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# Moscow Awaits Libyan Transitional Oil Official

By The Moscow Times

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Tarhouni, left, with a rebel commander at an oil and gas complex Friday. **Zohra Bensemra**

Libya's oil minister will be the first member of the North African country's National Transitional Council to visit Russia, President Dmitry Medvedev's envoy to Africa and the Middle East said.

The oil minister "will probably be first to come," Mikhail Margelov said Wednesday in an interview in Yaroslavl. "The timing of the visit will be decided through diplomatic channels. It's a matter of a few weeks." The new administration's oil and finance minister is Ali Tarhouni.

Margelov said he plans to meet a Libyan delegation at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, adding that Russia must not delay appointing a new ambassador to Tripoli.

While Russia joined calls to end Moammar Gadhafi's 42-year rule and recognized the new

administration last week, it repeatedly criticized NATO for overstepping a mandate to protect civilians in Libya. Russia hopes the new Libyan leaders will honor previously signed contracts and agreements, the Foreign Ministry said Sept. 1.

Russia stands to lose billions of dollars in deals it signed with Gadhafi's regime, Aram Shegunts, head of the Arab-Russian Chamber of Industry in Moscow, said last month.

Libya, home to Africa's largest oil reserves, produced more than 1.5 million barrels a day before the start of the civil war in February. Gazprom has two exploration blocks itself and is a partner in producing fields with BASF's Wintershall unit. It also agreed to enter the Elephant project with Italy's Eni. Tatneft also has Libyan exploration sites.

Eni's Greenstream gas pipeline from Libya to Italy may reopen next year and production will return to prewar levels in 2014, according to the Paris-based Societe Generale bank.

"We expect the Greenstream pipe to stay closed until early 2012 as the Italian market is already long in gas and is witnessing a decline in demand," it said. "We expect a gradual ramp-up in 2012 to 2013 with production returning to its prewar level in 2014 on a full-year basis."

"The main thing is that we are ready and the Libyans are ready to cooperate in the field of energy," Margelov said, adding that other areas where the two nations may work together include military equipment and telecommunications.

"The number of topics for cooperation is more than just oil," he said.

Russia has called on the United Nations to coordinate Libya's transition to democracy after the ouster of Gadhafi, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters Wednesday in Moscow at a joint briefing with his French counterpart, Alain Juppe, Bloomberg reported.

The UN will play an "essential role" in Libya's reconstruction, Juppe said.

Russia also urged talks in Syria between President Bashar Assad and the opposition and warned about a repeat of the Libyan "scenario" in the Middle Eastern country, Lavrov said.

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