

The parliamentary election in Georgia: Georgian Dream remains in power

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The first round of parliamentary elections took place in Georgia on 8 October. A mixed, proportional-and-majority election system applies in Georgia (77 seats are distributed according to proportional rules, and 73 in single-member constituencies). The governing party, Georgian Dream, won in the proportional system, with a support level reaching 48.6%. The second best result was achieved by the main opposition party – the United National Movement (27%). The pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (5%) also made it to parliament. The other parties, including the pro-Western Free Democrats and Republican Party, and the pro-Russian Democratic Movement of Nino Burjanadze have found themselves outside the parliament. Candidates of the governing party won in twenty-three single-member constituencies, and a runoff will have to be held in the remaining fifty (where none of the candidates garnered over 50% of the votes). The runoff should be held within 25 days of the first round of voting. Candidates of the governing party and the United National Movement will compete in almost all of the constituencies. Voter turnout was at 51.3%.

Despite the fierce rivalry and a few serious incidents during the election campaign (including an unsuccessful bomb attack at the opposition deputy Givi Targamadze) and during the vote itself (for example, attempts to break into several polling stations during the vote count), the election was held in a calm manner. International observers have not questioned the democratic nature of the election, although the OSCE watchdog mission has pointed out to numerous shortcomings linked, for example, with counting the votes. However, these have not affected the outcome of the election.

Commentary

- Georgian Dream's victory is a result of Georgians' fear of destabilisation on the political scene which would have been highly likely had the outcome been different (for example, due to victory for the United National Movement) and also because of a sense of there being no alternative. The growing frustration linked to the difficult economic situation and the falling levels of confidence in the governing party have not translated into support for the opposition. The fact that Georgian Dream achieved such a high result in the election is an effect of the low voter turnout (by Georgian standards).
- The runoff will decide whether Georgian Dream will have a constitutional majority (the governing party must win a total of 113 out of 150 seats, and this seems realistic).

However, regardless of the result of the runoff, Georgian Dream will govern the country by itself. The United National Movement has guaranteed itself the position of being a strong opposition, but must face a leadership problem (Mikheil Saakashvili, who is currently resident in Ukraine, domestic leaders). It appears that the fact that the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots of Georgia has made it to the parliament does not pose any serious threat since Georgian Dream does not have to enter into coalition with it. In turn, the defeat of the Free Democrats and the Republican Party means that the pro-Western vector of Georgian policy has weakened.

- No sudden revision of Georgia's pro-Western domestic and foreign policy coupled with attempts to build constructive relations with Russia should be expected. What seems to be the greatest threat to reforms is the overly strong concentration of power in the hands of a single grouping, which is characterised by a lack of transparency (Georgian Dream is controlled by Bidzina Ivanishvili from behind the scenes). This gives rise to an increasing risk of corruption and nepotism in the longer term, and this may lead to stagnation in the process of reforming the country.