

Abkhazia Says Pacific Nation Recognizes Its Independence

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The  **Moscow Times**

Georgia on Wednesday derided an announcement by the Abkhaz government that the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu has recognized the breakaway republic's independence.

"This is just another sign of how far down toward marginalization Russia's attempts have gone to find at any price a state willing to recognize [Abkhazia]," David Bakradze, speaker of the Georgian parliament, told reporters in Tbilisi.

Bakradze also questioned credibility of the announcement published [mfaabkhazia.net/en/node/949] on the Abkhaz foreign ministry's web site last Friday.

"This has not been confirmed," he said, according to the news portal Newsgeorgia.ru.

The Vanuatu government's web site, Gov.vu, carried no confirmation of the recognition Wednesday.

But the Abkhaz foreign ministry said the establishment of diplomatic relations was preceded

by "long bilateral consultations." The ministry also said in a separate statement that citizens on both sides could travel without visas.

Vanuatu, a nation of 83 islands about 1,750 kilometers east of Australia, has just 200,000 inhabitants. Abkhazia's population amounts to 120,000. Much of the Black Sea region has been left depopulated since its ethnic Georgian population fled after a separatist war in the early 1990s.

If confirmed, Vanuatu would be the second Pacific microstate to recognize Abkhazia after Nauru, the world's smallest island nation, which established diplomatic relations with Sukhumi in December 2009.

Media reports said at the time that Russia would give Nauru \$50 million in aid in exchange for its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's other separatist province.

Venezuela and Nicaragua are the only other countries that have recognized the two regions since Moscow established official ties following its war with Georgia in August 2008.

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