

Moldova withdraws from Georgia-based NATO drills

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The Moldovan government has withdrawn from involvement in NATO-led drills scheduled for May 6 through June 1 in Georgia, according to the Interfax news agency.

The reasons behind the decision have not been explained.

Earlier, the Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia, as well as Kazakhstan in central Asia and Serbia in Eastern Europe announced that they were pulling out of the exercises.

It's reported that Riga, Tallinn and Belgrade withdrew due to financial reasons while Astana has not commented on its decision not to take part.

[Russia has strongly criticized the upcoming NATO-led drills](#), officially known as Cooperative Longbow 09/Cooperative Lancer 09.

Moscow says the military exercises will further destabilize the region, the scene of an armed conflict less than a year ago.

In August 2008 Georgia attacked neighbouring South Ossetia, prompting Russia to interfere to protect its peacekeepers and citizens in the republic.

As a result of the conflict South Ossetia declared its independence, recognized by Moscow.

Meanwhile, NATO says arms and military hardware won't be used during the drills.

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