

# Abkhaz President Steps Down, Parliament Sets Early Vote

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Alexander Ankvab

Amid intense public pressure and a decision by Abkhazia's parliament to hold early presidential elections in August, Alexander Ankvab announced his decision late Sunday to step down as president of the Russian-backed breakaway province of Georgia.

"Today after numerous discussions with representatives of the public, voters, and allies I have made my final decision. It does not correspond to the will of the majority of our people and of those, with whom we have tried to look for a solution [to the political crisis]. Nevertheless, due to the well-known circumstances I believe this is the only right decision," Ankvab said in a statement published on the presidential website.

The crisis erupted last Tuesday, when a crowd of between 1,000 and 5,000 protesters stormed the presidential palace in the capital, forcing Ankvab to seek refuge at a Russian military base in Gudauta.

Regardless of the outcome of the upcoming presidential election, Abkhazia — which fought for independence from Georgia in 2008, and was recognized by Moscow as an independent state that same year — is expected to maintain a strong orientation toward Russia, on which Abkhazia remains financially and militarily dependent.

Abkhazia remains financially and militarily dependent on Russia. Most of its residents hold Russian citizenship, and the national currency is the ruble.

Demonstrating Moscow's role as the ultimate arbiter in the crisis, presidential aide Vladislav Surkov met with both sides of the conflict late last week and was assured that the protest has no anti-Russian element.

"Both the president and opposition have highlighted their absolute commitment to further strengthening [Abkhazia's] ties with Russia," Surkov said, RIA Novosti reported, following the visit on Thursday.

On Saturday, the parliament appointed its speaker Valery Bganba as interim president and voted to set early presidential election for Aug. 24. Ankvab initially denounced the move as unconstitutional, but later in his resignation statement said it was "politically acceptable." Bganba will serve as acting president until the election takes place.

**See also:**

[Moscow Steps In as Arbiter in Abkhaz Conflict](#)

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