

Yanukovich Plans Moscow Visit

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Tymoshenko looms in Ukraine's relations with the European Union and Russia, as she did in the Rada on Sept. 6. **Konstantin Chernichkin**

YALTA, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich will visit Moscow later this month for talks with President Dmitry Medvedev on the gas dispute that has sparked sharp recriminations and driven ties between the former Soviet allies to a new low.

The one-day visit, set for Sept. 24, will be the first meeting between Yanukovich and the Kremlin leader since the two fell out over Ukraine's calls for a better deal on the price of its huge Russian gas imports.

Medvedev has publicly accused Ukraine of trying to "sponge" off Russia.

Yanukovich has accused the Kremlin of trying to humiliate him and belittle Ukraine as a sovereign state.

"There is a wide range of issues to be discussed that include those relating to gas and others,"

Iryna Akimova, Yanukovych's economic adviser, said on the sidelines of an international conference in the Crimean resort of Yalta.

Russia has rejected Ukraine's call for a revision of the January 2009 gas agreement, which Ukraine says saddled it with an exorbitant price for gas supplies and obliges it to import more than it requires. Russia says a new deal can be worked out only if Ukraine joins a customs union linking Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, or lets Gazprom buy into its gas transportation system.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Friday that Moscow would not force Ukraine to join the trade alliance, but he found it "hard to imagine" Kiev would ever become a member of the European Union. Putin said joining the customs union would be more economically advantageous for Kiev.

"The idea of moving in the other direction is based on politics of an emotional character. If you look at the numbers and the reality, it would be more beneficial to join the customs union," Putin said at an economic forum in Sochi.

Speaking at the Yalta European Strategy conference, Yanukovych expressed confidence that problems with Moscow could be worked out. But he made clear that Ukraine intended to stick with its strategy of cutting back Russian gas imports.

The deal in question was signed between Ukraine's oil and gas firm Naftogaz and Gazprom before Yanukovych came to power.

Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko is now on trial in Kiev, charged with abuse of office linked to the deal. She is accused of railroading Naftogaz into signing the agreement to the detriment of Ukraine's national interest. She denies this and says the charges are politically motivated.

European diplomats said last week that the European Union wanted to see Tymoshenko free and politically active. Otherwise, they said, EU members could refuse to ratify the free trade and political association agreements that the two sides hope to initial in December. The EU's threat to scrap those agreements is immoral, Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said Saturday.

Stefan Fule, EU enlargement and neighborhood policy commissioner, said last week that he had received assurances that Ukraine would find a solution to the Tymoshenko case by reclassifying her alleged offense as one that is not a felony.

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