

Abkhazia Leader Says Ready To Resign if Protesters Vacate Parliament

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Aslan Bzhania **Sergei Fadeichev/TASS**

Russia-backed leader of Georgia's breakaway republic of Abkhazia announced Saturday that he is ready to resign after protesters stormed the regional parliament, opposing an investment deal with Russia.

Protests [have erupted](#) in recent days in the republic over the controversial Russian-Abkhazian investment agreement, which — if ratified by the local parliament — would offer various benefits to Russian investors in Abkhazia, including an eight-year tax and customs duty exemption.

"I am ready to call elections, to resign...and stand in elections. Let the people say who they will support," the leader of the separatist republic Aslan Bzhania said.

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Bzhania said his condition was that the protesters who entered parliament and a presidential administration building next door should vacate the premises.

"Those who took over the presidential administration should leave," he said.

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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.

The bill's initial approval by parliamentary committees sparked a wave of protests in the region earlier this year, with opposition arguing that Russia's growing presence in the region would undermine local control.

The "apartments bill" was eventually [withdrawn](#) from the parliament in July.

Russia on Friday advised its citizens not to travel to Abkhazia, a traditional holiday destination for Russians.

AFP contributed reporting.

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