

Lavrov Warns Ukraine Over EU Deal

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov **Maxim Stulov**

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday that Russian trade with Ukraine would not be severed if Ukraine signs an agreement next month with the European Union, but he said the current free trade conditions would not apply if the country moves closer to the West.

Lavrov made his comments following a meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, exactly one month before Kiev is expected to sign a landmark association deal with the EU despite opposition from its eastern neighbor.

Speaking about trade ties between Russia and Ukraine, Lavrov said there would be "no breaks" in relations but that his country would not give benefits to Ukraine if Russian goods have to compete with a flood of products from Europe, Interfax reported.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara said Russia would always be a "strategic partner," but repeated his country's desire to sign an association agreement with the EU, most likely at a summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, on Nov. 28 to 29.

Lavrov also said Monday that Russian and Ukrainian citizens should use international passports for travel between the two countries rather than the internal documents they are currently allowed to use, RIA Novosti reported. But he and his Ukrainian counterpart both said their countries would not introduce visa regimes for the other's citizens, a measure Lavrov said would be a "catastrophic mistake."

The meeting, held within the framework of the Russian-Ukrainian international cooperation subcommittee, was meant to focus on emerging international challenges and threats, regional conflicts, border disputes, international organizations and other issues.

Besides addressing the trade tensions between the two nations, Lavrov also said the neighbors would continue to work together on border security, especially in the run-up to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Lavrov said he expected a sizable number of visitors to travel through Ukraine to get to the event.

The foreign ministers also voiced support for continuing to work together on projects including the construction of a bridge over the Kerch Strait, which connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, and protecting the rights of Ukrainian and Russian citizens in the breakaway Moldovan region of Transdnestr.

Kozhara said he wanted to meet with Lavrov again on the sidelines of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's meetings in early December.

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