

EU Snubs Ukraine, Medvedev Beckons

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Dmitry Medvedev reiterated calls for Ukraine to join a regional customs union after the European Union postponed a meeting with Ukrainian leader Viktor Yanukovich to discuss closer ties.

Ukraine should not underestimate the potential of the union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, particularly during recent global financial instability, Medvedev said Tuesday.

"We must do everything so that our cooperation doesn't weaken but gets stronger," he told an economic forum in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine. "Today's reality is that not only states but also so-called cross-border and regional associations are becoming influential economic players."

Russia has said Ukraine's entry into the union may help its request for cheaper natural gas prices from its neighbor. While Yanukovich has sought to bolster ties with Europe, last week's jailing of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko for abuse of office sparked criticism

from EU officials, who deem her conviction politically motivated.

Ukraine is discussing cooperation with the customs union, which meets Wednesday in St. Petersburg, and is monitoring its development, Yanukovych told the same forum.

"The global economic crisis makes many countries seek various ways of protecting themselves by using existing opportunities," he said. "We will always do everything in our national interests."

EU President Herman van Rompuy said in a statement Tuesday that a planned Oct. 20 meeting with Yanukovych in Brussels to discuss a free-trade agreement "has been postponed to a later date when the conditions will be more conducive to making progress on the bilateral relations."

Closer ties with the EU "will depend on how progress is achieved in the near future," the Ukrainian leader told a news conference in Donetsk later.

Russia has also been irked by the imprisonment of Tymoshenko, now in opposition, who was convicted for overstepping her authority as premier in signing a 2009 gas-supply contract with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

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