

Moscow Wants Kiev to Accept New Ambassador, Despite Earlier Rejection

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Moscow said that it expects Ukraine to consider its proposed new ambassador after Kiev earlier outright rejected the candidate, the Interfax news agency reported Thursday.

Russia's former Ambassador to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov stepped down last month, having served during the Maidan revolution, Russia's annexation of Crimea and Russia's involvement in separatist violence in eastern Ukraine.

A Ukrainian Foreign Ministry official announced the rejection of the Kremlin's candidate, Mikhail Babich, in a televised interview on Wednesday saying that "it has been removed from the agenda."

However, presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that Moscow is still proposing Babich, a former senior official in Russia's security services, for the position.

"It is wrong that they have refused to consider Babich's candidacy. There are various

diplomatic procedures for preliminary acceptance [of an ambassador], which are carried out away from the media," he said when asked if Moscow would be proposing a new candidate for the role.

"If the Ukrainian side takes the decision to lower the level of our diplomatic relations and considers this reduced mode of diplomatic relations to be appropriate, then that is the decision of the Ukrainian side," he said in a statement to journalists.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin told the Interfax Ukraine news agency Wednesday that Ukraine's rejection of Babich was "about creating a positive dynamic in what's happening within the context of Russian aggression."

Relations between the two countries became strained in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the onset of violence in the Donbass region, which has killed over 9,000. Ukraine blames Russia for supporting pro-Russian separatists in the conflict but the Kremlin denies any involvement.

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