

# Nato warned over Georgian regions

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Two regions of Georgia are likely to secede if Nato seeks closer ties with the former Soviet state, Russia's ambassador to the alliance says.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia already run their own affairs, but Dmitry Rogozin said moves by the Tbilisi government to join Nato could lead to a final split.

His comments come ahead of a Nato summit which will consider beginning the membership process for Georgia.

Moscow is strongly opposed to neighbour Georgia joining the Western alliance.

"Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not intend to join Nato. They have a completely different view," Mr Rogozin told Reuters new agency.

Nato allies fully and strongly support the territorial integrity of Georgia under any possible scenarios Nato spokesman

He said a national referendum backing Nato membership, organised by President Mikhail Saakashvili last December, had excluded the two breakaway republics.

That decision was an "historic mistake", said Mr Rogozin, "because in this way he personally excluded Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia".

He added: "As soon as Georgia gets some kind of prospect from Washington of Nato membership, the next day the process of real secession of these two territories from Georgia will begin."

Putin to attend summit

In response, Nato spokesman James Appathurai said the alliance had taken no decision on whether to offer Georgia a "Membership Action Plan" - the first step to eventual membership.

"That being said, Nato allies fully and strongly support the territorial integrity of Georgia under any possible scenarios," he added.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is to attend the Nato summit in the Romanian capital Bucharest early next month.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia threw off rule from Tbilisi in the 1990s.

They are not internationally recognised. Moscow provides aid and most of the population hold Russian passports.

President Saakashvili says the two regions must remain part of Georgia.

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