

Georgia's new president

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On 17 November Georgia's new president Giorgi Margvelashvili, who won the presidential election held on 27 October without the need for a run off, was sworn into office in Tbilisi. In his inaugural speech the president emphasised his commitment to democratic values and pro-West policies. The ceremony was rather modest in scale – attended by the members of the cabinet and the coalition and foreign guests, the only president among the foreign guests was from Lithuania. Lithuania currently holds the rotating EU presidency. The outgoing president and opposition representatives were either not invited or boycotted the event.

In his inaugural speech the new president underlined the epic character of transformations in the country and declared his commitment to the rules of democracy. He also emphasised that Georgia is part of Western civilisation and declared his willingness for fast integration with EU and NATO structures (as he stressed at the same time the strategic importance of Georgia's bilateral co-operation with the US). However, in an interview given for the Russian television channel *Pervyi Kanal (Channel One Russia)* he distanced himself from the policies pursued by his predecessor and declared his willingness to engage in intensive dialogue with Russia.

Commentary

- The presidential inauguration ceremony has closed the process – ongoing since October 2012 – of transferring power from Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement to the Georgian Dream party led by Bidzina Ivanishvili (the new president, formerly a non-controversial civil society activist, was put up for election by Ivanishvili and does not have his own political support base). The inauguration of the new president is accompanied by the entering into force of changes in the constitution that limit presidential competences which have previously been rather extensive. The president is formally the head of state, the chief commander of the army and (non-exclusively) the representative of the state abroad. In practice, he will make decisions with the approval of the government (this consent is not required only under emergency rule).
- The change in the presidential position has been followed by other shifts in ministerial posts: Bidzina Ivanishvili will leave the post of prime minister (he will be replaced by his trusted aide – the present Interior Minister Irakli Ivanishvili); changes have also been made in the posts of the prosecutor general and the leader of the Georgian Dream group in parliament. All this confirms the absolute predominance of the Georgian Dream on the

Georgian political scene. However, the party's undisputed leader (and the most popular politician in the country) Bidzina Ivanishvili will not hold any official function.

- In the present situation the position of president in Georgia has been weakened, which is reflected by for example the presidential inauguration ceremony – its unabashed modesty and the presence of low-rank foreign delegations (including those from neighbouring countries, apart from Russia). However, the US has symbolically underlined its interest in Georgia: on 11-13 November a flagship of the Sixth Fleet of the US (the USS Mount Whitney command ship which last entered a Georgian port during the Georgian-Russian war in 2008) entered the port in Batumi and a meeting with representatives of the government, parliament and non-governmental organisations was organised on it.