

Moldova Says Will Stick to Pro-Europe Course Despite Russian Pressure

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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CHISINAU — Moldova's leaders hit back after a Russian envoy warned their ex-Soviet republic that its pro-Europe policy could bring retaliatory action from Moscow, possibly involving cuts in Russian gas deliveries.

Dmitry Rogozin, a Russian deputy prime minister, said Tuesday that Moldova, one of Europe's poorest states, might lose control over its breakaway territory of Transdnester if it went ahead with its drive for closer ties with the European Union.

Hinting that Moldova might also face sanctions by Moscow in the shape of reduced deliveries of gas, Rogozin said: "Energy supplies are important in the run-up to winter. I hope you won't freeze."

The small former Soviet republic of 3.5 million people is heavily in debt to Moscow for cheap gas imports that help keep its economy afloat.

Asked by journalists Wednesday about Rogozin's remarks, President Nicolae Timofti replied: "Moldova's course of European integration will continue.

"The statements by a functionary of another state are his private affair. We have a program of European integration that we will enact irrespective of any such statements."

The tough words to Moldova from Rogozin, a regional envoy of President Vladimir Putin, forms part of a broader drive by the Kremlin to dissuade its former Soviet allies from turning away from Moscow and tying their economy and future trade more closely to the EU.

Ukraine, another former Soviet republic and neighbor of Moldova, has also come under pressure from the Kremlin to halt its European integration plans.

Both Moldova and Ukraine are looking to a November summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, to lock in place key agreements on political association and free trade with the 28-member EU bloc.

"People must understand that they cannot live under permanent pressure from threats. Citizens have to elect a leadership of the country which will act so as not to rely on one single source of energy," Timofti added.

Rogozin, in his comments earlier this week, likened Moldova to a locomotive on a perilous course of twists and turns that could cause it to lose some of its carriages — an allusion to its rebel enclave of Transdnestr.

The separatist, mainly Russian-speaking, region of Transdnestr broke with Moldova's central government after a short war in 1992 and sees Moscow as its patron. But its status remains undecided, despite years of international talks.

Urging Moldova to keep its economy closely hitched to Russia, he warned Europe was "not a place for the weak" and the EU would not deliver "jam or honey."

In a warning shot to Ukraine last month about its westward drive, Russia conducted extra customs checks on Ukrainian imports over several days and Putin spoke of possible "protective" measures by Moscow and its Customs Union allies Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Ukraine says Russia will remain a strategic partner even after agreements with the EU. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich told parliament Tuesday to draw up draft legislation to prepare the country for the agreements to be signed and provide for "success" in Vilnius.

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