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Ukraine Ends ‘Nonaligned’ Status, Earning Quick Rebuke From Russia

Ukraine’s Parliament Reopens Aspirations to Join NATO

*Україна закінчує свій "позаблоковий" статус "неприєднаних",  
наражаючись на швидкий докір від Росії*

*Український Парламент відновлює курс на вступ до НАТО*

*Відмову України від "позаблокового" статусу автори публікації називають досить символічним кроком, що демонструє глибокі відмінності між Києвом і Москвою, яка давно вважала Україну своєю підконтрольною державою і буфером, що відокремлює її від Заходу. Проте шанси на вступ України в НАТО найближчим часом практично дорівнюють нулю, оскільки європейські країни-члени альянсу не особливо горять бажанням вступати в конфронтацію з Росією. У вівторок міністр закордонних справ Росії Сергій Лавров засудив цей крок, який, за його словами, ускладнить врегулювання кризи на Україну, відмічають автори.*

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-ends-nonaligned-status-earning-quick-rebuke-from-russia-1419339226>



*Lawmakers voted to end the nation's nonaligned status. Agence France-Presse*

KIEV, Ukraine—Ending its status as a nonaligned nation, Ukraine rekindled aspirations to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a move that drew a quick rebuke from Moscow.

Though largely symbolic, Tuesday's move highlights the depths of differences between Kiev and Moscow, which has long thought of Ukraine as its satellite and buffer against the West, and has accused the West of bringing hostile forces to its borders. Ukraine had pursued NATO membership when a pro-Western government was elected 10 years ago, but declared itself as nonaligned under the recently ousted pro-Russia president, Viktor Yanukovich, after he was elected in 2010.

Ukraine's chances of joining NATO anytime soon are practically nil, however, as members in Europe especially have little stomach for a confrontation with Russia. On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov condemned the move, which he said would make a resolution of the Ukraine crisis tougher.

"This is counterproductive and only worsens confrontation, creates the illusion that the path of taking up such laws can solve the deep inner crisis in Ukraine," Mr. Lavrov told journalists. Moscow has been urging Kiev to hold talks with rebels, whom the West says Russia has been supporting with arms and some of its own military units.

Russia denies sending weapons, and says some members of the military have been fighting in Ukraine while on vacation.



*A protester confronts police on Tuesday outside parliament. Agence France-Presse*

Ukraine's move comes as international diplomatic efforts to restart the peace talks between Kiev and separatists appear to be making some progress, with discussions in Minsk expected as early as Wednesday. A tentative cease-fire announced in eastern Ukraine appears to be holding, with the number of shootings and casualties down significantly, Ukrainian officials say.

In Minsk, representatives of Ukraine, the rebels, Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe will be looking for ways to cement the cease-fire, arrange a prisoner exchange, create a line of demarcation between government and rebel forces, withdraw heavy weapons, and supply humanitarian aid to the battle-worn region.

While neither side has fulfilled their military objectives, neither wants to continue fighting through the winter, fearing that a flow of refugees amid subzero temperatures could create a humanitarian crisis of yet-unseen proportions.

Russia has recently scaled back its rhetoric against Kiev, whose government it once referred to as a junta, after a drop in oil prices sent the ruble into a rout. Moscow says the Russian economy could shrink as much as 4.5% next year, due partly to a sharp rise in interest rates as the central bank attempts to defend the ruble.

Ukraine, meanwhile, has been teetering on the edge of financial collapse, with the government reliant on the West for handouts. Kiev expects the economy to shrink by at least 4.3% in 2015, after a 7% contraction this year.

Finance Minister Natalie Jaresko submitted a 2015 budget to Parliament on Tuesday that it is asking delegates to pass quickly so that Ukraine can get its next tranche of a \$17 billion loan package, which the government seeks to expand by as much as \$15 billion.

The government is under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to narrow its budget deficit at a time when revenues are collapsing and its military must fight a Russia-backed insurgency. In her report to parliament, Ms. Jaresko said 30% of next year's budget would be spent on defense and servicing the country's debt.

In the proposed budget, the government plans wide-ranging cuts outside the military, and to impose extra taxes on imports and large businesses, as well as lifting privatization restrictions. Overall, the budget deficit is seen narrowing to 3.7% of gross domestic product, down from 4.1% this year.

But the numbers don't include the deficit of the largest state energy company, Naftogaz, which has for years provided natural gas to Ukrainians at rates far below the market. This year, Naftogaz is expected to record a loss of about \$6.5 billion.

Ukraine's split with Moscow was sparked by its turn away from economic integration with Russia. Ukraine's previous president, Mr. Yanukovich, had called for closer ties with Moscow, and when he indefinitely postponed an economic-cooperation agreement with the European Union, pro-Western protests erupted in Kiev that escalated until he was ousted. Moscow denounced the events as a coup, annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, and the pro-Russia rebellion erupted in Ukraine's east.

On Tuesday, the Kremlin moved on with its economic alliance without Ukraine, as Russian President Vladimir Putin met the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to put final touches on the Eurasian Economic Union.

The collapse of Russia's ruble this month and rounds of sanctions between Russia and the West have created frictions within the alliance, with the president of Belarus questioning whether the ruble could be used in trade within the bloc.

"We very actively and I would say stormily discussed the details of our work together," said Mr. Putin, the Interfax news agency reported. "And in the end we found compromises."

Mr. Putin said the union will create a common market of 170 million people whose economic output totals \$4.5 trillion, Interfax reported.

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