

Russia, Abkhazia, S.Ossetia to sign economic and military cooperation agreements

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Russia may sign friendship and cooperation agreements with Georgia's rebel provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia early next week, a spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Friday.

"I want to reassure you that the signing of agreements on friendship, cooperation and mutual aid between Russia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia will take place in the nearest future, probably early next week," Andrei Nesterenko said.

Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states on August 26, two weeks after it had expelled Georgian troops from South Ossetia following Tbilisi's August 8 military offensive against the republic.

The diplomat added that all the documentation was nearly ready for signing.

Russia earlier this week established diplomatic relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and pledged substantial economic and military support. The majority of those living in the disputed republics are Russian passport holders.

Nesterenko also said that Russia and Georgia's rebel republics are also currently working on draft military cooperation agreements that are aimed at ensuring stability and security for the residents of both regions.

Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba said that the issues concerning the agreements and diplomatic ties would be discussed during Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to Abkhazia and South Ossetia on September 14-15.

"Lavrov's visit to Abkhazia will take place on September 14. He has scheduled meetings with the Abkhaz authorities and representatives of the UN secretary general in Sukhumi," Shamba said.

The Abkhaz minister said it is highly likely that the cooperation agreement will be signed in Moscow on September 17.

Murat Dzhioyev, the South Ossetian foreign minister, said the Russian minister will mainly discuss bilateral ties, adding that "This is Lavrov's first visit to Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

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