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Lavrov Says Vatican Is Not an Appropriate Venue for Peace Talks With Ukraine

By Reuters

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Sergei Lavrov **Russian Foreign Ministry**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Friday cast doubt over the Vatican as a potential location for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, saying that the Holy See would not be the appropriate place to host two mainly Orthodox Christian nations.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said Tuesday that Pope Leo XIV had confirmed his willingness to host talks during a phone call with her. The Vatican press office declined to comment further.

Pope Leo, the first U.S.-born pontiff, said soon after his election this month that the Vatican could act as a mediator in global conflicts, without specifically mentioning Russia and Ukraine.

Lavrov, speaking at the Diplomatic Academy in Moscow on Friday, played down the idea of the Vatican as the next venue.

"Many people are fantasizing about when and where [the meeting] will take place. We don't have any ideas right now," the foreign minister said.

The Kremlin said earlier there was not yet any agreement on where a new round of talks would take place.

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"But imagine the Vatican as a venue for negotiations. It would be a bit inelegant for Orthodox countries to use a Catholic platform to discuss issues on how to remove the root causes [of the war in Ukraine]," Lavrov added.

"I do not think it would suit the Vatican itself to host delegations from two Orthodox countries in these circumstances," he said.

Ukrainian and Russian negotiators held their first direct talks in more than three years earlier this month in Istanbul.

Lavrov also said that Moscow would not allow Russian-speakers in Ukraine to remain under the rule of what he called a "junta" led by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

It would be a "crime" for Russia to allow this to happen, Lavrov argued, adding that the easiest way to settle the conflict would be for the international community to demand that Ukraine cancel what he claimed were laws discriminating against Russian-speakers.

Kyiv denies any such discrimination.

Lavrov, reiterating a common talking point among Russian officials, said Ukraine should hold presidential elections so that Moscow could sign an eventual peace deal with someone widely regarded as legitimate.

Zelensky has dismissed the idea that he is not a legitimate leader. Elections were not held when his five-year term in office technically expired in May 2024 because Ukraine remains under martial law, which suspends the normal election cycle.

The Ukrainian president and the West say it is necessary to suspend normal political rules at a time of war and that the Kremlin, given Russia's own tightly-controlled political system, is in no position to criticize.

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