
Duma recommends closer links with unrecognized republics

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MOSCOW, March 13 (RIA Novosti) - Members of Russia's lower house of parliament recommended on Thursday that Moscow open 'missions' in Georgia's breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as in Moldova's Transdnestr.

They did not elaborate on what form these missions could take, although the mere fact that Moscow may now establish some form of diplomatic links with the three unrecognized republics points to a growing readiness to acknowledge the sovereignty of breakaway regions striving to merge with Russia.

Participants in a State Duma discussion of appeals for recognition by Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transdnestr also said that the withdrawal of the Russian-led peacekeeping force from the de facto independent republics could have disastrous consequences.

They also said that the recent recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty by a number of states could complicate the resolution of frozen conflicts throughout the world.

Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia on February 17. Since then the United States and 18 of the 27 EU states have recognized the Republic of Kosovo. Russia, China, Spain, Cyprus and several other countries have refused to recognize its independence, however.

In early March, reacting to what they called "the Kosovo precedent," the parliaments of Georgia's breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia asked Russia's parliament, the United Nations and other organizations to recognize their independence.

Belgrade has recalled its ambassadors from a number of countries recognizing Kosovo's sovereignty. Russia has also pledged to block any move by Kosovo to join the United Nations.

Prior to the declaration of independence by the "world's newest state," the European Union approved the sending of a 2,000-strong police and justice mission to Kosovo to replace the UN mission deployed there since the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 ended a conflict between Albanian and Serb forces.

Kosovo has been a UN protectorate since the end of this conflict.

Recommendations were also made in the State Duma on Thursday that goods produced with the participation of Russian companies on the territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transdnestr should be permitted into Russia without the imposition of import duties.

The participants in the State Duma discussion also recommended that Russia widen its support for Russians living in these three territories in trade, economic, social and humanitarian spheres.

Russia lifted last Thursday trade, economic, financial and transport sanctions on Abkhazia, and urged other CIS countries to follow suit.

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia were involved in bloody conflicts with Georgia after proclaiming independence following the split-up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Transdnestr, which has a large ethnic Russian population, proclaimed its independence from Moldova after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In December 2007, it said it would seek recognition for its independence from Moldova if the Kosovo issue was resolved in favor of Albanian separatists.
