

Syria Applies for Free-Trade Zone With Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Forces of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad carry a Syrian flag.

Syria this month applied for the creation of a free trade zone with Russia, Deputy Economic Development Minister Alexei Likhachyov told news agency TASS on Friday.

Russia has strong ties with Syria and its President Bashar Assad, who Russian President Vladimir Putin stood by even as the West moved to punish the regime for its bloody crackdown on a popular uprising in early 2011, which spiraled into the ongoing Civil War in the country.

High level delegations from the two countries met on Thursday night in Sochi. Before the meeting, Russian newspaper Kommersant reported that Syria would request a \$1 billion loan from Moscow.

The two countries had begun negotiations on the creation of a free trade zone before, but

the beginning of the conflict in the region put the talks on hold, Likhachyov said.

Now, the Economic Development Ministry stands behind "beginning negotiations for a preferential [trade] regime," Likhachyov said.

The possibility will be discussed at a session of the Eurasian Economic Commission that is loosely scheduled for late December, he added.

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