

Georgia Says Olympic Guests Must Not Visit Breakaway Abkhazia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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TBILISI, Georgia — Georgia on Wednesday called on foreign visitors to the Winter Olympics to keep out of Abkhazia, a Russia-aligned breakaway territory just south of Sochi along the Black Sea coast.

The International Olympic Committee, however, said there was no reason not to go to Abkhazia.

Abkhazia declared independence shortly after Russian forces crushed the Georgian army in a brief 2008 war, but most of the world still considers it Georgian territory. Only Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and two Pacific island nations have recognized Abkhazia as an independent country.

Russia's attempts to facilitate travel across its border with Abkhazia, only five kilometers south of Olympic venues, was "a provocation aimed at undermining the sovereignty

and territorial integrity of Georgia" and "misleading foreign citizens," the Georgian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Asked the IOC's view on Olympics visitors going to Abkhazia, IOC spokesman Mark Adams said "why not."

"The talks and exchanges between the two governments, that is entirely been to the two governments," he said. "In terms of going to Abkhazia ... well if it is safe, people will go there."

Alexandra Kosterina, spokeswoman for the Sochi organizers, refused to comment.

In connection with the Games, the Russian border with Abkhazia has been closed to most traffic, so it is unclear whether Olympic visitors would be allowed to cross it.

While Abkhazia and another breakaway region, South Ossetia, remain sticking points in restoring diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia, President Vladimir Putin said Monday that he hoped the Sochi Games would help to mend fences and expressed a willingness to meet with his Georgian counterpart.

The Georgian government responded positively to Putin's overture.

Mutual personal enmity had prevented any meeting between Putin and former Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, whose term ended in November.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said a possible meeting between Putin and Georgia's new president, Giorgi Margvelashvili, would be discussed at talks in early March between envoys from the two countries.

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