

U.S. Calls For Peaceful Change In Ukraine

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. said Saturday that the dramatic ouster of Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich and the release of opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko could move the country away from violence toward a political settlement.

The White House said Washington was keen to see the country build a new government and hold early elections.

Ukraine's Rada parliament voted to oust Yanukovich, who abandoned his Kiev office to protesters and denounced what he described as a coup after a week of fighting in the streets.

The White House issued a statement welcoming the release of Tymoshenko, a former prime minister, and pledging to work with Russia, European allies and international organizations to support the formation of a government of national unity.

On Friday, a senior State Department official had warned that a peace deal between Yanukovich and opposition figures had been fragile. That deal collapsed, and the White House said Saturday's developments in Kiev appeared positive.

"We have consistently advocated a de-escalation of violence, constitutional change, a coalition government, and early elections, and today's developments could move us closer to that goal," the White House said.

"The U.S. deeply values our long-standing ties with Ukraine and will support them as they pursue a path of democracy and economic development," the statement said.

The State Department said it would send its No. 2 official, Bill Burns, to Kiev next week.

It was not immediately clear who would fill the vacuum left by Yanukovich, who fled to eastern Ukraine, and with Tymoshenko appearing in public urging the opposition to keep up the protests it was also unclear whether the opposition would remain unified.

Tymoshenko and the leader of one of the opposition groups, Vitaly Klitschko, are likely to emerge as top candidates to lead the country, said Taras Kuzio, a Johns Hopkins University scholar who is an expert on Ukraine politics.

The crisis reflects the conflict between those who want Ukraine to remain aligned with Moscow and President Vladimir Putin, and those seeking closer integration with Western Europe.

Spheres of Influence

Putin sees any move to align Ukraine closer with Western Europe as undermining his efforts to build a Eurasian sphere of influence, but Europeans do not see the issue in such stark geopolitical terms, said former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Steven Pifer.

"Russia cares more about losing Ukraine than Europe cares about gaining it," he said.

Many in Washington expect Putin to focus more closely on the issue after Sunday's closing ceremony of the Olympic Games, to which he has devoted much time and resources.

Some analysts in the U.S. cited Tymoshenko's close ties to Moscow as an avenue for Putin to build on as the post-Yanukovich transition unfolds.

Russia and the U.S. on Saturday appeared to remain at odds over Washington's backing for the opposition groups.

In a phone call, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry that the agreement had been "sharply degraded" by the opposition's inability or unwillingness to respect it, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Lavrov reminded Kerry that Putin had urged U.S. President Barack Obama during an earlier call to "use every opportunity to stop the illegal actions of radicals and return the situation to constitutional channels," it said in a statement.

The U.S. had repeatedly urged measures to stabilize Ukraine's economy but has made it clear that any financial assistance would need to go through the International Monetary Fund.

U.S. Supports IMF Help

On Friday, a senior State Department official said Washington had assured Ukraine's leaders they can count on "strong support" from the U.S. in talks with the IMF.

Ukraine's relationship with the IMF has long been a difficult one. Successive governments have failed to fully implement IMF-backed programs, which have required politically difficult reforms.

A senior State Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said going through the IMF was a more sustainable way to stabilize the Ukrainian economy than any other option, suggesting it should not rely on Moscow's handouts.

IMF insiders, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the international lender would be cautious about making a deal with an interim Ukrainian government given the country's history of weak economic reforms.

The insiders said the IMF's experience in Greece, where reforms have been bankrolled by European and IMF money and made difficult by a shaky coalition, would make the Fund wary of lending to a Ukraine government that is not politically committed to tough economic changes.

Still, as the IMF's largest and most influential member country, the U.S. could push for easier conditions under an IMF loan program.

An IMF program would unlock more funding and guarantees from other international institutions like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, a key lender in the region, and the World Bank.

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