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Putin Affirms Kremlin Support on Visit to Breakaway Abkhazia

August 09, 2017



Vladimir Putin and Abkhazia's President Raul Khajimba **Kremlin Press Service**

President Vladimir Putin visited the breakaway region of Abkhazia on Tuesday to meet regional officials and reaffirm the Kremlin's support for the territory's separatist ambitions, the state-run RIA news agency reports.

Putin's visit coincided with the nine-year anniversary of hostilities breaking out between Georgia and Russia over a second breakaway region, South Ossetia, in 2008.

"We reliably guarantee the security and self-sufficiency and independence of Abkhazia. I am sure that will continue further," RIA cited Putin as saying during a meeting with Abkhaz leader Raul Khadzhimba.

Putin also said Russia would invest 6 billion rubles ($100 million) in the Abkhazian economy by 2019.

Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008, with

only Venezuela, Nicaragua and the tiny Pacific island of Nauru following suit. Over 80 percent of Abkhazians are Russian citizens.

According to the Reuters news agency, A NATO spokesman said Russian authorities should have coordinated the president's visit with Georgia in advance.

"President Putin's visit to the Abkhazia region of Georgia — on the ninth anniversary of the armed conflict — is detrimental to international efforts to find a peaceful and negotiated settlement," the statement read.

Putin's visit to the breakaway region came just one week after U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence visited the Georgian capital and criticized Russia's influence in the country.

Putin last visited Abkhazia in 2013.

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