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Russia Loses UN Telecoms Agency Leadership Vote

By Reuters

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The headquarters of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva. **Fabrice Coffrini / AFP**

Russia missed out on senior posts at the UN's telecommunications agency on Monday, after what diplomats described as efforts by Moscow to reduce its international isolation over its war in Ukraine and to gain more control over digital technology.

Unwillingness to publicly oppose Russia has been slowly building at the United Nations, UN diplomats say, with some countries starting to rebuild trade and security relations with Moscow as the conflict drags on.

Some UN diplomats say Russia is seeking to capitalize on a growing sense of war-weariness to seek posts that might increase its influence in the United Nations.

Moscow hoped to secure two senior roles at the International Telecommunication Union in elections in which the ITU's 194 members chose people for dozens of posts at a meeting in

Doha, the capital of Qatar.

But it lost out in the election to join the Radio Regulations Board, securing 58 votes versus 111 and 70 for the successful candidates from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. It also missed out on a position on the 48-member council that has influence over the agency's budget, strategy and administration.

Ukraine's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk, voiced satisfaction after the vote and said it sent a clear message. "Russia should stop its aggression, otherwise it will remain isolated from main roads of international policy," he told Reuters.

Last year, Russia failed in an attempt to secure a seat on the board of the World Health Organization. In 2023, they also failed to win enough votes to return to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council, the UN's top human rights body.

Moscow's chances of success are rising, however, because some states now want to normalize trade and security relations and are thus hesitant to openly oppose Russia at the UN, one UN diplomat said.

Russia's diplomatic mission at the UN in Geneva declined to comment.

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The ITU, one of the UN's oldest agencies, is headquartered in Geneva but holds major conferences around the world. Founded in 1865 to harmonize telegraph services, it allocates global radio spectrum and helps set standards for AI and emerging technologies.

Countries vie for ITU posts because winning can give them more influence on important topics such as AI standards and global radio spectrum allocation.

American Doreen Bogdan-Martin was re-elected as ITU secretary-general at the Doha meeting on Thursday.

Before the vote, Western diplomats expressed concerns about what they considered the potential bad optics of having Russia in leadership posts, as well as its growing sway over telecommunications policy.

Ukraine's Tsymbaliuk said Russian attacks had caused more than $2.5 billion in telecommunications damage in Ukraine, excluding cyberattacks.

The Geneva-based ITU has previously upheld complaints that Russia interferes with satellite signals, and one proposal, which is led by Lithuania and is under consideration, aims at stronger measures against such attacks.

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