

Russian-Installed Zaporizhzhia Head Apologizes After Blaming Kursk Residents for Failing to Defend Region

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Yevgeny Balitsky. @BalitskyEV

The Kremlin-appointed head of the partially occupied Zaporizhzhia region in southern Ukraine [apologized](#) Wednesday after accusing residents of southwestern Russia's Kursk region of failing to defend their territory during the Ukrainian incursion last year.

Yevgeny Balitsky, the Moscow-backed governor of the Zaporizhzhia region, [claimed](#) during a live broadcast Tuesday that his region had “done everything to protect our land, unlike the people of Kursk.”

The stream was later deleted, but Balitsky's remarks sparked outrage among Russia's pro-war figures and officials.

Kursk region Governor Alexander Khinshtein [demanded](#) a public apology, calling Balitsky's statement an “absolutely unacceptable” insult to the memory of soldiers and civilians killed

in the border fighting.

“Such words offend everyone who heroically defended and continues to defend our land — those who gave their lives for it, and those who will never again see their fathers, sons or husbands,” Khinshtein wrote on Telegram on Tuesday night.

The dispute refers to the August 2024 occupation of large swaths of the Kursk region by the Ukrainian forces, which Russian troops only drove out with North Korea’s support earlier this year.

On Wednesday, Balitsky issued an apology on Telegram and said his comments were misunderstood.

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He insisted the phrase “people of Kursk” referred to the region’s former leadership, which he accused of embezzling roughly 1 billion rubles (\$12.5 million) earmarked for building defensive fortifications along the Ukrainian border.

Balitsky argued the alleged misappropriation “led to the enemy’s incursion into Russian territory” and said those officials are now under criminal investigation.

Kursk was briefly governed by Alexei Smirnov at the time of the cross-border incursion. He was [arrested](#) on charges of large-scale fraud in April.

Smirnov, who governed Kursk from May 2024 until December, when he was replaced by Khinshtein, last month [admitted](#) guilt and agreed to cooperate with investigators. A verdict in his case has not yet been issued.

The rare confrontation between Kremlin-appointed governors highlights tensions within regional leadership amid continued Ukrainian strikes inside Russian and occupied territory.

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