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# Georgia Rebel Region Seeks Recognition After Kosovo

By Guy Faulconbridge  
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MOSCOW, March 5 (Reuters) - A pro-Russian breakaway region in the Caucasus mountains said on Wednesday it had asked the world community to recognise its independence from Georgia following the West's support for Kosovo's secession.

South Ossetia, which broke away from Georgia, drove out pro-Tbilisi forces and declared independence in the early 1990s, called on the United Nations, European Union states and Russia to recognise it as a sovereign state.

"The Kosovo precedent has driven us to seek our rights more actively," a spokeswoman for South Ossetia's separatist leader, Eduard Kokoity, said by telephone.

The region's local assembly has passed a resolution which says Kosovo's independence created a precedent which showed that regions desiring sovereignty should be recognised by the international community.

Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia on Feb. 17. Its Western backers say this does not create a precedent but ex-Soviet rebel regions say that is hypocrisy.

Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Azerbaijan's rebel Nagorno-Karabakh region and Transdniestria, which split from Moldova, declared independence in the 1990s but have not received international recognition.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, en route to Brussels for a NATO foreign ministers' meeting, said South Ossetia had no chance of international support for independence.

"It is not going to happen," said Rice, asked whether she could support recognising South Ossetia as an independent state.

"I don't want to judge the motives but we have been very clear that Kosovo is sui generis. That is because of the special circumstances out of which the breakup of Yugoslavia came," she told reporters.

## KOSOVO PRECEDENT

The region's assembly took the opposite view. "The 'Kosovo precedent' is a convincing confirmation that the resolution of regional conflicts is based not only on the principle of a state's territorial integrity," it said in a statement e-mailed to Reuters.

"The 17-year period of South Ossetia's independence confirms its viability and demands only the legitimisation of her sovereignty in accordance with the United Nations charter."

South Ossetia, which says it wants to "move closer" to Russia, is still recognised internationally as part of Georgia.

Almost all the 50,000 people in the region hold Russian passports, transactions are in roubles and Moscow is the region's biggest diplomatic supporter. South Ossetia has close ethnic ties to North Ossetia, a neighbouring Russian region.

Tbilisi has vowed to restore its control there and the region is a source of tension between Russia and Georgia.

Voters in South Ossetia have repeatedly backed splitting from Georgia, which says the votes are not legitimate and are cooked up by Russia.

Russia, a close Serbian ally, says the recognition of Kosovo independence by the West has opened a "Pandora's box" of separatist tension across Europe.

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