

Back to dialogue: NATO and Russia rebuild relations

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Russia's envoy to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, said the first official contacts between Russia and NATO will take place at the 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy, scheduled to take place in early February.

The ice is thawing between NATO and Russia as the two sides hold an informal meeting for the first time since the conflict in South Ossetia.

On Monday, all 26 NATO members and Russia are holding a council meeting which aims to improve relations between Moscow and the alliance. The sides will also consider resuming regular meetings of the Russia-NATO Council.

NATO froze all work of the Russia-NATO Council last August when it condemned Moscow for what it described as a disproportionate use of force against Georgia. The alliance then suspended all military cooperation programmes.

Russia's representative to NATO Dmitry Rogozin said Moscow is ready to get down to business with the military alliance. He stressed, however, that the Russian side is not "going to pretend that nothing has happened."

"We have a number of serious questions to the alliance, especially about its extremely one-sided assessment of the Georgian intrusion into South Ossetia," he said. "This problem is going to be discussed."

Earlier, NATO General Secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer emphasized that Russia remains a vital partner of the alliance, adding that the two sides should remain in dialogue on the issues that divide them.

According to him, these include anti-missile defence systems and the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty - both of which establish the military balance in the world.

Washington says that in placing missile defence systems in Eastern Europe, it wants to intercept possible missile attacks from 'rogue states' like Iran and North Korea.

According to current plans, opposed by Russia, the Czech Republic will host a radar base and Poland a battery of anti-missiles.

Polls show 70 per cent of the Czech population are against the building of a US radar station on its territory.

The issue of the United States pushing for Ukraine and Georgia's entry to NATO also remains a stumbling block.

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