

EU and Russia to Swap Recriminations Over Ukraine

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BRUSSELS — European Union and Russian leaders will trade recriminations over Ukraine at a summit on Tuesday, as the former Soviet republic reels from violent unrest after spurning the EU's embrace and lurching back toward Moscow.

President Vladimir Putin travels to Brussels for talks with EU leaders at a time when relations are strained over Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision in November to turn his back on a trade and political agreement with the EU in favor of closer trade ties with Russia.

That decision, rewarded with a \$15 billion bailout from Russia, sparked weeks of pro-EU demonstrations in Kiev, during which three protesters have recently been killed.

Police clashed with protesters in the Ukrainian capital again Sunday and the opposition said it would keep pushing for early elections, despite being offered the prime minister's post by Yanukovich.

The 28-nation EU, which accuses Russia of putting trade pressure on Ukraine and other ex-Soviet states tempted by closer ties with Brussels, showed its anger by canceling the dinner that traditionally precedes its twice-yearly summits with Russia.

It has opted instead for an intensive two-and-a-half-hour session of talks, restricted to top officials, to permit an in-depth discussion about Ukraine and other divisive issues.

Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will represent Russia while European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton will speak for the EU.

Russia, which regards Ukraine as part of its sphere of influence, has told European governments to stop meddling in the country's crisis and has criticized politicians such as Ashton for visiting protest sites in Kiev.

Russia and the EU have had "a number of differences which need to be discussed and clarified" at the summit, Van Rompuy said in a statement.

The EU's strategy of forging closer ties with ex-Soviet states was left in tatters when Armenia opted last September to join the Customs Union led by Moscow. Ukraine was next to jilt the EU, after Moscow tightened checks on its imports and threatened to cut off its gas supplies.

Van Rompuy and Barroso will stress to Putin that "there should not be any interference or threats" and that Ukraine and other ex-Soviet states should be free to take their own decisions, one EU source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A German member of the European Parliament, Knut Fleckenstein, urged the EU and Russia to work together to foster a dialogue in Ukraine.

"If they do not want Ukraine to slide into a kind of civil war, they must work for a dialogue between the Ukrainian government and the opposition. Russia and the EU can solve this issue together, but not alone," Fleckenstein, a leader of a joint committee with Russian legislators, told Reuters.

But the EU source said that, while both sides were likely to call for an end to violence in Ukraine, no joint statement would be issued after the meeting.

The EU has launched its own mediation effort in Ukraine, sending enlargement commissioner Stefan Fuele for talks last week and Ashton later this week.

"This is not going to be a summit about Ukraine ... [But] of course the dramatic developments there are undoubtedly a source of serious concern for both Russia and the EU," Russia's ambassador to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov, said last week.

Russia is the EU's third-biggest trading partner after the U.S. and China, and two-way trade totaled more than 330 billion euros (\$452 billion) in 2012. But the two sides are locked in quarrels over trade and energy which could be raised in Tuesday's talks.

The EU has launched a World Trade Organization dispute with Russia over allegations it

illegally protects its carmakers, and has opened an antitrust probe of Russian energy giant Gazprom. The Syrian conflict and negotiations with Iran on its nuclear program will also be raised at the summit.

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