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Politics Holding Up EU-Ukraine Trade Agreement

By The Moscow Times

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BRUSSELS — The European Union's trade chief said Thursday that he had concluded negotiations on a trade pact with Ukraine but it was now up to Kiev to create the political conditions to allow it to be put into practice.

The EU has condemned the jailing last week of Ukrainian opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko as politically motivated and said that while it would continue working on the landmark trade pact and a broader deal on closer ties, it will not sign until Kiev shows a commitment to shared values.

EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht told the European Parliament that he agreed "on all elements of a final trade deal" with Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Andriy Klyuev on Wednesday, although some technical aspects still needed fine-tuning.

"Now it's up to the Ukrainian leadership to create the political conditions so this deal can

materialize, and I hope this can happen very soon," he said, in reference to the treatment of Tymoshenko.

"These agreements are not negotiated in a vacuum, they are negotiated in a political context," De Gucht said.

"At this moment in time there is a stumbling block, and it's up to the parties concerned to evacuate that stumbling block."

Klyuev told the parliament that Ukraine was working to solve the "political problems."

"These political problems have to be solved in the nearest future. The president of Ukraine together with the parliament are now working on solving the problem in the nearest future," he said.

"We have several ... ways how the problem can be solved, and I hope that this problem will be solved in the nearest future and we do not have any obstacle to signing."

Klyuev did not elaborate on how the issue would be resolved and despite his remarks, on Monday Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych indicated that he was not ready to bend to pressure over Tymoshenko. He denied charges of political meddling in her trial, saying he was not going to go "begging" to anyone.

The EU has pressed Kiev to amend the original charge against Tymoshenko to make it an administrative offence rather than a criminal one, thus allowing her to go free, but Yanukovych said court decisions had to be respected.

The EU has said it hopes to be able to finalize the deals with Ukraine by year-end, but this week called off a meeting scheduled for Thursday with Yanukovych.

Ukraine jailed Tymoshenko last week for seven years after she was found guilty of abuse of office for negotiating a gas deal with Russia while prime minister. Kiev says the deal forces it to pay more than it can afford for gas.

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