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## Ukraine leadership vows to steer toward EU

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Ukraine's new interim president pledged to put the country back on course for European integration now that Moscow-backed Viktor Yanukovich had been ousted, while the United States warned Russia against sending in its forces.

As rival neighbors east and west of the former Soviet republic said a power vacuum in Kiev must not lead to the country breaking apart, acting President Oleksander Turchinov said Sunday that Ukraine's new leadership wanted relations with Russia on a "new, equal and good-neighborly footing that recognizes and takes into account Ukraine's European choice."

A day after Yanukovich fled to the Russian-speaking east following dozens of deaths during street protests aimed at toppling him, parliament named new Speaker Turchinov as interim head of state. An ally of the ousted leader's long-jailed rival Yulia Tymoshenko, he aims to swear in a government by Tuesday that can provide authority until a presidential election on May 25.

With battle-hardened, pro-Western protesters in control of central Kiev and determined to hold their leaders to account, lawmakers rushed through decisions to cement their power, display their rejection of rampant corruption and bring to book officials who ordered police to fire on Independence Square.

But whoever takes charge as interim prime minister faces a huge challenge to satisfy popular expectations and will find an economy in deep crisis, even if the EU makes good on new offers of aid that may help make up for loans that Russia has frozen.

Scuffles in Russian-speaking Crimea and some eastern cities between supporters of the new, pro-EU order in Kiev and those anxious to stay close to Moscow revived fears of separatism that a week earlier were focused on the West, where Ukrainian nationalists had disowned Yanukovich and proclaimed self-rule.

In an appearance on NBC TV Obama's National Security Adviser Susan Rice was asked about a scenario in which Russia would send troops to restore a government more friendly to Moscow, or for the country to be carved up.

"That would be a grave mistake. It is not in the interests of Ukraine or of Russia or of Europe or the U.S. to see

the country split. It's in nobody's interest to see violence return and the situation escalate," Rice said. Yanukovich's flight into hiding left Putin's Ukraine policy in tatters, on a day he had hoped eyes would be on the grand finale to the Sochi Olympics. The Kremlin leader spoke Sunday with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose foreign minister had brokered a short-lived truce in Kiev Friday. They agreed Ukraine's "territorial integrity" must be maintained, Merkel's spokesman said.

Earlier this month, a Kremlin aide warned that Moscow could intervene and accused Washington of breaching their 1994 treaty under which Russia removed Soviet nuclear weapons from Ukraine.

It is unlikely the United States and its allies in NATO would risk an outright military confrontation with Russia but such rhetoric, laden with echoes of the Cold War, underlines the high stakes in Ukraine, whose 46 million people and sprawling territory are caught in a geopolitical tug of war.

EU officials offered financial aid to a new government and to revive a trade deal that Yanukovich spurned under Russian pressure in November, sparking the protests that drove him from office after 82 deaths last week, many from police sniper fire. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton will travel to Ukraine Monday to discuss economic help, the EU said.

The United States has also promised help. But budgets are tight in the EU and Washington, and international creditors like the IMF may remain wary of Yanukovich's opponents, whose years in government before him were no economic success story.

In Russia, where Putin hoped to count on Ukraine as a key element in a union of ex-Soviet states and might also fear the Kiev uprising could inspire his own opponents, the finance minister said the next tranche of a \$15 billion loan package agreed in December would not be paid, at least before a new government is formed.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, according to his office, told U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry the opposition had “seized power” by force by ignoring the EU-brokered truce Friday that left Yanukovich in office for the time being. Lavrov said that power-sharing agreement should be revived.

Yanukovich, whose whereabouts remain unclear but who may be in his home city of Donetsk near the Russian border, accused opponents of a Nazi-style coup and said he remained in power.

In a hectic round of voting in parliament, lawmakers rushed in some crowd-pleasing measures against the ousted administration.

They stripped Yanukovich of his abandoned country home near Kiev. Its brash opulence, complete with ostrich farm and hot tubs, was put on display within hours and fueled demands that the rough-hewn former petty criminal from the eastern coalfields be held to account for stealing taxpayer billions.

Newly appointed Speaker Oleksander Turchinov, now acting president, said a government should be in place by Tuesday.

His ally, Tymoshenko, defeated by Yanukovich in 2010 presidential polls and later jailed for corruption, ruled herself out as interim premier. Freed from a prison hospital Saturday after more than two years in jail, she may want time to recover and build support before running for the presidency.