

EU Willing to Offer Ukraine Financial Aid in Return for Reform

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BRUSSELS — The European Union is ready to boost aid to Ukraine if Kiev pursues economic and political reforms, a senior EU official has said.

"In case of a positive scenario we will be ready to extend our assistance based on a genuine commitment for political and economic reforms, in cooperation with the IMF and other international actors," Stefan Fule, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, told members of the European Parliament on Wednesday.

He said reform of Ukraine's electoral system was among the main political preconditions for aid to the country, which has been rocked by large-scale anti-government street protests since November.

The announcement came shortly after The Wall Street Journal reported that the U.S. and EU were discussing a short-term financial aid plan for Ukraine in a move to counter pressure

from Moscow.

The prospective aid package was discussed by top U.S. and EU diplomats on the sidelines of a security conference in Munich over the weekend. The size and sequencing of the package have yet to be worked out, WSJ said.

The European loan is likely to reopen the long-term geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the West deepened by Kiev's rejection late last year of plans to sign key trade and association agreements with the EU.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich made a last-minute decision in November to back off from signing the landmark deals with the EU and instead signed a \$15 billion aid deal with Russia. The move sparked nationwide protests that have since transformed into a broader movement seeking the president's ouster.

After Ukraine's government resigned last week, Russia said it would suspend its next installment of aid, giving the West an opportunity to again bid for influence in Ukraine.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara said Kiev had received no official proposals about the possible loan, but that discussions were possible during the ongoing visit to Ukraine by EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

Ashton met with Yanukovich on Wednesday evening, the presidential administration said in a statement.

"The parties have discussed ways of stabilizing the political situation in Ukraine, economic reforms and measures to strengthen democratic institutions," the statement reads. "In particular, issues of maintaining security, providing an unbiased and transparent investigation into the recent events and the prospects of pursuing constitutional reform were discussed."

Ashton told journalists after the talks that the EU had offered to assist an investigation into the recent violent clashes between police and protesters in Kiev, in which at least two people were killed.

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