

Lavrov Slams Georgia's Caucasus Visa Waiver

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Russian officials criticized Georgia on Tuesday for its decision to introduce visa-free entry for residents of North Caucasus republics, calling it a “provocation,” an “act of propaganda” and even “utter nonsense and stupidity.”

Georgian Foreign Minister Nino Kalandadze told journalists Monday that residents of Dagestan, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, North Ossetia and Adygeya will be able to spend up to 90 days in Georgia without a visa.

She said the decision, already signed by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and to be enacted Wednesday, was part of Georgia's liberalization of its policies, adding that residents of the North Caucasus have plenty of business and private interests in the country.

But her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, called it an “act of propaganda” move that goes against “the framework of relations between civilized partners,” Interfax reported. He said he was not formally informed about the decision and learned about it from media reports.

The deputy presidential envoy for the North Caucasus Federal District, Arkady Yedelelev, also said the Russian side had not been informed about the development, which he called a “provocation,” the report said.

Federation Council Senator Alexander Torshin slammed the decision as “utter nonsense and complete stupidity” and accused Georgian authorities of supporting North Caucasus militants by allowing them to retreat to Georgia to “lick their wounds,” Interfax said.

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