



With hundreds of thousands of protestors reportedly rallying anew in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, General Ban Ki-moon has appealed directly to President Victor Yanukovich for peaceful dialogue to defuse ongoing political tensions in the country.

In a telephone call with the President, Mr. Ban expressed his grave concern and emphasised that there must be no resort to violence.

Angry crowds that brandished the flag of the nationalist Freedom Party toppled the statue of Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin, police said, protesting the country's strengthening ties with Moscow.

Demonstrators hope to force President Viktor Yanukovich to resign after he, on 21 November, refused to sign a historic trade pact with European Union leaders under pressure from Russia.

Following the protests that followed, Mr. Ban appealed to all parties to act with restraint, avoid any further violence and to uphold the democratic principles of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

In his call, the top UN official also congratulated Mr. Yanukovich on a successful chairmanship during this year of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairmanship and of the ministerial meeting held on 5 and 6 December in Kyiv.

Ban: there must be no resort to violence in Ukrainian protests

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Ukraine is seeking cheaper gas imports and possibly credits from Russia to stave off a looming balance of payments crisis, as the country is faced with \$17bn in gas bills and debt repayments next year. Those bills are about equal to the the heavily-depleted reserves now held by Ukraine's central bank.

Russia has pressured Ukraine to join a trade bloc, which also includes former Soviet states Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Protesters have denounced attempts to bring Ukraine back into Moscow's orbit and contend Yanukovich aims to sell out Ukraine to Russia. The demonstrations are the largest since the 2004-05 Orange Revolution.

With the first snowfall of winter, protesters on Independence Square have been digging in with tents and supplies of food and clothing.