

Yanukovych Denies Ouster; Promises to Fight for Ukraine In the News March 1, 2014

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One week has passed since lawmakers in Ukraine voted to oust Viktor Yanukovych as president. Mr. Yanukovych told a press conference on Friday that he was forced to leave Ukraine, but denied being ousted. "Nobody has overthrown me," he said. "I was compelled to leave Ukraine due to a direct threat to my life". Mr. Yanukovych spoke in Russian to reporters in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don. He announced plans to return and fight for his country. He said he wants to fight for Ukraine's future against those who took control of the country through terror and fear.

Also on Friday, Ukraine's new government accused Russian forces of carrying out a "military invasion and occupation" at two airports. Interior Minister Arsen Avakov wrote on his Facebook page that armed men were blocking the Belbek airport in the Crimean port of Sevastopol. Russia has a naval base in the area.

Unidentified men were also guarding the international airport in Simferopol, the Crimean capital. As of late Friday, the airport was still open. But all of the activity has some people concerned about their well-being.

Those guarding the airport appeared a day after unidentified gunmen took control of government buildings in Crimea.

The crisis began a week ago when Ukraine's parliament voted to oust President Yanukovich. The vote followed three months of street protests. The demonstrations began in November after the president backed out of a trade deal with the European Union. His move was seen as an effort to strengthen relations with Russia instead of getting closer to Europe. The protests were peaceful at first, but then turned violent. More than 75 people were reported killed in the week before the president was ousted.

Parliament wasted no time in replacing Mr. Yanukovich. Lawmakers elected parliamentary speaker Oleksandr Turchynov as the country's acting leader. He immediately announced plans to form a new government. Mr. Turchynov said it would lead the country until new presidential elections in May.

Valerii Pekar is a Ukrainian researcher and political commentator. He said the events of the past week are Ukraine's final break with its recent past.

"We call it a government of national trust because it's a transitional government, which will keep the country alive during preparation of the free, transparent elections, which we need."

This week, Mr. Turchynov accused the former government of stealing billions of dollars from the state treasury. On Friday, Switzerland ordered restrictions on any money in Swiss banks that belongs to Mr. Yanukovych and the people traveling with him. The Swiss government wants to avoid the stealing of money that belongs to the Ukrainian public. Austria also said it was freezing the bank accounts of 18 Ukrainians after being asked to do so by Ukraine's new government.

And that's In the News from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.