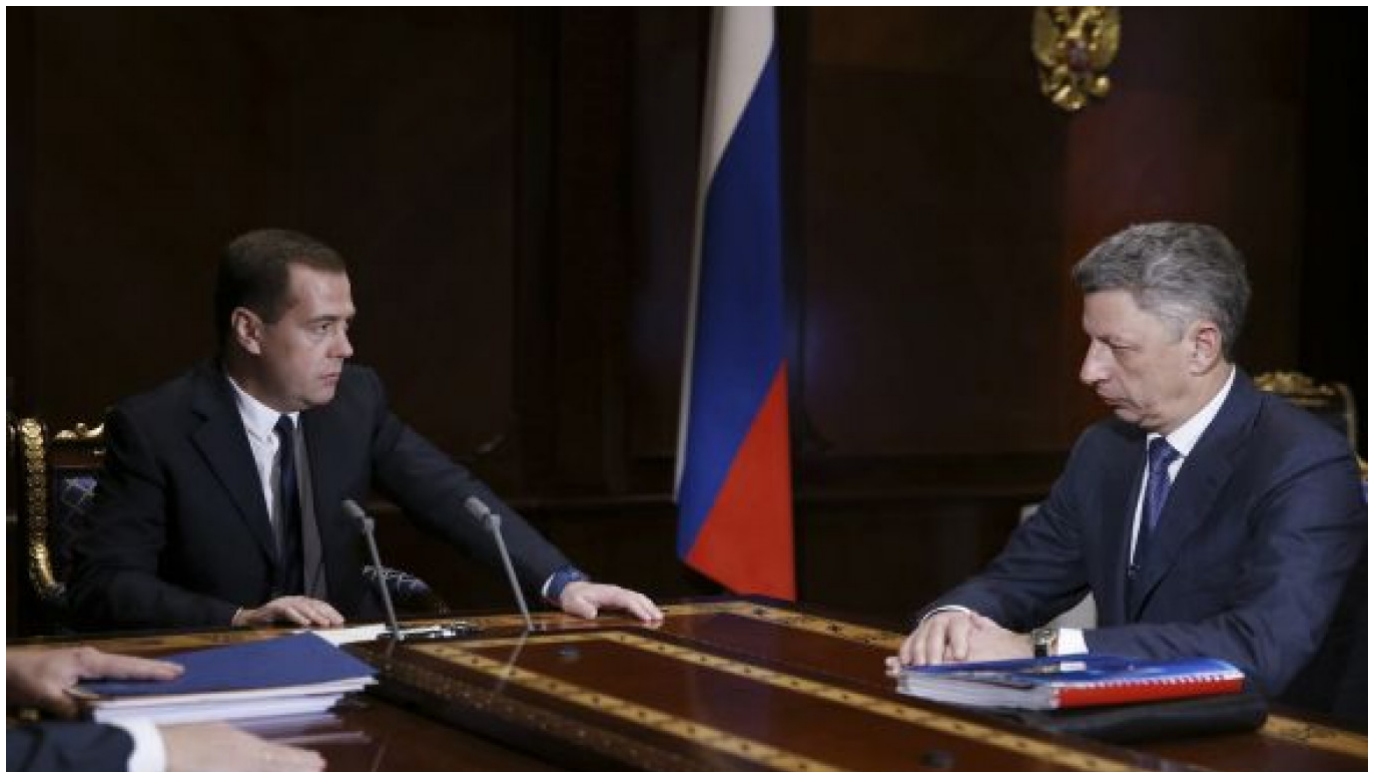


Ukraine PM Warns Protesters as Delegation Seeks Financial Help in Moscow

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Medvedev meeting with Ukraine's Yuriy Boiko in Moscow on Wednesday. **Dmitry Astakhov**

Ukraine's prime minister warned protesters trying to blockade government buildings on Wednesday that they would be punished for any "illegal acts," as officials went to Moscow seeking aid to avoid a financial meltdown.

Meeting the Ukrainian delegation, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said their country needed "stability and order," in the two sides' first high-level talks since Kiev pulled out of a planned trade alliance with the European Union, provoking mass protests.

Prime Minister Mykola Azarov also accused the opposition of trying to provoke violence, and tension remained high in Kiev with protesters confronting ranks of black-helmeted riot police in front of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's main offices after his

government's U-turn in trade policy back toward Russia.

The crisis has again exposed a tug-of-war playing out in Ukraine, which has oscillated between the EU and former master Moscow since the Orange Revolution nine years ago that overthrew the post-Soviet political order.

The leader of the far-right nationalist party, Svoboda, announced a march on Wednesday to the Interior Ministry, but no clashes between protesters and riot police were reported.

With foreign ministers from the OSCE human rights watchdog arriving in Kiev for a two-day meeting from Thursday, Azarov tried to project an image of being in control in the absence of Yanukovich, who has gone to China for an official visit.

Urging all political forces to avoid a further escalation of tension, Azarov said: "Everybody must realize that the country's constitution and laws are in force, nobody is allowed to violate them ... All those who are guilty of illegal acts will answer for them."

Azarov later accused the opposition of trying to stir up trouble. "We know there are 2,500 fighters who are being used as a force with which to provoke law enforcement structures to resist. We are showing that we do not use force, but the opposition does use force," he told the visiting secretary general of the Council of Europe, Thorbjorn Jagland.

Despite the turmoil, Yanukovich flew to China on Tuesday and Chinese state media said he was visiting the Terracotta Warriors archaeological site and an aircraft factory in Xian.

In Moscow, the delegation led by a Deputy Prime Minister Yuriy Boiko, was seeking lower prices for Russian natural gas and aid to close gaping external deficits that could set off a balance of payments crisis.

"You are having quite an active political season," Medvedev told Boiko drily in the meeting at his residence outside Moscow, according to Interfax news agency. "Of course, this is an internal matter, but it is very important that there be stability and order in the country."

Azarov told his cabinet in Kiev that the Boiko visit would continue a dialogue with Russia on trade and economic relations that were "very critical for maintaining and developing Ukrainian industry and economy."

Opposition deputies forced parliament to suspend its session, blockading the speaker's rostrum to further their demands for Yanukovich to dismiss Azarov and his team.

Pro-Europe demonstrators have set up a large encampment on Independence Square — the scene of the 2004-05 Orange Revolution — and are monitoring news events from a giant television screen.

At Kiev's city hall, which protesters have occupied since Sunday, people dozed on the floor while others passed through the revolving doors for handouts of food and warm clothing.

The challenge for the opposition now appears to be how to sustain the momentum for change and keep people on the streets as temperatures begin to drop and the harsh Ukrainian winter sets in.

Ukraine faces huge problems to finance a big current-account deficit. Cheaper Russian gas would buy time for Kiev to find ways to meet outside funding needs estimated at \$17 billion next year.

Despite reports that Ukraine's Naftogaz had won deferral until spring of payments of gas bills for the last three years, Gazprom chief executive Alexei Miller said Kiev owed just more than \$2 billion for three months of deliveries, and no agreements had yet been reached on settling the debt.

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