising collateral strain. The Commission’s refined-products FAQ is explicit that design choices should avoid unintended consequences for EU supply security arising from over-compliance. The EEAS legality page similarly stresses mitigation of unintended humanitarian impacts. These sources imply an important recalibration principle for the outlook period: hybrid sanctions should be tightened when pressure weakens, but they should also be adjusted when lawful operators, humanitarian channels, or basic market functions begin to bear disproportionate friction relative to anti-circumvention benefit. This does not mean dilution of pressure. It means that durability depends on keeping friction strategically allocated rather than diffusely punitive^{5,6}.

These recalibration triggers can be summarised more systematically.

Table 6.3.4-2. Recalibration triggers for hybrid sanctions, 2026–2030

Trigger	What it would look like in practice	Likely policy response
Update lag	Evasion patterns evolve faster than packages, annexes, or FAQs are revised	Shorter review cycles, faster guidance updates, more modular amendments

¹ European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.

² Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6)

³ Criminal offences and penalties for the violation of EU restrictive measures. (2024). EUR-Lex summary of Directive (EU) 2024/1226.

⁴ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.

⁵ European Commission. (2025, October 29). *Frequently asked questions on restrictions on import ban on refined products obtained from Russian crude oil concerning sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine*.

⁶ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

Trigger	What it would look like in practice	Likely policy response
Replaceability of targeted nodes	Newly listed vessels, banks, exchanges, or firms are quickly replaced by equivalents	Shift targeting toward the infrastructure that enables replacement
Intelligence-enforcement gap	More mapping and red flags, but weak conversion into legal or operational action	Improve coordination, evidence handling, and institutional follow-through
Partner-coordination slippage	Alternative jurisdictions absorb shipping, finance, or service functions at scale	Tighter nexus-based controls and renewed alignment diplomacy
Collateral over-friction	Over-compliance, humanitarian delays, or lawful-supply disruption rise materially	Clarify derogations, narrow ambiguity, and refine risk targeting
Legitimacy strain	More de-listing pressure, litigation, or procedural criticism	Strengthen review, statement-of-reasons discipline, and correction mechanisms

Authorship: prepared by the author on the basis of official EU institutional materials, Commission guidance, and EUR-Lex materials.

Sources:

- European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.
- European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the FAQs on sanctions against Russia and Belarus*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.
- European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.
- Criminal offences and penalties for the violation of EU restrictive measures. (2024). *EUR-Lex summary of Directive (EU) 2024/1226*.
- Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6).
- Foreign Affairs Council, 23 February 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2026/02/23/>

The overall outlook is therefore cautiously favourable, but conditional. Hybrid measures appear better placed than more static sanction forms to remain relevant through 2030 because they can be layered, updated, and redirected at new enabling nodes without requiring total regime redesign. The evidence available as of March 2026 already points in that direction: the legal chassis remains stable, package work continues, technical review mechanisms exist, guidance updates are frequent, and the Union has formalised both safeguard logic and stronger cross-authority enforcement cooperation. But none of these conditions is self-executing. The durability of hybrid sanctions will depend on whether the regime can keep combining speed with proportionality, intelligence with usability, and pressure with legitimacy. In practical terms, the most durable version of the regime will be one that behaves less like a static list of prohibitions and more like a continually managed system of adaptive constraint^{1,2,3,4}.

A final conclusion follows. Between 2026 and 2030, hybrid sanctions are likely to remain one of the most durable elements of the EU regime against Russia only if six conditions are maintained together: faster update cycles, continuous network mapping, stronger data-sharing, tighter partner coordination, credible proportionality safeguards, and feedback-based recalibration. If these conditions hold, hybrid measures can continue closing loopholes without full regime redesign and can preserve their comparative advantage as the most agile part of the sanctions’ architecture. If they weaken, the likely result will not be the formal collapse of sanctions but gradual erosion: more substitution, more opacity, more uneven enforcement, and more friction falling on lawful rather than targeted actors. The decisive issue for the outlook period is therefore not whether hybrid sanctions can survive as legal instruments.

¹ European Commission. (2026, March 13). *Consolidated version of the FAQs on sanctions against Russia and Belarus*.

² European Commission. (2026, January 15). *Guidance on oil price cap*.

³ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Legality of sanctions*.

⁴ Criminal offences and penalties for the violation of EU restrictive measures. (2024). *EUR-Lex summary of Directive (EU) 2024/1226*.

It is whether they can remain operationally faster and institutionally smarter than the networks they are designed to constrain^{1,2,3}.

¹ Statement by President von der Leyen on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia. (2026, February 6).

² Foreign Affairs Council, 23 February 2026. (2026, February 23).

³ European External Action Service. (2025, January 9). *Increasing the effectiveness of sanctions*.