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Ukraine Starts Emergency Gas Import Talks with EU

By The Moscow Times

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Ukraine is in emergency talks with European neighbors on the possibility of importing natural gas from the West, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk said.

The urgency of securing affordable supplies has grown since Moscow boosted the price it charges Kiev for its gas twice this week, almost doubling its fees in three days, in price hikes criticized by Yatsenyuk as "political"

"We are carrying out emergency talks with our European partners. One way to solve the problem is reverse gas from EU countries," Yatsenyuk told reporters on Friday, adding that the main candidates for imports were Slovakia, Hungary and Poland.

"On a technical level, the idea of reverse gas raises no problems and we hope our European partners make the right decision. If it will be to reverse [gas], then it means the price for gas will be $150 dollars lower than Russian gas."

Russia has raised the price of gas to $485 per 1,000 cubic meters for Ukraine, where it is locked in the biggest confrontation with the West since the end of the Cold War.

Yatsenyuk has called the price hikes "unacceptable" and warned that he expected Russia to increase pressure on Kiev by limiting supplies. Russia has annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea and has made demands on Ukraine's new government.

Moscow has frequently used energy as a political weapon in dealing with its neighbors, and European customers are concerned Russia might again cut off deliveries.

Ukraine covers 50 percent of its gas needs with Russian supplies. It will soon get money from the International Monetary Fund under a new loan package but faces large debts and its economy is in chaos. The EU receives around half of its Russian gas supplies via Ukraine.

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