

Ukraine Opposition Protests Europe U-Turn

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Ukrainians in support of EU association assemble at Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Kiev's central square.
EuroMaidan

Opposition leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk has alleged that Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych "bargained" with Russia and received \$20 billion to not proceed with his country's planned association agreement with the EU.

The leader of Ukraine's Fatherland party also said that half of the funds would be stolen by the president's inner circle and the other half would go toward funding Yanukovych's 2015 re-election campaign and falsifying election results, Interfax reported Friday.

The allegations follow Yatsenyuk's remarks at a Thursday night protest at Kiev's Independence Square that "the presidential election has already begun." He also expressed hope that 100,000 people would come to a planned rally in support of European integration to be held on Sunday.

Protesters gathered in the center of Kiev on Thursday night, hours after the Ukrainian Cabinet said it was stopping preparations for a deal to be signed at a summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, next week and that government ministries should look for greater cooperation with Russia. (See related [article](#).)

Various estimates placed the crowd at the Ukrainian capital's Independence Square between 1,000 and 2,000 people, Interfax reported.

Among the demonstrators was boxing champion and head of the opposition party UDAR (Punch) Vitaly Klitschko, who said "Together we can prove that Ukraine will be in Europe and will be a democratic state." Klitschko has said he plans to run for president in the 2015 election.

While a spokesman for President Vladimir Putin on Thursday lauded Ukraine's desire to develop a closer partnership to Russia, the country's potential foreign partners in the West said that the move would see Ukraine miss out on economic growth.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said in a statement, "This is a disappointment not just for the EU but, we believe, for the people of Ukraine."

British Foreign Secretary William Hague called the decision "a missed opportunity."

A U.S. State Department representative echoed Ashton and said the U.S. was "disappointed," adding that Washington believes "there was ample time to resolve all remaining obstacles to signing the association agreement in Vilnius."

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