

Russia Cannot Alter Ukraine-EU Deal, EU Trade Nominee Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia will not be allowed to amend a free-trade deal between the European Union and Ukraine, the woman set to become the EU's new trade chief said on Monday, rejecting Moscow's demands.

Russian President Vladimir Putin wants three-way negotiations to amend the EU's accord with Kiev, which Russia says will hurt its own economy, and has threatened to curtail Ukraine's access to Russian markets if Kiev implements the deal.

"I will not, if I am confirmed, and the Commission will not allow Russia to amend the agreement," Sweden's Cecilia Malmstrom told a European Parliament hearing to examine her appointment.

"They have expressed concerns, many concerns, as far as I can judge most are economic," she said, adding she hoped a 15 month delay in implementing the accord would provide time to

overcome differences.

According to EU officials, Russia wants to remove more than 2,000 products eligible for duty-free access to the European Union, tearing up about a quarter of the agreement. Putin has called these "systemic adjustments".

The EU-Ukraine deal is at the heart of a dispute that has grown from a tug-of-war between Brussels and the Kremlin over Kiev to sanctions, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, and concern about a new Cold War.

Putin will have his first opportunity to discuss the issue next month at a summit in Milan, which the Russian leader plans to attend, two diplomats familiar with the plans told Reuters.

The summit, which takes place every two years, is being held in Milan on Oct. 16-17. It would be the first opportunity for Putin to meet with top European leaders since D-Day celebrations in Normandy, France in early June.

Following the overthrow in February of a pro-Moscow president who rejected the EU deal, Ukraine's parliament sealed a historic shift by ratifying the political and trade agreement. That put Kiev on a path it hopes will bring the prosperity it sees in fellow ex-communist states like Poland.

Moscow wants Kiev to join its own free-trade zone, trying to maintain its influence over Ukraine and other newly independent states it dominated during the Soviet era, especially those with energy pipelines and large Russian-speaking communities.

In a last-minute concession to Moscow, the EU delayed implementing the trade accord until Dec. 31, 2015. But it is now a legal treaty that cannot easily be changed.

"Only Ukraine or the EU can amend the association agreement, not Russia," Malmstrom said.

Russian officials say there may be some leeway within the structure of the treaty to adjust how it is implemented without amending the text that will be ratified by EU parliaments.

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