

U.S. Approves Ukraine Aid Package

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The  **Moscow Times**

U.S. lawmakers on Thursday overwhelmingly passed a bill to give Ukraine a \$1 billion loan and let Washington impose further sanctions on those held responsible for Russia's annexation of Crimea.

The Ukraine Support Act, which also promises up to \$150 million in direct aid to Ukraine, became the subject of a bipartisan spat when Republicans opposed a number of International Monetary Fund reforms that the White House had aimed to include in the legislation.

Once Democrats dropped the IMF reforms from the bill, both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives voted in favor of it, the latter with a 399 to 19 vote.

U.S. House Speaker Harry Reid hailed the vote as a success.

"This bill is a reality check to [President] Vladimir Putin that the United States will not stand idly by while he plays the role of a schoolyard bully," Reid said, The Guardian reported.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Robert Menendez said the majority vote was a step in the right direction.

"I believe we are in a dangerous moment in history with global consequences and the world is watching," he said, Reuters reported Friday.

On top of the aid package and sanctions, the U.S. has also promised to start exporting natural gas in a bid to help Europe reduce its reliance on Russian energy.

A separate preliminary agreement announced by the IMF on Thursday also promised Ukraine another \$14-18 billion loan in return for a set of reforms aiming to "put the country on the path of sound governance and sustainable economic growth while protecting the vulnerable in society," a statement on the organization's website said.

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