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Activists in Russia-Backed Abkhazia Released After Night of Protests

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Authorities in the breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia released several opposition activists who were arrested while protesting an economic agreement with Russia in exchange for their supporters unblocking key roads and bridges, state media reported Tuesday.

Five activists were arrested outside Abkhazia's parliament on Monday after local lawmakers passed a regulatory law tied to a Russian-Abkhazian investment deal. A sixth activist was arrested late last week.

Supporters of the arrested activists started blocking traffic along three key bridges leading to Abkhazia's capital of Sukhumi around 10:00 p.m. on Monday.

All six activists were released by early Tuesday evening, Russia's state news agency TASS reported, citing an opposition spokesman. The news agency previously reported that a local court had dismissed some of the activists' cases.

Around the same time, the bridges to Sukhumi were unblocked.

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Opposition activists argue that the Russian-Abkhazian investment deal would lead to the construction of complexes in the region that would be bought by Russians.

Abkhazia, known for its natural beauty, has emerged as a top destination for Russian tourists after wartime sanctions and flight bans made travel to EU countries more difficult.

Russia recognizes the self-proclaimed republic nestled between the Caucasus mountains and the Black Sea as an independent country, but the international community recognizes Abkhazia and the breakaway region South Ossetia as part of Georgia.

Russia and Abkhazia signed the controversial investment deal in Moscow last month and it is expected to be ratified this Friday.

Abkhazia declared independence from Georgia following an ethnic conflict in the early 1990s after the Soviet Union's collapse. Russia formally recognized Abkhazia's independence in 2008 after a brief war with Georgia over South Ossetia.

AFP contributed reporting.

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