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Georgia Jails 2 Israelis

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TBILISI, Georgia — A Georgian court convicted two Israeli businessmen of bribery on Friday and sentenced them to prison, dismissing their allegations of entrapment.

Ron Fuchs and Zeev Frankiel were convicted of offering a $7 million bribe to Deputy Georgian Finance Minister Avtandil Kharaidze in October in exchange for dropping plans to protest an international arbitration court's ruling.

Prosecutors said Fuchs was sentenced to seven years in jail and was ordered to pay a fine of $340,000. Frankiel was handed down a sentence of 6 1/2 years and a $70,000 fine. Defense lawyers said their clients, who plan to appeal, were ensnared in a plot orchestrated by senior officials trying to wriggle out of an arbitration payment of $90 million.

Local media reports say Fuchs is politically well-connected in Israel, causing the case to dent ties. A Georgian political visit to the Jewish state last month was canceled. The Georgian Foreign Ministry later said ties between the two would not be hurt.

(Reuters)

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