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Belarus, Kazakhstan Oppose Ukraine Import Restrictions, Report Says

By The Moscow Times

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The presidents of Belarus, left, Kazakhstan, center, and Russia announcing the creation of the Eurasian Union.

Belarus and Kazakhstan have turned down a Russian proposal to restrict imports to the Customs Union from Ukraine, unidentified officials close to the negotiations said, the Vedomosti business daily reported Monday.

Ukraine on Friday signed the second part of a landmark association agreement with the EU that envisions, among other things, the cancellation or reduction of import duties between the two sides. Russia is worried that the deal may allow cheap European goods to make their way into the CIS free trade zone, of which Ukraine remains a member.

Moscow proposed the restrictions at a Eurasian Economic Commission meeting, but the corresponding resolution was not supported by Belarus or Kazakhstan, an official told Vedomosti.

However, unidentified sources told the paper that the Customs Union's rules allow Russia to make decisions unilaterally. First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov last week said Russia could impose trade barriers without its partners' support.

Vedomosti cited a Russian presidential administration official as saying that the position of Belarus and Kazakhstan is understandable. Belarus shares a 600-kilometer-long border with Ukraine and closing the border is economically unreasonable, while Kazakhstan is seeking to enter the World Trade Organization and there is a risk of Ukraine trying to block its accession, the official said.

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