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Yanukovych Eyeing Early Elections, Lawmaker Says

By The Moscow Times

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Viktor Yanukovych is prepared to hold early presidential and parliamentary elections in the country.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych says he is prepared to hold early presidential and parliamentary elections in the country if no other solution can be found to the ongoing political crisis, his political ally has said.

The country's government resigned last week, and demonstrators who have occupied the center of Kiev since November are demanding the resignation of Yanukovych.

"The president said: 'If we politicians can't reach an agreement now ... then the only democratic way of resolving the situation is early elections,'" Yuri Miroshnichenko, a lawmaker from Yanukovych's Party of the Regions, told Ukrainian television channel ICTV.

Miroshnichenko said the president has ruled out the use of force to liberate Independence Square, the heart of the mass anti-government protests where barricades have been erected

and a protest camp set up.

"I will never do that, because these are also our citizens," Miroshnichenko quoted Yanukovych as saying.

Following the Cabinet's resignation last week, Yanukovych went on sick leave for what the presidential website said was an acute respiratory illness, prompting the country's opposition to accuse him of inaction amid the ongoing political crisis. He returned to work Monday.

The demonstrations were sparked in November by Yanukovych's last-minute decision to back off from signing landmark trade deals with the EU. The protest movement has since transformed into a loose coalition of opposition groups seeking the president's ouster.

The largely peaceful demonstrations in Kiev spilled over into violence last month, and up to five people have been killed.

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