

At SCO summit, Russia welcomes Ahmadinejad

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President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attends a regional security summit in Russia where officials welcome him as the re-elected president.

Ahmadinejad arrived in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg on Tuesday to participate at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit.

The SCO Summit is convened at a time when the military alliance of the European and North American states (NATO) is moving to increase its influence in ex-Soviet nations, such as Georgia.

The Iranian president, who was re-elected for a second four-year term in Friday's poll, is scheduled to deliver an address at the summit; Iran currently has observer status in the SCO.

"Iran, Russia and China are three major economic and political poles attending the summit; [They] play important roles in dealing with the world's current and upcoming developments," Ahmadinejad said Tuesday morning before leaving Tehran.

Ahmadinejad added that he would participate in the summit as a special guest of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

Upon his arrival, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov welcomed Ahmadinejad as the winner of the disputed election, calling the issue a domestic matter.

"The Iranian elections are the internal affair of Iran," Ryabkov was quoted by Reuters as telling reporters in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg. "We welcome the fact that elections took place, we welcome the new president on Russian soil and see it as symbolic that he made his first visit to Russia. This allows hope for progress in bilateral relations"

Ahmadinejad's departure for the summit was originally scheduled for Monday morning.

The delay came after protests in Tehran erupted over the hotly-contested election in which Ahmadinejad was declared victor by a landslide.

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