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Tighter Customs Prepared

By The Moscow Times

August 17, 2013

Russia is preparing tighter customs controls with Ukraine in case Kiev makes the "suicidal" move of signing an association agreement with the European Union, an aide to President Vladimir Putin was quoted as saying on Sunday.

Russian border guards imposed new time-consuming checks on all Ukrainian cargo last week as Putin piles pressure on Kiev to join a Moscow-led regional trade bloc.

Ukraine has refused to join because it hopes to sign a free trade and political association agreement with the EU in November, and the two deals are mutually exclusive.

Sergei Glazyev, who advises Putin on developing the trade union, on Sunday said the additional checks of Ukrainian imports were a one-off and only temporary but warned that Kiev should expect more such measures if it goes ahead with its European plans.

"We are preparing to tighten customs procedures if suddenly Ukraine makes this suicidal step of signing the EU association agreement," Glazyev said, RIA Novosti reported.

Russia is the largest consumer of Ukrainian exports, but ties between the two have deteriorated over Kiev's European aspirations as well as trade and gas rows.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said it "would be very serious" if Russia waged a trade war against Ukraine to prevent it from deepening ties with the EU.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/08/17/tighter-customs-prepared-a26859