

A Pacific Nation's Turmoil Leaves Abkhazia in Limbo

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Confusion over Abkhazia's ties with Vanuatu reached new heights Monday when reports from the Pacific island nation said a new government had withdrawn an earlier recognition of the breakaway Georgian republic's independence.

Edward Natapei, who was declared Vanuatu's acting prime minister last week, issued a statement saying Abkhazia was an "autonomous province of the republic of Georgia," the Vanuatu Daily Post [reported](#) Monday.

Natapei instructed Vanuatu's UN ambassador, Donald Kalpokas, to establish relations with Georgia, the report said, adding that the decision brings the Pacific state back in line with the majority of the international community.

Kalpokas became the center of confusion about Vanuatu's stance earlier this month when he repeatedly denied reports that the government of Prime Minister Sato Kilman had recognized

Abkhazia.

Kilman was deposed last week after Vanuatu's Supreme Court ruled that his election by the parliament last November was unconstitutional because it was conducted by a show of hands and not a confidential ballot.

But Abkhazia's foreign minister, Maxim Gvindzhia, said Monday that he had not received the statement officially and that he would not recognize it anyway.

"Mr. Natapei is an acting prime minister. We will only deal with a government fully in office," Gvindzhia said by telephone from Sukhumi.

He said reports of Vanuatu's about-face had emanated from Georgia and that Natapei's statement was seemingly written in haste and contained stark factual errors.

According to a scan [published](#) by LiveJournal blogger Suresnois, the statement was signed by Natapei on June 17, just a day after he was appointed prime minister by the country's chief justice. The text is in ungrammatical English and contains gaffes like placing the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1980 instead of 1991.

"It seems strange that he would do this as the first thing after coming to office," Gvindzhia said.

The statement had not been published on the Vanuatu government's web site, www.gov.vu, by Monday.

The web site [announced](#) Natapei's appointment Thursday, but a day later published a statement in which Foreign Minister Alfred Carlot [confirmed](#) Vanuatu's recognition of Abkhazia. However, Carlot's statement was already one week old, and it was unclear Monday whether he was still in office.

Vanuatu politics have been beset by turbulence for some time, and the latest leadership change is the fifth in less than one year.

The country's parliament is to vote for a new prime minister on Thursday, and Natapei said through a spokesman that he would not stand, Radio Australia reported Monday.

The contest is likely to be between Kilman and his rival Serge Vohor, who has already held the top job five times before, the report said. But the new government will remain shaky as parliament remains divided 50-50.

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