
Georgia's Unrecognized Republics Seek 'Decisive' Action From Russia.

Moskovskiy Komsomolets, Moscow

20/3/2007

Representatives of the unrecognized CIS republics have become regular visitors to Moscow recently. At present three ministers of foreign affairs (from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the Dniester region) and South Ossetia's leader Eduard Kokoiti are in the capital. All of them have one headache: Georgia is joining NATO...

At a meeting the ministers clarified details of a "rendezvous" between the presidents of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the Dniester region which will take place in Sokhumi at the beginning of April. According to Sergey Shamba, head of Abkhazia's Foreign Ministry, the main question which will be discussed there is the potential for Russia to recognize the republics.

"Russia now has a unique and perhaps final chance to preserve its influence in the South Caucasus - by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia," Shamba said in an interview with Moskovskiy Komsomolets. "Moscow should use the Kosovo precedent and take a decisive step now because the Kosovo example will lose its relevance later. Georgia and Azerbaijan will become members of NATO, after this Armenia will quite simply be forced to follow their example. Russia's influence in the region will come to nothing. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are the only buffer remaining between Russia and NATO. These countries are still prepared to defend Russian interests. But politicians from a younger generation could soon come to power there who, unlike us, have not lived through a war. And we do not know how they will behave when they are surrounded by NATO countries."

"The international community's reaction to Russia recognizing Abkhazia will of course be negative. But any decisive Russian action causes discontent in the West. If Russia does not now recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it will mean that politicians in Moscow do not consider the South Caucasus to be a zone of Russian interest. It is now or never: Either recognize the unrecognized, or lose influence in the region completely..."

South Ossetia's President Eduard Kokoiti commented on the situation specially for Moskovskiy Komsomolets: "It is no news to us that Georgia is joining NATO. We have known about this for a long time and have prepared ourselves for it. The United States is trying to inflame the situation in the region with its own shortsighted actions. It is not the United States or NATO but Russia which has always been the guarantor of stability and order in the South Caucasus. We have therefore made our choice: To try to gain independence, and we do not intend to ask for the United States' opinion on this matter. It is time for Russia to take a principled stand, enough of making concessions."
