

Russia to Send Arms to Transdnestr

April 17, 2012



A statue of Vladimir Lenin guards a government building in Transdnestr's capital of Tiraspol. **Kevin O'Flynn**

CHISINAU, Moldova — An official news agency in Transdnestr reported that Moscow will send new weapons to its troops based in the Moldovan separatist region.

Olvia-press on Tuesday quoted Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin as saying unspecified arms will be deployed to about 500 troops following Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov's visit to the former-Soviet, self-proclaimed republic last week. No further details were available.

There was no immediate reaction from the Moldovan government, which last week criticized Serdyukov's visit.

The move comes just weeks after a new Moldovan president was sworn into office, following three years of political stalemate that left the country without a leader.

Transdnestr broke away from Moldova in 1990 over fears that it planned to reunite with Romania. Russia has about 1,000 troops in Transdnestr to guard Soviet-era weapons, and a

further 500 peacekeepers stationed at border points.

In January, Moldovan officials and the new leader of Transdnestr agreed to increase contacts between their populations and improve crossborder trading and telephone links.

The pledge came following the first meeting between the sides in years in Ukraine, although the matter of Russia's troop presence was not discussed.

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Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/04/17/russia-to-send-arms-to-transdnestr-a14148>