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Russian Banks to Open Branches in Ukraine's Occupied Kherson Region

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A man riding a bicycle past a poster reading "Great Patriotic War 1941-1945" in Kherson, Ukraine. **Sergei Ilnitsky / EPA / TASS**

A Russian bank is set to open a branch in Ukraine's occupied Kherson region this week, an official in the region's Moscow-appointed administration announced Tuesday.

"I think in the near future, a month or a month and a half, people will be able to open accounts and try to pay via the internet," said Kirill Stremousov, deputy head of the Kherson region's "military-civilian" administration, without specifying which Russian bank will be opening.

"Ukrainian banks will no longer work due to the disconnection of communications from the Ukrainian side," Stremousov told reporters during a visit to the Russia-annexed Crimean peninsula.

Stremousov added that more Russian banks could open branches in Kherson in the near future.

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The Kherson region of southern Ukraine has seen a gradual "Russification" since Russia's forces took control in March, prompting speculation that its Moscow-installed authorities could stage a referendum to become part of Russia.

The region started transitioning to the Russian ruble last month, and Russian television channels and cellphone signals have replaced Ukrainian ones.

Russia has also simplified the process of obtaining a Russian passport for residents of captured Ukrainian territories.

On Monday, Stremousov claimed that the Kherson region "will soon become a full-fledged subject of the Russian Federation."

President Vladimir Putin vowed that Russia would not occupy Ukrainian territory when he launched what he calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24.

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