

Russia considers opening Black Sea Fleet base in Abkhazia

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Russia is considering opening a base for its Black Sea Fleet in Abkhazia, a lawmaker and former fleet commander said on Thursday.

Russia's Black Sea Fleet uses a range of naval facilities in Ukraine's Crimea as part of a 1997 agreement, under which Ukraine agreed to lease the bases to Russia until 2017.

Vladimir Komoyedov, a Communist Party lawmaker, took part in a parliamentary defense committee meeting on the Armed Forces' development up to 2020.

Asked about the possibility of creating a base at Ochamchira, a seaside town in the separatist Georgian republic recognized by Russia as independent, Komoyedov said: "The issue concerning [Abkhazia](#) is under consideration."

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko announced in the summer that Ukraine would not extend the lease of the base in the Crimean city of Sevastopol beyond 2017, and urged the Russian fleet to start preparations for a withdrawal.

Although the agreement for Russia's use of the base foresees a possible extension of the lease, and Moscow has repeatedly said it wants negotiations on the issue, Ukraine reiterated its position last month that it would not permit an extension of Russia's naval presence in the country after 2017.

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine heightened after several Black Sea Fleet warships dropped anchor off the Georgian coast during and after the August armed conflict with Georgia over breakaway South Ossetia.

Earlier in the month a source in the Russian Defense Ministry said that Russia plans in 2009 to open one base in Gudauta, in the west of [Abkhazia](#), and another in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia.

Russian General Staff chief Gen. Nikolai Makarov told journalists in Moscow in October that in line with friendship and assistance treaties, concluded with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, each base will deploy some 3,700 service personnel.

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