The Moscow Times
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Georgia Says No Plans to Restore Diplomatic Ties With Moscow

October 27, 2024

Tbilisi, Georgia **Antoine Boureau / Hans Lucas via Reuters Connect**

Georgia has no plans to restore diplomatic relations with Russia due to Moscow's ongoing presence in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the South Caucasus country's prime minister said Sunday.

“We have no diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation. We are just pursuing a pragmatic policy towards Russia,” Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said at a press briefing.

When asked by a journalist about the likelihood of Georgia restoring diplomatic ties with Moscow, Kobakhidze responded: “No, no, no. There are no plans in this respect because 20% of our territory [Abkhazia and South Ossetia] is occupied by the Russian Federation.”

Russia has provided military, diplomatic and economic backing to Abkhazia and South Ossetia since Moscow defeated Tbilisi in a five-day war in 2008.

The two neighbors broke off diplomatic ties following the war and maintain no formal

diplomatic relations to this day.

Kobakhidze's comments followed a parliamentary election seen as a vote that will determine whether Georgia will join the European Union — and one in which observers reported significant violations.

The ruling Georgian Dream party claimed victory on Sunday with nearly 54% of the vote, a result that opposition parties dispute.

Georgia was gripped by mass demonstrations earlier this year against what the opposition saw as government attempts to curtail democratic freedoms and steer the country of 4 million off its pro-Western course and towards Russia's orbit.

In power since 2012, Georgian Dream initially pursued a liberal pro-Western policy agenda.

But it has reversed course over the last two years.

Its campaign centered on a conspiracy theory about a "global war party" that controls Western institutions and is seeking to drag Georgia into the Russia-Ukraine war.

In a country scarred by Russia's 2008 invasion, the party has offered voters bogeyman stories about an imminent threat of war which only Georgian Dream could prevent.

Georgian Dream's controversial "foreign influence" law which targeted civil society sparked weeks of street protests and was criticized as a Kremlin-style measure to silence dissent.

The move prompted Brussels to freeze Georgia's EU accession process, while Washington imposed sanctions on dozens of Georgian officials.

AFP contributed reporting.

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