

Kremlin Pressures Ukraine to Join Alliance

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A top Russian official said Saturday that Ukraine would continue paying a high price for natural gas imports unless it joined a Moscow-dominated alliance.

Kiev, which relies on Russian natural gas for most of its energy needs, has long been courting Moscow to get a discount for gas imports since a 2009 agreement significantly increased the natural gas price.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich told an international conference in the Ukrainian Black Sea city of Yalta that Ukraine may expect a discount only if it joins a Russia-dominated economic alliance. Ukraine has resisted such overtures, fearing that membership in the Moscow-led customs union would scuttle its hopes of closer ties with the EU.

"If [Ukraine] wants beneficial relations with Russia, maybe the customs union is the choice," Dvorkovich said. "People should understand that all disagreements, all barriers, all

administrative restrictions, and all misunderstandings among countries come with a cost."

Moscow opposes Kiev's efforts to integrate into the European Union and move away from the Kremlin's sphere of influence. So far Kiev has resisted offers to join the customs union, and Ukraine's Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleh Voloshin said that Ukraine's pro-Western course is not a subject of negotiations.

"Cheap gas for the cost of Ukraine's European strategy is not a choice for us," Voloshin said.

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