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Brussels Summit to Raise Duma Vote

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European Union leaders will discuss election fraud and anti-Kremlin protests with President Dmitry Medvedev at a Brussels summit Thursday, but the two sides are unlikely to move forward quickly on easing visa restrictions, diplomats said.

Allegations of vote-rigging during the Dec. 4 State Duma elections will be on the summit agenda, EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton said in comments released Wednesday.

Ashton told European Parliament members Tuesday that a "key flaw" of the election was the prior exclusion of various opposition parties, according to an e-mailed transcript of her remarks.

Over the summer, the Justice Ministry refused to register the Parnas opposition movement as a party, thus barring it from the election.

"In addition we have seen reports about procedural violations such as the lack of media impartiality and the lack of clear separation between political party and state," Ashton said.

She also expressed concern about "the detention of protesters demonstrating for free and fair elections, and reports of police violence against activists."

Ashton said she welcomed Medvedev's promise to have irregularities investigated. Russian election law "provides for appeal and rectification, and we expect of course that this ... will be respected," she said.

The summit, which kicked off with a dinner Wednesday night, will discuss energy policies, trade and the European debt crisis, the Kremlin said in an e-mailed statement.

Meanwhile, EU officials poured cold water on fast progress in ongoing visa talks.

The summit will adopt a list of "common steps" that need to be fulfilled before visa waiver talks can begin, but the list still needs ratification from some governments, including Russia, EU delegation Soren Liborius said.

He added that negotiations on widening a visa facilitation agreement have stalled and a further round of expert-level talks is needed in January.

Both sides said this summer that they want to introduce five-year, multiple-entry visas for visiting businesspeople, journalists and NGO workers.

But in a small step, Russia and Poland on Wednesday signed an agreement extending a visa-free corridor for cross-border trips to the whole Kaliningrad exclave, the Foreign Ministry said on its web site.

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