

# Ukraine in Brief

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*Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov at the last meeting between the two.*

*(Photo: Kyiv Post)*

## Ukraine Says No to Russian Customs Union Offer

Ukraine was recently offered a chance to join the customs union by Russia, however on Thursday April 7, President Yanukovich said that Ukraine had no interest in joining the group. The customs union is made up of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

While Ukraine said that they have no intention of joining the customs union, President Yanukovich proposed the creation of a free trade agreement instead. Russia and the customs union provided Ukraine with large financial incentives had the country joined the trade-bloc. Additionally, Russia's Gazprom company said it would be willing to give Ukraine a discount on gas supplies, which would save Ukraine \$8 billion a year.

Ukraine turned down this offer but President Yanukovich stated, "I think the further development of our ties with the customs union will be based on new agreements."

Part of the problem with joining the customs union is that Ukraine would no longer be eligible for a free trade agreement with the EU. By joining the customs union, Ukraine would be required to apply a

common customs tariff to EU countries, which would not be in line with the EU's practices, according to EU Trade Spokesman John Clancy.

Ukraine is free to establish other trade agreements with the customs union and still remain eligible for free trade areas with the EU. It is only direct participation in the customs union that places a free trade agreement with the EU in jeopardy.

Prime Minister of Russia, Vladimir Putin visited Ukraine on Tuesday April 12 to discuss economic and other issues. Putin hoped to convince Ukraine to join the customs union, but his Ukrainian counterpart, Prime Minister Mykola Azarov did not make any commitments, only saying that he hoped a decision not to join would not hurt trade relations. Putin stated that if Ukraine spurned the union, it might cause Russia to take "protectionist measures."

## Ukraine Hopeful for Donors Conference

On April 19, as part of the ongoing commemoration events for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, Ukraine will host a donors conference to enlist funding for the containment structure surrounding the reactor.



*Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, Raisa Bohatyriova*

*(Photo: Kyiv Post)*

The Chernobyl Shelter Fund was created in order to permanently build a sarcophagus for the damaged reactor at the plant. The project still needs large

amounts on funding from the international community. According to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone Manager Volodymyr Kholosha, the shelter fund still needs about 600 million Euros, while another fund, dedicated to creating storage facilities for nuclear waste needs funding of about 140 million Euros.

Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, Raisa Bohatyriova, stated that the country is hoping to receive about 800 million Euros from the donors conference. This would cover the current difference in funding and allow Ukraine to finally construct a safe structure over the damaged reactor. At the upcoming conference in April members of the international community have committed to attending, including the Prime Minister of France who just recently announced he would lead his country's delegation.

## Parliament in Ukraine Looks to EU for Visa Liberalization

On Tuesday April 12 the Ukrainian Parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, voted for a resolution that calls for the EU to create a visa-free regime for Ukrainians.

Not only does Parliament want the visa-free regime but they also asked that the EU include a respective provision in the future EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Ukraine hopes that this will further encourage the EU to liberalize the visa regime. There will need to be strict policies between Ukraine and the various embassies and consular offices within the EU in order to properly execute this new plan.

Parliament hopes that the visa agreement between the two will expand to include NGO representatives, religious organizations, and organized tourist groups. This visa liberalization plan would be another step in strengthening the bond between Ukraine and the European Union.