

# EU's Ashton Says Yanukovych Wants to Sign EU Deal

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Ukrainian officials were heading to Brussels on Thursday for talks with the European Union, as the bloc's foreign policy chief said the country's embattled president "intends to sign" a trade and cooperation agreement he rejected last month.

Demonstrators angry over President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to shelve the long-anticipated agreement will be watching the meeting closely, worried that the leader could instead sign an agreement to join a Russia-led customs union when he and President Vladimir Putin meet next week.

Yanukovych appears to be backed into a corner. As protesters furious over his decision to turn away from the EU clog the center of Kiev, he appears to be leaving his options open for the best deal he can get from his economically troubled country's powerful suitors.

Yanukovych has said he is still open to the EU Association Agreement if terms can be worked

out that provide more aid to Ukraine, which is concerned about the impact of losing trade with Russia.

EU foreign policy head Catherine Ashton, who talked with Yanukovych and opposition figures in Kiev this week, said it was clear that the short-term economic and financial issues Ukraine faces can be alleviated by signing the deal, which she said would bring in fresh investment from EU nations.

"Look, Yanukovych made it clear to me that he intends to sign the Association Agreement," Ashton said on arrival for a meeting in Brussels early Thursday after her visit to Kiev.

Ashton said Ukraine's economic problems "can be addressed by the support that not only comes from the EU institutions, but actually by showing that he has a serious economic plan in signing the Association Agreement."

Ukrainians in the east look more favorably on closer ties with their giant neighbor. Yanukovych, who is seeking a bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund to keep Ukraine from going bankrupt, is sensitive to the economic disruption that trade disputes with Russia can cause.

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