

Georgians Burn Russian Flag in Protest Over Abkhazia and S. Ossetia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A group of Georgian nationalists has burnt a Russian flag during a rally in Tbilisi demanding the return of breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgia, the Georgia Online news agency reported.

Protesters from the National Front movement, who gathered in front of the government headquarters on Thursday, claimed that Russia continued to carry out its "imperialistic plans," and called on the government to place military units around the border of the so-called "occupation zone" to prevent "further annexation of Georgian territories."

The dispute over the two regions has been a sticking point in relations between Moscow and Tbilisi ever since Abkhazia and South Ossetia proclaimed independence from Georgia in the early 1990s. Tensions in the region eventually led to a brief war between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia in August 2008.

In the wake of the war, Moscow recognized South Ossetia or Abkhazia as independent states and pledged full assistance to both republics.

South Ossetia, in particular, delegated the protection of its borders to Russia in a 2009 deal, citing the absence of its own border patrol.

The territorial issue flared up in recent weeks when Russian border guards on Sept. 17 began erecting barbed-wire fencing near the border between Georgia and South Ossetia, which Georgian official Zurab Abashidze called a "blatant violation of humanitarian and international norms."

Western countries, which have repeatedly criticized Moscow's decision to recognize the two republics, called on Russia to dismantle the border barriers as their construction "may prompt frustration and further protest, which could in turn lead to further destabilization in these sensitive areas."

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