

Yanukovych Says Bad Peace Better Than Good War

By [The Moscow Times](#)

December 02, 2013

The  Moscow Times

KIEV — Ukrainian protesters blockaded the main government building on Monday, seeking to force President Viktor Yanukovych from office with a general strike after hundreds of thousands demonstrated against his decision to abandon a European Union integration pact.

Demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday, which saw violent clashes with the police, drew hundreds of thousands of people, the biggest public rally in the ex-Soviet state since the Orange Revolution against sleaze and electoral fraud nine years ago. The head of the Kiev police was fired Monday over the violence.

Yanukovych called on the protesters to remain peaceful, saying both the authorities and the demonstrators needed to obey the law.

"When we say that we are building a democratic state, a democratic society — and we are all

citizens of one nation — it is important for all members of this society and participants in these processes to adhere to the law," Yanukovych said in an interview to Ukrainian television stations, Interfax reported.

"I am convinced that any peace, even a bad one, is better than even the best war," he said.

The unrest has hammered Ukraine's financial markets, underlining the fragile state of the economy. The central bank was forced to intervene to prop up the hryvna and threatened more action, emphasizing Kiev's vulnerability as it seeks more than \$17 billion next year to meet gas bills and debt repayments.

"We have no other choice but to defend ourselves and the gains we have made," said Taras Revunets, a protester at Kiev's city hall, which hundreds of demonstrators occupied Sunday and have turned into an operational hub.

With many people worried that the unrest could endanger their savings, the central bank sought to head off a rush of panic withdrawals.

In a video statement, its chairman said the bank would not introduce any financial restrictions. "I urge everyone to have confidence in the banking system and maintain their savings," said Ihor Sorkin.

Ukraine is divided between those who see stability in close ties with Russia and those who look westwards and see a more prosperous future with the EU. Since election in February 2010, Yanukovych has sought to straddle the divide, reassuring Ukrainians he could pursue close ties with Europe while managing relations with Moscow.

Even some supporters were shocked by the abruptness with which his government announced it was suspending work on a long-awaited pact with the EU in favor of reviving economic ties with Russia. Scenes over the weekend of police beating demonstrators hardened opinion against him.

"Yanukovych will do whatever Putin tells him to do," said Oleksander, 49, on Kiev's Independence Square, where protesters are establishing tented camps to dig in for a long campaign.

"He has been losing his legitimacy for a long time. His decision to send police in to beat up children was the last straw," said Oleksander, adding that he had voted for Yanukovych in the past and had joined the president's Party of the Regions.

Yanukovych's government struggled to show on Monday that it was still functioning, with protesters blocking the approach road to the main government building with trash bins and other obstacles and many employees turned back home.

The National Bank and the finance and economy ministries were functioning, their press services said. City authorities, whose central premises were still in the hands of protesters, said basic services including public transport and hospitals were working normally in the city of three million.

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