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Kyrgyzstan Won't Join Customs Union on 'Someone Else's' Roadmap

By The Moscow Times

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Kyrgyz President Atambayev speaking at an interview. **Sergei Porter**

Kyrgyzstan plans to join the Moscow-led Customs Union of former Soviet states but will demand that any association agreement take into account its national interests, President Almazbek Atambayev said Monday.

The statement follows a decision by Ukraine in November to suspend a planned association deal with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia and its rival trade bloc.

"Ukraine can choose, and we have little choice, but we will only take a route that suits us," Atambayev said, Interfax reported. "We will only join the Customs Union if our national interests are met."

Moscow had put heavy pressure on Ukraine, including export restrictions and threats of energy prices hikes, to push Kiev into reassessing its trade orientation.

Kyrgyzstan's economic dependency on Russia is substantially greater. The impoverished former Soviet republic in Central Asia has some oil and natural gas reserves, but depends heavily on Russian imports for its energy needs.

"We will not join [the Customs Union] according to a roadmap that somebody else has laid out," Atambayev said, without disclosing any specific demands his government may put forth.

Last week, the Kyrgyz government complained that a "roadmap" for their country's accession to the Customs Union was drafted without consulting the Kyrgyz government, Interfax reported.

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