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Georgian Breakaway Region Transfers Soviet-Era Seaside Dacha to Russia

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Black Sea coast in Pitsunda, Abkhazia. **Hons084 / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

The breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia on Wednesday ratified a deal transferring a dacha in the coastal town of Pitsunda to Russia's Federal Protection Service (FSO).

Located on the Black Sea Coast, the Soviet-built Pitsunda dacha has long been a popular holiday destination for Soviet, Russian and allied leaders. Its transfer has sparked protests by locals concerned that the transfer of Abkhaz land to foreigners is a threat to the independence of Abkhazia, a separatist state internationally recognized as part of Georgia.

The parliament voted 26-2 in favor of ratification, with seven members absent.

The transfer comes with a symbolic annual payment of 1 ruble ($0.01).

The parliament was expected to convene at 11 a.m. for the vote, but members arrived at 5 a.m. in what critics called an attempt to avoid protests. Despite their efforts, some protesters and journalists were present outside the parliament at the unexpectedly early hour, with more

protests planned for later in the day.

The date of the vote had already been moved forward after initially being scheduled for Thursday. Hundreds of protesters began to gather outside the parliament on Tuesday, with more expected.

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The agreement to sell the dacha building and lease 301 adjoining hectares of land and sea for 49 years to the FSO dates to 1995, but no practical steps had been taken since to transfer the property.

Both governments secretly signed an extension in January 2022 before making it public and presenting it to the parliament for ratification in July 2022.

Several amendments were added to the agreement to appease protesters, including a requirement that the FSO obtain permission to construct new buildings or facilities on the land and a clause that terminates the agreement if the FSO donates, sells or transfers the dacha to a third party.

Russia has maintained a permanent military base in Abkhazia since its five-day war against Georgia in 2008.

Observers say that Abkhazia's close relationship with Russia should worry both Georgians and Abkhaz concerned with maintaining their sovereignty.

Georgia's pro-Western President Salome Zourabichvili tweeted that the transfer of the land in Pitsunda, known as Bichvinta in Georgian, "is a form of annexation of Georgian territory by Russia."

However, Abkhazia's leader Aslan Bzhania, who signed the ratification at 9 a.m. Wednesday, put the breakaway government's position concisely: "Russia can live without this dacha as well, but can we survive without support from Russia?"

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