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Kremlin-Backed Reforms Spark Protests in Russia's Altai Republic

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Protesters blocking off the Chuya Highway in the republic of Altai. **Sib_EXpress / Telegram**

Eight people were arrested in the Siberian republic of Altai on Thursday for staging a protest against reforms initiated by regional head Andrei Turchak.

Protesters blocked off a part of the Chuya Highway, a key road artery, with large banners that called on President Vladimir Putin to dismiss Turchak and recently appointed government chairman Alexander Prokopyev.

The activists condemned Turchak's plans for scrapping the two-tier system of local self-government, which he announced amid growing fears of a possible merger of the republic and the neighboring Altai region into a single federal subject.

While no arrests were made at the protest site, security forces arrested participants at their homes later in the day, according to local media reports.

Participants of the Thursday protest received sentences ranging from fines to 14 days of

administrative arrest, according to the local branch of the Interior Ministry.

Turchak condemned the protests in a statement released late on Friday, labeling the participants "vandals who disrespect the sacred Altai [mountains] and its sacred places."

Videos shared by local bloggers showed large crowds gathering near a local court building in the village of Onguday, where the court hearing took place.

Some sources claimed that as many as 300 people gathered in support of the arrested protesters. The Moscow Times could not independently verify this number.

Passed by Russian lawmakers in March, the local government reform has been protested against by both the public and local elites across several Russian regions, including the Krasnoyarsk region and the republic of Tatarstan.

Critics warn that eliminating the rural settlement tier across all regions would remove about 99% of all elected positions in Russia and make it increasingly difficult for residents of rural localities to defend their interests within the government system.

The potential merger of the republic of Altai and the neighboring Altai region, in turn, would dramatically alter the position of Indigenous Altai peoples, making them a small minority in the new majority Russian region.

Turchak, a St. Petersburg native and the son of a longtime Putin associate, was appointed by the Kremlin to head the republic of Altai in June 2024 despite having no prior ties to or experience in the region.

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