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Yanukovych Agrees to Early Vote in Bid to End Crisis in Ukraine

By Jennifer Monaghan

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Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych has agreed to constitutional reform and early elections. **The Ukrainian Government**

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych has agreed to constitutional reform and early elections in a bid to end the political standoff in Kiev.

"I will also initiate a... redistribution of powers towards a parliamentary republic," Yanukovych said in a statement posted Friday on the presidential website.

The proposed deal would see a return to the 2004 Ukrainian Constitution, which would be restored within 48 hours and entail a restriction of presidential powers, Ukrainian broadcaster ICTV reported, citing a copy of the agreement.

A presidential election would also be held before December 2014.

EU mediators said the opposition was seeking last-minute changes to the deal, but they still

expected a deal to be signed on Friday, Reuters reported.

The opposition are yet to directly comment on the announcement, while it is unclear whether anti-government protesters will give their approval to the deal.

On Friday, the Ukrainian Health Ministry said that 77 people had been and nearly 600 people injured following two days of violent clashes between demonstrators and riot police in Kiev.

Ukrainian parliament speaker Vladimir Rybak on Friday gave his backing to a decree that ordered the country's security troops to pull back and end their crackdown on protesters. The move, which was passed by the Verkoha Rada late Thursday, was backed by 35 pro-government lawmakers, indicating the emergence of cracks within the Yanukovych camp.

In another sign of Yanukovych's eroding support, the Ukrainian army's Deputy Chief of Staff Yury Dumansky submitted his resignation Thursday, saying he could not accept the military being dragged "into a civilian conflict," UNIAN reported.

Yanukovych's hand-picked acting mayor of Kiev, Volodymyr Makeyenko, also announced his resignation from the ruling party on Thursday, while more more than 50 Ukrainian diplomats in the U.S., including Ambassador Olexandr Motsyk, signed a statement in support of the protesters.

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