

Medvedev, Sarkozy and Merkel to Meet

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The leaders of France and Germany will press President Dmitry Medvedev at talks in Deauville, France, this week to consider NATO's call for Russia to cooperate in missile defense, officials said.

The two-day summit, which starts Monday, comes after French President Nicolas Sarkozy's office announced Friday that France was ready to help develop and pay for a U.S.-led European anti-missile shield as a backup, not a replacement, for the country's nuclear deterrent.

Russian and EU officials said Friday that cooperation with NATO — including on missile defense — would be a key issue at the talks between Medvedev, Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, which will resume trilateral talks last held in 2005.

The leaders will also discuss visas, economic links and Iran's nuclear program, Sergei Prikhodko, Medvedev's foreign policy aide, told reporters in Moscow.

"We have serious differences," Prikhodko said of the missile defense plans. "They relate to practically one main issue: We do not always similarly identify threats. When we establish a

dialogue on this topic and these threats are identified, it won't be difficult to make decisions."

EU partners will try to convince Medvedev to accept an invitation to attend a NATO summit next month in Lisbon to discuss cooperation on missile defense.

"I would like to see cooperation with Russia. It makes sense ... a security roof from Vancouver to Vladivostok," NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said after talks with Sarkozy in Paris on Friday.

But Fogh Rasmussen said Russia has so far not responded to the invitation to cooperate.

A decision may be reached at the NATO summit for a missile defense "adapted to the evolution of the ballistic menace weighing from certain programs in the Middle East," Sarkozy's office said in a statement after the president's meeting with Fogh Rasmussen.

France's government has questioned the need for an anti-missile shield in the past, but on Friday an official in Sarkozy's office said, "France is fully for missile defense." He said France was ready to make a "financial and technical contribution" to the effort but added that it would "complement the deterrent."

Russia's ambassador to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, said a decision had yet to be made on whether to attend the NATO summit. But he reiterated Russian concerns that the system could be used to counter Russian long-range missiles.

"Is it just a pretext to move the missile interceptors closer to Russian borders?" Rogozin told a seminar in Brussels.

"We have appealed to our NATO partners to limit the range of action of the missile interceptors by geography and for some technical parameters to make it possible for the system to only intercept small and medium-sized missiles," he said. "But they don't want any limitations and that really poses a threat to the strategic missiles on Russian territory."

(Reuters, Bloomberg, AP)

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