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New Georgian Cabinet Sees No Quick Fix for Russian Ties

By The Moscow Times

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Ivanishvili addressing the press Monday in Tbilisi. His Georgian Dream coalition sees no quick fix for Russian ties. **Shakh Aivazov**

Maia Panjikidze, nominated on Monday to be Georgia's next foreign minister, vowed that the country's foreign policy would not change and predicted that it would take years to normalize relations with Russia.

"This is the decision of the Georgian people: to integrate with European and Euro-Atlantic organizations, to continue and deepen the strategic partnership with the U.S., which remains our main partner; and to establish relations with Russia," Panjikidze told reporters.

Panjikidze, who has 16 years of diplomatic experience, including stints as the ambassador to the Netherlands and Germany, said the restoration of ties with Russia "will probably take years," Interfax reported from Tbilisi.

“What is clear is that our main issue, the restoration of Georgia’s territorial integrity, cannot be solved without Russia’s participation,” she said.

Russia recognized two Georgian regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as independent countries following a brief war with Georgia in 2008.

Panjikidze is among a lineup of new faces named on Monday by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose Georgian Dream coalition won last week’s parliamentary elections, as part of his proposed Cabinet. Ivanishvili said he would take the helm as prime minister.

Ivanishvili chose Irakli Alasania, who quit as ambassador to the United Nations in 2008 and joined the opposition, as defense minister and deputy prime minister. Former AC Milan football star Kakha Kaladze would be his other deputy prime minister and also hold the post of minister for regional development and infrastructure.

Ivanishvili chose Irakli Garibashvili, a close ally who once headed his charity foundation, as interior minister. “Besides the fact that we have peacefully changed the government, now we should do something even bigger, which is to become truly the people’s government and truly an honest government,” Ivanishvili said at a news conference, Reuters reported.

He said he might meet with President Mikheil Saakashvili on Tuesday for their first get-together since the elections. The post of prime minister will become the country’s most powerful after Saakashvili’s second and final term ends next year.

Among the other Cabinet nominees are Teya Tsulukiani for justice minister, Paata Zakareishvili for state minister for reintegration, Alexei Petriashvili for state minister for European integration, Amiran Gamkrelidze for health minister, Sozar Subari for prisons minister, Levan Kipiani for sports minister, Guram Odisharia for culture minister, Konstantin Surguladze for state minister for diaspora issues, and David Kirvalidze for agriculture minister, according to Interfax.

Ivanishvili also selected Archil Kbilashvili as prosecutor general and David Usupashvili as speaker of the parliament, which will convene on Oct. 21. The Cabinet should be approved easily, with Ivanishvili’s Georgian Dream projected to hold 83 seats in the next parliament compared with 67 for Saakashvili’s United National Movement.

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