

U.S. Increases Security Funding to Moldova as Tensions Rise

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The U.S. on Sunday pledged \$10 million to bolster border security in Moldova at a time when concerns are rising about divisions within the country over a trade deal with Europe and Russia's intervention in neighboring Ukraine.

The pro-Western Moldovan government is pushing ahead with an EU trade deal by the summer despite the increasing debate on whether to integrate with Europe or stick with former Soviet master Russia.

It was the rejection of the same EU deal in November by former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich that triggered street protests against his rule after he balked under the threat of economic retaliation from Moscow.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Victoria Nuland announced the new U.S. funding during a visit to Moldova on Sunday before she flew to Paris for a meeting between U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The Paris meeting is aimed at defusing tensions between Moscow and the West over Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region and making it part of Russia.

"Today I am delighted to announce that the U.S. will contribute an additional \$10 million to support Moldovan border security efforts," Nuland told a news conference, according to a transcript provided by the State Department.

This was in addition to ongoing funding for nonproliferation objectives and border security, she said.

"This is a time of some stress in this neighborhood. It is clear to everybody," she said.

The U.S. strongly supports Moldova's moves to strengthen its relationship with Europe through the trade deal, which is expected to be sealed by the summer.

In language similar to what the U.S. has used on Ukraine, Nuland said: "It is no accident that I am here today to make clear U.S. support for those same principles here in Moldova — for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country, for the right of Moldova and Moldovans to choose their own future."

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