

Georgia: The presidential election was peaceful and democratic

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The presidential election was held in Georgia on 27 October. It was won by the candidate of the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition, Giorgi Margvelashvili. Taking 62% of the vote, he beat the candidate of the United National Movement (UNM), Davit Bakradze (21%), and the former parliamentary speaker, Nino Burdjanadze (10%). The voter turnout was 46%. The election was peaceful, and international observers (including from the OSCE and the Council of Europe) recognised it as transparent and democratic. The new president will be sworn in on 17 November and will be representing the country during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius on 28–29 November.

Commentary

- The outcome of the election is proof of the high public support for the present government team and, above all, for Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose popularity was the main cause of the good result achieved by the little-known Margvelashvili. This has also revealed that although the UNM led by President Saakashvili is still the main opposition force, the public is unfavourably disposed towards this formation. The result achieved by Bakradze, the least controversial politician in the UNM, which was almost twice as high as the party's support level in opinion polls, will set the maximum level of support Saakashvili's team could count on in the predictable future. Nino Burdjanadze's result is moderately good, and offers her a starting point for further political activity. It is quite likely that it is Burdjanadze who will have the opportunity to capitalise on part of the disillusioned electorate of Georgian Dream in the future.
- The manner in which the election was held has been positively evaluated by international observers and has strengthened the image of Georgia as the most democratic country in the region. However, since the political system was changed from presidential into governmental-parliamentary (when the president-elect took power under the constitutional amendments of 2010), the outcome of this election has not removed doubts as to how the political situation will develop. Bidzina Ivanishvili will present the person who will replace him as prime minister. This is likely to be one of the members of the present cabinet, who are linked to Ivanishvili and have no independent political position. In this scenario, the two top positions in the state would be held by individuals who owe their promotion solely to support from Ivanishvili, who has promised to resign

from all positions in the state and politics. This has given rise to concerns about the transparency of the government system.

- In the opinion of observers, both the election itself and the campaign preceding it were transparent and closer to democratic standards than those held before. Nevertheless, the political climate in Georgia over the past year has been strongly affected by the setting of accounts with the representatives of the previous government team, which commenced after the election last year. Politicians and officials at central and local levels alike have been made accountable. For example, the former prime minister and current secretary general of the UNM, Vano Merabishvili, and a former minister, Bacho Akhalaia (he was sentenced on 28 October for 3 years and 9 months in prison) are behind bars. The fact that Akhalaia (a politician who had been accused of abuse of power already before the Saakashvili team lost power) was sentenced one day after the election may be a sign that the accountability process, which slowed down in recent months, will again gain momentum. The most important question in this context is whether Mikheil Saakashvili will face allegations and stand trial.