

Georgian Diplomats Facing Eviction

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A Russia-Georgia war of words has turned into a war of bills after a Moscow landlord filed a lawsuit to evict a group of Tbilisi diplomats amid feeble attempts by the Foreign Ministry to intervene.

The Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, took a new stab at Georgia, [accusing](#) it on Tuesday of preparing an invasion into the breakaway province of South Ossetia through a "peace march" of internally displaced people from the region.

The Moscow Arbitration Court has registered a lawsuit filed by the Ostozhenka Business Center against the Georgian diplomatic section located on its downtown premises, the Rapsi judicial news agency [said](#) Tuesday.

The business center accuses the diplomats of occupying offices without signing a lease or paying for utilities, the report said. No date for a hearing was set.

Moscow and Tbilisi severed formal diplomatic ties after the 2008 war over South Ossetia.

Georgian diplomatic interests in Russia are currently represented by the Swiss Embassy, and its consular department has occupied space in the business center on Ulitsa Ostozhenka since 2009.

The building's owner has cut off electricity to the Georgian office twice this month, rendering it unable to issue visas for several days at a time.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry last week called the demands of the landlord "groundless," but did not elaborate.

The Russian Foreign Ministry asked the business center on Friday to leave the power on for the next two months, ministry spokesman Alexei Pavlovsky said.

"The situation is undesirable and brings unnecessary political tension," Pavlovsky [said](#) in comments carried by RIA-Novosti.

The ministry also said in a statement Tuesday that it suggested to Givi Shugarov, head of the Georgian interests section, more than two weeks ago to "immediately start direct talks" with the business center.

It remained unclear whether the talks ever took place or whether the landlord would comply with the ministry's request.

Repeated calls to both the Ostozhenka Business Center and the Georgian interests section at the Swiss Embassy on Maly Rzhevsky Pereulok went unanswered Tuesday. A spokeswoman for the consular department refused comment when reached by telephone.

The Foreign Ministry expressed hope that no crackdown would follow on its own consular section at the Swiss Embassy in Tbilisi, where, indeed, no problems have been reported so far.

Meanwhile, Russian diplomats accused Georgia of preparing a "massive illegal penetration" of South Ossetia under the guise of a "peace march."

More than 3,000 people, mostly internally displaced Georgians from South Ossetia, have been asked to march into the region Friday, which marks the third anniversary of Russia's decision to recognize the region as independent, the Foreign Ministry said on its web site.

"Georgian authorities are making extensive use of threats and pressure. ... Sometimes citizens are being forced to sign up for the 'march of peace,'" the ministry said.

Shota Utiashvili, a spokesman for the Georgian Foreign Ministry, described the Russian comments as "made-up rumors" and the "invention of a deranged mind," news reports said.

South Ossetian officials also said a march was in the works, but a spokesman for the European Union's mission in the region said the EU had no such information, Gazeta.ru [said](#).

A similar march in 1989, inspired by Tbilisi and aimed against South Ossetian plans to increase the republic's autonomy, ignited a standoff that eventually culminated in an 18-month war in 1991-92 and the region proclaiming independence. Between 20,000 and 40,000 Georgians took part in the initial rally.

About 100,000 Ossetians fled Georgia during fighting in the 1990s, while some 23,000 ethnic Georgians left South Ossetia. Many refugees from South Ossetia and Abkhazia, another breakaway province, still live in rundown temporary housing, prompting worries from international human rights bodies.

A "peace march" by internally displaced Georgians was in the works in 2007, a year before the 2008 war, but the plans did not materialize.

Three years after the war and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, relations between Moscow and Tbilisi remain strained, in large part due to open Russian hatred toward Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

President Dmitry Medvedev said earlier this month that he "will never forgive" Saakashvili for ordering to kill "hundreds of our citizens" in the war. He vowed that he would never work with him.

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