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Ukraine Protesters Look to Set Up Independent Government

By Anna Dolgov

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Protesters on Maidan Nezalezhnosti singing the Ukranian national anthem. **Denis I.**

The Ukrainian opposition has begun setting up an independent government structure to replace the country's existing authorities, who have refused to resign and have given the protesters until next week to end their rally.

"Starting tomorrow, we are beginning to form an independent administration in Kiev, a local self-governance body," head of the opposition Svoboda (Freedom) party Oleh Tyahnybok told a rally on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) on Thursday. He didn't specify the possible makeup of the new structure or the procedure for forming it, Ukrainian media reported.

Rejecting the opposition's demands for the government's resignation, Deputy Prime Minister Serhiy Arbuzov said a new election would put the country on the verge of economic collapse.

"I don't support the government's resignation," he said in a television newscast Thursday night, adding that parliament "stands by us in this."

Protesters, who have seized key public buildings in Kiev in a protest sparked by the government's rejection of an association deal with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia, have compiled a list of five major demands to the government, head of the opposition Fatherland party Arseniy Yatsenyuk said.

Besides the government's resignation and a new election, the protesters are demanding the release of "political prisoners" — an apparent reference to former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, whose release the EU had also tried to secure — the prosecution of officials who had ordered troops to beat demonstrators during last Sunday's clashes and the signing of the EU deal that the government had postponed.

Acting head of the Kiev police Valery Mazan indicated Thursday that his officers may again have to use force against demonstrators if they fail to abide by a Wednesday court ruling to end the blockade of administrative buildings within five days, Interfax reported.

"The police are doing everything possible to make sure the rallies are peaceful," Mazan said. "But if there are violations of the law, we will act decisively, harshly."

However, the ruling Party of the Regions's leader in parliament, Oleksandr Yefremov, said during a press conference Friday afternoon that "there should not be any use of force" toward the protesters. He added that his party was open to negotiating with members of the opposition.

Tyahnybok told reporters on Friday that the opposition was also ready for talks, The Associated Press reported, but conditioned any sitdown with officials on punishments for police who violently dispersed protesters.

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