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Russia Ratifies Military Alliance With Abkhazia

By The Moscow Times

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Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with Abkhazia's Raul Khadzhimba in Moscow.

Russia's parliament has ratified a military alliance with the disputed territory of Abkhazia, a breakaway Georgian republic not recognized by the United Nations as an independent state, the TASS news agency reported.

The treaty, which was approved by the State Duma with only one dissenting vote on Friday, establishes a unified military force to protect a common defense and security space between Russia and Abkhazia.

"If one of the parties [to the treaty] is subject to aggression by any state or group of states, it will be considered an act of aggression against the other," TASS cited the agreement as saying.

Abkhazia, nestled between Russia and Georgia on the Black Sea coast, has struggled for its

independence from Georgia since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. A United Nations peacekeeping force comprised largely of Russian soldiers has patrolled the border between Abkhazia and Georgia since 1999.

When Georgia went to war with Russia over control of another Moscow-fostered breakaway region, South Ossetia, in 2008, the Russian military invaded the country through Abkhazia.

Moscow brushed aside Georgian forces in a five-day war, and formally recognized both territories as independent states. Only Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Nauru, a small island nation in Micronesia, have followed suit.

Under the new agreement with Abkhazia, Russia has pledged to help the territory attain wider international recognition, and integrate with international institutions, TASS reported.

The treaty's ratification comes two months after President Vladimir Putin and Abkhazian leader Raul Khadzhimba signed a "strategic partnership" agreement in Sochi. The partnership granted Abkhazia, among other things, 5 billion rubles ($78 million), and set in motion the creation of a military alliance.

The announcement of the deal sparked protests in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

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