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Abkhazian Leader Resigns Amid Protests Over Russian Investment Plan

By AFP

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Abkhazia's President Aslan Bzhania. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

The president of Abkhazia resigned Tuesday, his office said, after reaching an agreement with protesters who stormed the breakaway territory's parliament over a controversial Russian investment plan.

Protests erupted last week in Abkhazia, located between the Caucasus mountains and the Black Sea, over fears that a proposed economic deal with Moscow could lead to large-scale apartment construction.

Abkhazia is recognized internationally as Georgian territory but has been under de facto Russian control since a brief war between Moscow and Tbilisi in 2008.

"In order to maintain stability and constitutional order... I resign from the post of President of the Republic of Abkhazia," the region's leader Aslan Bzhania said in a statement.

His resignation is part of a deal under which demonstrators agreed to vacate government buildings they stormed Friday. Protesters have since begun leaving the square outside the presidential administration, though some remained waving Abkhazian flags, according to the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Bzhania's resignation will be submitted to parliament Tuesday, with his deputy expected to take over as acting president, his office said.

Protests have led to major disruptions in the tiny territory, known for its natural beauty, with demonstrators blocking roads in the main city of Sukhumi. Russia, a key supporter of Abkhazia, advised its citizens last week to avoid traveling to the region.

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