

Ukraine Government to Abolish Protest Law, Offers Conditional Amnesty

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January 28, 2014

The  **Moscow Times**

Ukraine's embattled government has ceded to the opposition's demands and offered to revoke a recent anti-protest law that had fueled massive anger, and to provide a conditional amnesty to demonstrators.

President Viktor Yanukovich, who met with opposition leaders Monday, has agreed to rescind the Jan. 16 law, which had triggered violent protests, Justice Minister Olena Lukash said late Monday.

The anti-protest law would likely be abolished Tuesday during an emergency session of parliament, RIA Novosti reported.

In a statement posted on the presidential website, Lukash also said the government would not seek to prosecute demonstrators if they cleared their barricades and stopped attacking government buildings. The announcement followed the protestors' withdrawal from the

Justice Ministry headquarters, which they had occupied earlier on Monday.

Lukash had threatened to call for a state of emergency — which would have imposed a curfew, banned rallies, suspended political parties and restricted movements of cars and people — unless demonstrators withdrew from the ministry building.

A state of emergency could have cleared the way for the army's involvement in suppressing the protests, opposition spokeswoman Lesya Orobets said, CNN reported.

The parliament, or Verkhovna Rada, was also expected to discuss the government's "responsibility" for the recent violence on Tuesday, and may hold a vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Mykola Azarov's Cabinet, Lenta.ru reported

A parliamentary no-confidence vote in the Cabinet would be a major concession to the protesters, who had initially taken to the streets in November over the government's decision to pull out of a planned association deal with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Moscow, but have since adopted broader demands, calling for the government's resignation and an early election.

Yanukovich had offered the prime minister's job to opposition leader Arseny Yatsenyuk over the weekend, but the proposal was rejected. The opposition warned that the offer may have been a trap aimed at dividing and discrediting their movement.

The prime minister wields relatively little political power in Ukraine, and some political analysts have said that whoever holds the post would probably be unable to resolve the ongoing crisis, while the president can easily turn the premier into a patsy for the country's economic troubles.

Violence spread through much of western Ukrainian regions and other parts of the country on Sunday, with demonstrators seizing regional administrations' buildings and demanding the resignation of local governors.

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