

October 13th, 2026

**An Open Letter From The Centre For Eastern European
Democracy to Members of the United States Congress**

Executive Summary

**Re: President Trump's Ukraine Policy and the
October 9, 2026, Diesel Agreement with Russia**

Dear Senators and Representatives:

The Centre for Eastern European Democracy (CEED) calls on Congress to investigate the Trump administration's recent diesel agreement with Russia and its broader approach to the war in Ukraine.

The central concern is straightforward:

The United States should not provide economic benefits to Russia while it continues its war against Ukraine, unless Russia makes meaningful, verifiable concessions toward peace.

The **attached letter** explains five major concerns:

1. Strengthening Russia at Ukraine's expense.

The diesel agreement could provide Russia with additional revenue while weakening Ukraine's ability to defend itself and negotiate a just peace.

2. Questions about U.S. policy toward Ukraine.

Interruptions in American military assistance, proposed sanctions relief, and other administration actions raise concerns about whether U.S. policy is helping Russia rather than Ukraine.

3. Possible violations of U.S. law.

Bipartisan concerns have been raised about whether the diesel agreement complies with federal restrictions on Russian oil imports and congressional oversight requirements.

4. Uncertain benefits for Americans.

There is insufficient evidence that the agreement will meaningfully lower fuel prices for American consumers.

5. National security and accountability.

Additional Russian revenues could support activities threatening American interests. Questions also remain about who negotiated the agreement, under what authority, and whether private commercial interests were involved.

What CEED asks Congress to do

CEED urges Congress to hold public hearings, require full disclosure of the agreement and its legal basis, investigate the roles of those involved, and consider suspending the import authorization until its legality is established.

Congress should also protect military assistance to Ukraine and ensure that any future economic concessions to Russia depend on verified steps toward a just and lasting peace.

The fundamental principle is simple: American energy policy must not strengthen an aggressor, undermine an ally, or compromise U.S. national security.

We respectfully ask members of Congress to review the attached letter, which provides the supporting evidence, legal questions, and specific recommendations for congressional action.

Now see the full letter below.

An Open Letter from the Center for Eastern European Democracy to Members of the United States House of Representatives and Senate

Re: President Trump's Ukraine policy and the October 9 diesel agreement with Vladimir Putin

Dear Representatives and Senators:

The Centre for Eastern European Democracy (CEED) urges you to exercise immediate bipartisan oversight of President Donald Trump's policies toward Ukraine, particularly his recently announced diesel agreement with Vladimir Putin. President Trump's record includes interruptions in military assistance, sanctions relief, proposed diplomatic concessions, and misleading claims about Ukraine. These actions have weakened Ukraine's military and diplomatic position, relieved pressure on Russia, and undermined public understanding of the war.

Americans want affordable fuel. Ukrainians deserve sovereignty and security. A responsible administration should pursue both objectives without providing Russia with economic relief while it continues its war against Ukraine.

President Trump has called for Ukraine to replace its leader. Ukraine's leadership is for Ukrainians to determine.

President Trump also announced an energy ceasefire that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said was news to him. Any arrangement restricting attacks on energy infrastructure must involve both countries, contain clear obligations, and provide verification and consequences for violations. A presidential declaration cannot substitute for an agreement accepted by the parties. Pressuring Ukraine to surrender leverage while offering Russia economic relief risks weakening the conditions for a durable peace. American policy should strengthen Ukraine's ability to negotiate a secure future.

The following seven examples warrant congressional scrutiny.

1. Easing sanctions on Russian diesel - October 9, 2026

This approach is strategically misguided, rests on questionable economic assumptions, and raises substantial concerns about compliance with federal law. The diesel agreement opens opportunities for Russian export revenue and reduces economic pressure on Moscow. Seven bipartisan senators have challenged the decision's compliance with the statutory prohibition on Russian energy imports. Granting economic relief without meaningful Russian concessions risks teaching Putin that persistence will bring rewards.

2. Pressuring Ukraine to stop attacking Russian refineries - September–October 2026

President Trump repeatedly demanded that Ukraine halt attacks on Russian refineries. Reporting citing a U.S. official indicates that he sought a unilateral halt, while Ukraine offered to stop if Russia ceased attacks on Ukrainian power plants. Ukrainian officials also alleged threats to cut intelligence support; a U.S. official denied that those threats were made. Congress should investigate that disputed allegation.

A unilateral restriction would protect Russian refining capacity and remove a source of Ukrainian leverage. Any agreement protecting energy infrastructure must impose reciprocal, verifiable obligations and consequences for violations.

3. Suspending military aid and intelligence sharing - March 2025

Following the February Oval Office confrontation with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the administration suspended military assistance and intelligence sharing to pressure Ukraine into negotiations. Both were restored on March 11 after Ukraine accepted a proposed 30-day ceasefire contingent on Russian agreement.

Although temporary, the interruption put essential support at risk while Ukraine was defending itself against Russian forces. Using weapons deliveries and intelligence as leverage against Kyiv weakens confidence in America's reliability and risks impairing Ukraine's military position.

4. Voting alongside Russia against a United Nations resolution supporting Ukraine -February 24, 2025

The United States voted against a General Assembly resolution condemning Russian aggression and reaffirming Ukraine's territorial integrity, aligning its vote with Russia and breaking with European allies. The administration argued that its approach would facilitate peace negotiations.

That decision nevertheless weakened international unity over Russia's responsibility for the war and reduced Moscow's diplomatic isolation. Peace efforts should preserve the distinction between the country that invaded and the country defending its territory.

5. Proposing recognition of Russian territorial gains and broad sanctions relief - April 2025

A reported administration peace proposal included U.S. legal recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea, acceptance of Russian control over other occupied areas, exclusion of Ukrainian NATO membership, and lifting sanctions imposed since 2014. These were proposed terms, rather than completed policy changes. The proposal also included some Russian territorial concessions and reconstruction support for Ukraine.

Offering recognition of territorial conquest and substantial sanctions relief advances major Russian objectives. Congress should insist that negotiations protect Ukraine's sovereignty and secure credible guarantees against renewed aggression.

6. Spreading false or misleading claims that discredit Ukraine - February 2025 onward

President Trump blamed Ukraine for starting the war, called Zelenskyy a “dictator without elections,” and claimed his approval rating was 4%. Russia, however, launched the full-scale invasion. Zelenskyy was elected in 2019, Ukrainian law prohibits elections under martial law, and contemporary polling placed his approval at approximately 57%.

Such claims undermine public understanding of the war and can erode American support for Ukraine. They also reinforce Moscow’s effort to portray Ukraine’s government as illegitimate. Ukraine’s leadership is for Ukrainians to determine.

7. Withholding congressionally appropriated security assistance - 2019

During President Trump’s first term, the administration withheld approximately \$214 million in Defense Department security assistance for Ukraine. In January 2020, the Government Accountability Office concluded that OMB’s withholding for policy reasons violated the Impoundment Control Act.

This is a documented legal finding concerning a separate action, rather than a determination about the current diesel agreement. It nevertheless demonstrates why Congress must protect its appropriations authority and scrutinize executive interference with assistance it has authorized.

The negotiators’ roles and commercial priorities require scrutiny.

President Trump entrusted negotiations with Moscow to Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, sending both to meet Vladimir Putin. Neither is a career diplomat, and their professional backgrounds are primarily in real estate and investment. Congress should scrutinize their qualifications, mandates, and accountability in negotiations affecting Ukraine’s survival and European security.

The diesel agreement deepens our concern that Ukraine’s best interests were subordinated to a commercial arrangement with Russia. Reporting indicates that Witkoff and Kushner discussed potential Russian energy deals with Ukrainian and European representatives while Washington pressed Kyiv to stop striking Russian refineries. These circumstances suggest that business considerations may have taken precedence over Ukraine’s security. They do not establish the negotiators’ private intentions, but they give Congress compelling reason to investigate whose interests these negotiations served.

The security consequences extend beyond Ukraine.

Purchasing Russian oil and diesel has consequences for American security as well. Russia and Iran have demonstrated hostility toward the United States, and U.S. officials have reported that Russia supplied Iran with intelligence that could help it target American military personnel and assets. Providing Moscow with additional oil revenue therefore risks strengthening its ability to assist Iran. President Trump’s policy could undermine the safety of the very American service members he has a responsibility to protect.

The diesel agreement requires economic evidence and a clear legal justification.

The administration's economic rationale also requires scrutiny. President Trump's effort to blame Ukraine for rising diesel prices ignores the sharp escalation that followed the U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28, 2026. The U.S. Energy Information Administration links the subsequent surge in petroleum prices to disrupted Middle Eastern supplies and shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. Although Ukrainian strikes on Russian refineries can affect supply, blaming Ukraine obscures the major role of the war with Iran in driving up Americans' fuel costs.

Nor has the administration adequately demonstrated that its agreement with Russia will deliver the promised relief. One published analysis estimates that the initial 300,000 metric tons represent approximately 0.6 days of American distillate consumption—and the announced supply is intended for global as well as American markets. That analysis also identifies broader disruptions involving Gulf energy infrastructure, refining capacity, and the Strait of Hormuz. Additional supply may help, but the administration must substantiate its promise of substantial, rapid, and lasting consumer savings. Russia's ability to deliver the announced quantities also requires scrutiny, given reports of acute fuel shortages among its own citizens.

The agreement must also comply with federal law. The Ending Importation of Russian Oil Act of 2022 prohibits imports of covered Russian energy products. Its termination procedure requires advance congressional consultation and a report, followed by a presidential certification and a 90-day review period. The certification must address an agreement accepted by Ukraine for Russian withdrawal and cessation of hostilities, the absence of an immediate Russian military threat to NATO members, and recognition of Ukrainians' freedom to choose their government.

On October 11, 2026, seven bipartisan senators stated that the diesel-import decision conflicts with that law and that the administration failed to conduct the required consultation or provide an explanation. An OFAC license does not, by itself, demonstrate compliance with a separate congressional prohibition. The administration must identify its precise legal authority and substantiate any claimed exception.

We therefore ask Congress to:

1. Hold prompt public hearings on these actions and their consequences for Ukraine, American security, and the safety of U.S. military personnel.
2. Require disclosure of the diesel agreement's terms, beneficiaries, payment arrangements, reciprocal commitments, economic assumptions, and statutory justification.
3. Investigate the roles of Witkoff and Kushner, including any commercial interests that may have influenced negotiations.
4. Press for suspension of the import authorization pending a satisfactory demonstration of legal compliance.
5. Protect congressionally authorized assistance to Ukraine and investigate any unlawful withholding.
6. Condition future sanctions relief on verified Russian concessions, in coordination with Ukraine and our allies.

7. Demand accurate public statements about the war and the causes of rising fuel prices and respect for Ukraine's right to determine its own leadership and future.

Supporting Ukraine's sovereignty serves American interests by resisting territorial conquest, strengthening allied security, and preserving confidence in American commitments. Those interests also require scrutiny of economic arrangements that could strengthen Russia's ability to support threats against American forces.

Congress must insist that the pursuit of affordable energy and negotiated peace remain consistent with American security and federal law. The American people deserve evidence, transparency, and accountable government. Ukraine deserves a peace that secures its future.

Respectfully,

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