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Protesters Storm Parliament in Abkhazia Amid Dispute Over Russian Investment Treaty

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Protesters stormed and seized control of Abkhazia's parliament building on Friday, opposing a proposed investment agreement with Russia they claim threatens the breakaway region's economic and security interests.

Scores of demonstrators gathered in Sukhumi as lawmakers gathered to consider ratifying the controversial Russian-Abkhazian investment agreement, with activists arguing the deal would enable Russians to buy newly built complexes in the region, effectively undermining local control.

Protesters hurled stones and sticks at security forces, while a vehicle rammed through the parliament's metal fence, Russia's state-run TASS news agency reported. A fire engine was brought outside the building to block the crowd from entering.

Law enforcement deployed tear gas, and gunfire was reported at the scene, according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Russian-language bureau for the Caucasus. Amid the escalating unrest, Abkhazia's parliament postponed the session where the agreement was set for ratification.

Embed:

Abkhazia's Interior Minister and head of state security went to speak to the agitated crowds to de-escalate the situation, TASS later reported. However, protesters continued their push toward the parliament building and eventually seized control of it, forcing out law enforcement officials who had guarded the building.

Parliamentary Speaker Lasha Ashuba later told TASS that authorities in the breakaway territory would hold talks with opposition representatives, who have begun calling for the resignation of Abkhazia's Russia-backed leader Aslan Bzhania.

At least two people were injured during the clashes between protesters and law enforcement agents outside the parliament building in Sakhumi on Friday.

The controversial treaty has been championed by Bzhania, who has spent the past two years advocating for the so-called "apartments bill." It seeks to lift the region's ban on foreign ownership of residential property, allowing Russians to purchase real estate on the Black Sea coast.

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