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EU Tells Ukraine That Reforms Are Necessary for Trade Pact

By The Moscow Times

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BRUSSELS — Leaders of the European Union had a blunt message Monday for the president of Ukraine: Choose between a customs union with Russia and a free-trade agreement with us. You can't have both.

"One country cannot at the same time be a member of a customs union and be in a deep common free-trade area with the European Union," said Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission. "This is not possible."

But that's exactly what Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych said he hoped to achieve.

In addition, Barroso and European Council President Herman Van Rompuy said Ukraine must make rapid reforms, including to the judiciary, if it wants to sign a broad association agreement with the EU in November.

It was expected that EU officials would announce a 610 million euro ($804 million) aid package for Ukraine at Monday's summit. Since 1991, the EU has given Ukraine more than 3 billion euros in assistance.

In Kiev on Monday, several thousand people marched near government buildings denouncing Yanukovych to mark his third-year anniversary in office.

The protesters chanted "Free Yulia," demanding that former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who is serving a seven-year sentence on abuse-of-office charges and could face life imprisonment in a separate murder case, be released from jail.

The West has condemned the prosecution of Tymoshenko and her top allies as politically motivated and urged Ukrainian officials to release them. EU officials have said the cooperation agreement cannot go forward until concerns about democracy and misuse of the justice system have been resolved.

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