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Juncker: Ukraine to Remain Outside EU for 20 Years

By The Moscow Times

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Ukraine will not be able to join NATO or the European Union for at least another 20 years, the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker estimated on Thursday, Germany's DPA news agency reported.

“Ukraine will definitely not be able to become a member of the EU in the next 20-25 years, and not of NATO either,” Juncker was quoted by DPA as saying.

He was speaking in the context of an upcoming April referendum in the Netherlands on a free-trade deal between the EU and Ukraine, DPA reported. The agreement does not qualify as the first step toward EU membership, he said, DPA reported.

A dispute between Russia and Western-leaning Ukrainians about their country's European integration set off the crisis in 2014, which led to Moscow annexing the Crimean Peninsula and backing separatist insurgents in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow claims that NATO's eastern expansion is a threat to its national security, and wants to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence.

After the loss of Crimea to Moscow and the disintegration of eastern Ukrainian regions into a violent conflict, officials in Kiev proclaimed Ukraine's European integration their major political priority.

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