

Vanuatu Denies Recognition of Abkhazia

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TBILISI, Georgia — The remote Pacific island nation of Vanuatu has denied recognizing the independence of Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia, contradicting a statement made by an Abkhaz official days earlier.

"There was no declaration of Abkhazia's independence from Vanuatu," Donald Kalpokas, Vanuatu's ambassador to the United Nations, said Friday by telephone from New York.

On Wednesday, Abkhazia's foreign minister, Maxim Gvindzhia, said Vanuatu, an island chain with some 235,000 people east of Australia, had recognized his country's sovereignty.

Russia has lobbied its allies to follow its lead in recognizing Abkhazia and another Georgian breakaway region, South Ossetia, since waging a war with Georgia over the provinces in August 2008.

So far Venezuela, Nicaragua and the tiny Pacific State of Nauru have established diplomatic ties with Abkhazia.

Separately, Georgian officials said Friday that they arrested two residents of Abkhazia

on suspicion of preparing a terrorist bombing for Russia.

Georgian Interior Ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili said the man and woman were seized on Thursday carrying explosives to be set off in a market.

He added that the suspects said they were acting on the orders of the Federal Security Service.

The FSB declined immediate comment. But Itar-Tass cited Abkhaz police official Vadim Gvindzhia as saying the arrest was "a spectacle staged by Georgian special services."

(Reuters, AP)

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