

Georgia: Bidzina Ivanishvili presents his government

Marek Matusiak

On 8 October Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of Georgian Dream (GD), which won the parliamentary elections in Georgia, and who is also its candidate for prime minister, presented the partial composition of the future government. According to the constitution, control over the state's policies as a whole, including the formation of the cabinet and appointing the ministers of defence and internal affairs, remains with the president. The amendment significantly extending the powers of the head of government and parliament will only take effect in the autumn of 2013, after the end of the current presidential term. However, colleagues of Mikheil Saakashvili have stated that the president will not exercise these prerogatives, and will leave GD a free hand in the formation of the cabinet.

Commentary

- Under the conditions of cohabitation, the likely strategy of President Saakashvili – whose term expires next year, and whose political position, despite his far-reaching powers, has weakened as a result of losing the elections – will be to reduce political activity and allow the new government to quickly take full political responsibility for the situation in the country. However, it seems inevitable that there will be tensions between the government and the president, as well as a settling of accounts with the previous ruling camp. This is indicated by the conflicts which are already arising around the appointments of senior posts, such as the chief of the general staff and the governor of the central bank, as well as by anecdotal information that several key members of the previous government (including the Minister of Justice Zurab Adeishvili and the former head of the Interior Ministry Bakho Akhalai) have been leaving the country.
- Ivanishvili's candidates to head a number of important ministries in the next government, such as those of defence, integration with NATO and the EU and foreign affairs, have in the past been part of President Saakashvili's broader team, and are currently associated with the most pro-Western wing of the GD coalition. These include Georgia's former ambassador to the UN, Irakli Alasania (for defence minister and deputy prime minister), and Maia Panjikidze (who is related to Alasania by marriage), a former ambassador to Germany and the Netherlands (for foreign minister). These individuals seem to guarantee that the foreign and defence ministries will remain their pro-Western course. However, it seems likely that personal clashes and reshuffles will emerge.

- There is a question mark over the future government's policy in the field of internal security. The Interior Ministry, which in Georgia covers the police, border guards, counter-intelligence, the constitutional security service, and the anti-terrorism and special forces, will be in the hands of someone who until recently was entirely unknown: Irakli Garibashvili. Garibashvili is a close associate of Ivanishvili; according to the current government, he was involved in fabricating recordings showing torture in a Tbilisi prison (the guards abusing the prisoners were allegedly bribed by Garibashvili's father-in-law, who was serving a sentence in the same prison). The Interior Ministry is being entrusted to a man with no experience, and who (as it appears) is completely subservient to Ivanishvili; this may indicate that the future prime minister is seeking to maintain personal control over this particular ministry. Garibashvili has promised to make significant changes to the structure of the ministry, which will no doubt result in changes in its personnel.
- The future government's economic policy also remains unclear. Ivanishvili has not nominated any candidates for the finance and economy ministers; his candidate for the head of the very prosperous Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure (which also distributes foreign aid) is a former soccer player and Ivanishvili's business partner, Kakha Kaladze.