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Russia Seeks Closer Ties With Transdnestr After Moldova's EU Deal

By The Moscow Times

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The Transdnestrian parliament building in Tiraspol, fronted by a statue of former Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin.

Moscow on Wednesday said tying Moldova closer to the EU violated the rights of the people in the former Soviet republic's breakaway region Transdnestr and said it would foster closer ties with the enclave.

The crisis in eastern Ukraine, where Kiev is struggling against a rebellion by pro-Russian separatists, renewed concerns over Transdnestr, which broke away from Moldova in 1990 and has since sought to join Russia.

In Moscow, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin signed several government agreements with Yevgeni Shevchuk, the head of Transdnestr, which has not been recognized by any country as an independent state.

"Up until now, the majority of goods produced on the territory of Transdnestr was meant to go to EU countries," Interfax news agency quoted Rogozin as saying.

"Our task is to ... create conditions to redirect the production manufactured in Transdnestr to Russian markets," said Rogozin, who is also President Vladimir Putin's special envoy for Transdnestr.

Rogozin, known for his conservative brand of patriotism and anti-Western rhetoric, in May also brought a petition from Transdnestr to Moscow in which the breakaway region backed a union with Russia.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said the memoranda signed on Wednesday covered areas including manufacturing, trade, agriculture and transport.

The Moldovan parliament on Wednesday ratified an agreement tying it closer to the EU, which Chisinau signed on June 27 along with other former Soviet republics Ukraine and Georgia.

That happened in spite of Russia's opposition and drew swift threats of retaliatory trade action from Moscow.

Transdnestr is home to about 2,500 Russian soldiers and half-a-million people — 30 percent of them ethnic Russians — who look to Moscow as their patron. Moldova's autonomous region of Gagauzia also has historic and religious ties with Russia.

The EU and U.S. have threatened to ratchet up sanctions against the Russian economy unless it reins in the separatists in eastern Ukraine.

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