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Ousted President Yanukovych Speaks of Desire to Return to Ukraine

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People attend an "Anti-Maidan" rally to protest against the 2014 Kiev uprising, which ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, in Moscow Feb. 21, 2015.

Ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, who fled to Russia a year ago after being toppled by months of street protests, said he was ready to return to Ukraine if the opportunity arose.

The pro-Russian leader was overthrown by the "Maidan" uprising in Kiev against his decision to back away from a deal that would have taken the country towards integration with Europe and instead tighten economic ties with Russia, Ukraine's old Soviet master.

Just weeks after his departure, Moscow annexed the Crimean Peninsula, a base for Russia's Black Sea fleet, and pro-Russian separatists seized key buildings in the east of the country, leading to a conflict in which more than 5,000 people have been killed.

Interpol has put Yanukovych on the international wanted list at the behest of Kiev authorities on charges of embezzlement and financial wrongdoing. But Russia is likely to turn down any

request to extradite him, the Interfax news agency said last month, citing a source familiar with the situation.

Yanukovych, who has denied any involvement in corruption, said in a television interview aired Saturday he regretted he could not return to his country.

"God has left me alive, so it looks like I'm needed for something. ... As soon as there is a possibility for me to return, I will return and will do everything I can to make life better in Ukraine. And today, the main task is to stop the war," he told Channel One channel.

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