



Russia warned of retaliatory measures Wednesday after NATO invited the tiny Balkan state of Montenegro to join the military alliance in its bloc's first expansion since 2009. The move defies previous warnings from Moscow that enlargement of the U.S.-led alliance further into the region would be seen as a provocation.

In a scripted session at NATO's headquarters in Brussels, Montenegro's Foreign Minister Igor Luksic strode into the imposing conference hall to loud applause from his peers as NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg declared: "This is the beginning of a very beautiful alliance."

Stoltenberg said inviting Montenegro had nothing to do with Russia. But NATO diplomats have said the decision sends a message to Moscow that it does not have a veto on NATO's eastwards expansion, even if Georgia's membership bid has been complicated by its 2008 war with Russia.

Moscow opposes any NATO extension to former communist areas of eastern and southeastern Europe, part of an east-west struggle for influence over former Soviet satellites that is at the center of the crisis in Ukraine.

[More...](#)