

Russia Dismayed by Remarks Made by New NATO Chief Jens Stoltenberg

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Statements by NATO's new chief do not raise hopes of a rapid improvement in relations between Russia and the military alliance, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said Thursday.

Jens Stoltenberg, a former Norwegian prime minister, has been widely seen as using more conciliatory language towards Russia than the man he replaced last month as NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Lukashevich told a news briefing that Russia was leaving the door open to dialogue, strained by the crisis in Ukraine, but said: "To be honest and quite frank, so far the first statements by Mr. Stoltenberg cause no optimism."

"The atmosphere, which had in principle been maintained with the alliance until recently, vanished in the blink of an eye and it will be very difficult to restore it, to restore the dialogue," he told a news briefing.

He did not refer to any specific comments by Stoltenberg.

The conflict in Ukraine has pushed relations between Moscow and the West to their lowest level since the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union collapsed more than 20 years ago.

The European Union and the U.S. have imposed sanctions on Russia over the crisis and Moscow has banned some Western food imports although it denies arming pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

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