

Ukraine Leader to Seek Turkmen Gas to Ease Reliance on Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KIEV — The supply of Turkmen gas to Ukraine will be on the agenda during a visit to Turkmenistan next week by Ukraine's president, whose government is struggling to reduce its dependence on expensive Russian gas.

President Viktor Yanukovich's visit will take place from Feb. 12 to Feb. 14, his office said Friday. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara, who traveled to Turkmenistan last month to prepare the visit, said gas will be discussed.

Turkmenistan used to sell gas to Ukraine in the late 1990s and early 2000s, shipping it through Russian pipelines. But since 2009, Ukraine has been buying the fuel only from Russia's Gazprom.

The price of Russian supplies has been rising steadily, becoming a burden on the state budget and the economy because a 2009 contract between Gazprom and Ukraine's Naftogaz linked it

to global energy prices.

Finding another supplier could be a quick solution for Ukraine, but only if Kiev and Ashgabat agree on a price and Moscow allows such shipments.

Ukrainian officials say a new free trade agreement signed last year by the Commonwealth of Independent States, a club of ex-Soviet republics, obliges Russia to allow shipments of Turkmen gas to Ukraine at competitive rates.

But Moscow has yet to comment officially on the idea.

According to oil and gas firm BP, Turkmenistan's natural gas reserves are equal to those of Saudi Arabia and are smaller only than those of Russia, Iran and Qatar.

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