

2nd-Smallest Island State Recognizes Abkhazia

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The Pacific island nation of Tuvalu has become the sixth state to recognize Abkhazia and the fifth to recognize South Ossetia, the two Georgian breakaway regions said Friday.

Tuvalu's prime minister, Willy Telavi, signed declarations about the establishment of diplomatic ties with representatives of both regions during a visit to Abkhazia and South Ossetia earlier in the week, according to statements on both regions' web sites.

The island's government, which does not have a web site, did not confirm the reports until Sunday. Nor did the Georgian government make any public comment. The news comes as a slap in the face for Tbilisi because Tuvalu just seven months earlier officially established diplomatic ties with Georgia.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia were recognized as independent by Russia following a 2008 war with Georgia. Subsequently, Nicaragua and Venezuela established relations, but none of Moscow's close allies among other former Soviet states have followed suit.

In 2009, the Pacific island nation of Nauru became the fourth UN member state to recognize the two territories as separate from Georgia.

Earlier this year, another Pacific island group, Vanuatu, said it recognized Abkhazia but not South Ossetia.

Tuvalu is the world's second-smallest island state after Nauru.

Georgia has accused Russia in the past of bartering recognition deals with its breakaway regions in exchange for financial aid.

But in its efforts to woo UN member states to its side, Tbilisi has also resorted to financial incentives. In September 2010, Tuvalu's mission to the United Nations received \$12,000 from Georgia to transport medical aid from the United States to the Pacific. The payment followed a vote in the UN General Assembly in which Tuvalu supported a Georgia-sponsored resolution reiterating the right of refugees to return to their homes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, civil.ge reported.

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