

Ukraine Presses Europe Ambitions, Ignores Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KIEV — Ukraine formally gave the go-ahead Wednesday for landmark trade deals to be signed with the European Union, disregarding pressure from Moscow for Kiev to halt its westward course.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said the agreements, which should be signed at a November summit in Lithuania, raised the prospect of "a European quality of life" for the ex-Soviet republic.

But he kept silent over the imprisonment of his predecessor, Yulia Tymoshenko, whose release European envoys have been trying to secure in the run-up to the Vilnius meeting.

The 28-member European Union, while pursuing the agreements with Ukraine including participation in a free trade zone, has condemned Tymoshenko's trial for abuse of office and seven-year jail sentence as politically motivated, and her continued confinement still

threatens prospects of a signing in Vilnius.

"We believe we must make every effort for Tymoshenko to be freed before the Vilnius summit," Iryna Gerashchenko, a deputy for the opposition party UDAR, told Interfax-Ukraine.

"Even though the signing is important to the EU and Ukraine, the EU will never be able to close its eyes to the violation of fundamental values such as human rights, including the right of defense in a court and the right to justice," she said.

Azarov, taking a lead from President Viktor Yanukovich, said Kiev would meet the criteria for democratic progress laid down by the EU as preconditions for signing in Vilnius.

Kiev has come under pressure from Russia, its former colonial master and still biggest single trading partner, which wants to entice it instead into a Russia-led customs union.

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