

EU Tells Russia to Stop Trade Punishment

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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LUXEMBOURG — European Union foreign ministers told Russia on Monday to stop using trade agreements to punish East European nations seeking closer relations or special agreements with the bloc.

The bloc's 28 nations hope to agree on closer cooperation deals with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia at a Nov. 28 to 29 summit. But Moscow is urging those nations instead to align themselves closer to Russia.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said Monday that any more pressure from Moscow would be counterproductive. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius said EU nations "have to help to counter the pressure" from Russia.

Russia has told Ukraine that a gas price cut would only be possible if Ukraine does not sign an EU association agreement. Last month, Russia banned Moldovan wine, arguing that it did

not meet quality standards.

Next month's EU summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, has quickly turned into a geopolitical pressure cooker where nations such as Ukraine are expected to decide whether to have closer ties with Russia or with the EU.

At Monday's EU ministerial meeting in Luxembourg, Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger said, "For us, it is important that Ukraine clearly turns its path toward Europe and not in the direction of Russia."

To help such nations make that decision, Bildt and Polish Prime Minister Radoslaw Sikorski will leave the meeting in Luxembourg for a whirlwind tour of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia to promote closer alignment.

A full EU association agreement could be signed with Ukraine, but only agreements in principle with Georgia and Moldova, pending further parliamentary approval.

The EU already has made it easier for Moldovan wines to be imported to the bloc's markets to offset the Russian sanction. The EU ministers are now discussing what measures to take if Russia makes similar moves to penalize countries seeking closer EU trade ties, "which is something we can definitely not exclude," Bildt said.

At the same time, the EU is pressuring Ukraine to release and pardon jailed former premier Yulia Tymoshenko, a key condition for the signing of a landmark agreement with the country and the EU next month.

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