

Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

09 October 2012

An elegant start to a difficult transition

The events in Georgia over the last few days cannot be described as anything but historic. Within minutes of the close of polling in the 1 October Parliamentary elections all exit polls indicated that the elections had been won by the Georgia Dream opposition coalition led by Bidzhina Ivanishvili. For a tense few hours it was not clear how the government of President Saakashvili would react. Early signs were disturbing. There were reports of systematic attempts to alter the vote in favour of the ruling party in a number of marginal constituencies. Then there was statement by Saakashvili himself saying that Georgian Dream had won more seats under the party list vote, but that his United National Movement had won a majority of the single member constituencies vote. If true, this would have opened the way for what many had feared would be a nightmare scenario where two parties claimed victory. In the end however commonsense and statesmanship prevailed. Saakashvili appeared on television and conceded defeat.

A normal transition of power through the ballot box has never happened in the South Caucasus before. In Georgia the situation is even more complicated because of the constitutional peculiarities which leave a president in office from a different party, and at least for the next few months with strong power. Georgians learned very quickly the meaning of political co-habitation.

Many feared the worst, but in fact the last few days have seen an elegant start to the process of transition of power. High level officials from both sides met to map out the transition process. It was all very civilized and Georgians liked that, and the international community liked it even more. Georgia will benefit from this experience both internally because its democracy is now much stronger, but also in its international image.



Grab from video footage showing a meeting between senior officials from the Georgian Dream and present authorities. Georgian Dream representatives are seen on the right side of table, from left to right: Sozar Subari; Irakli Garibashvili; Irakli Alasania; Davit Usupashvili. On the opposite side, from right to left: outgoing parliamentary speaker Davit Bakradze; Secretary of National Security Council Giga Bokeria; Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava and outgoing chairman of parliamentary committee for legal affairs Pavle Kublashvili. (picture courtesy of civil.ge).

Let nobody be fooled that the next months are going to be easy. President Saakashvili does not like to loose. Admitting for the first time in his political life, defeat, must have been difficult for him. He may be tempted to use his last months as President to show that he who laughs last laughs best. But the chances are that the process that has started is irreversible.

Georgian politicians, especially those in the new government, now must roll up their sleeves and start working on the many difficult problems that Georgia faces, especially in the economic sector. ■

Source: Caucasus Elections Watch Editorial team.

Caucasus Elections Watch is a specialised weekly publication focusing on elections related processes in the Caucasus, with news and analysis compiled by experts with long experience of the region.

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Tbilisi

Bidzhina Ivanishvili on 8 October announced the names of the persons who will occupy the key positions in the government of the new coalition.

Reflecting the complex composition of the coalition and its different components, Ivanishvili named Irakli Alasaina, leader of the OG-FD party, as Deputy prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Kakha Kaladze, from his own Georgian Dream Party as Deputy prime Minister and Minister of regional Development and Infrastructure.

A third key nomination is that of **David Usupashvili**, the Leader of the Republican party as Chairman of Parliament

Other Ministerial nominations include:

Interior Minister – **Irakli Garibashvili** (GDDG);

Minister of Justice – **Tea Tsulukiani** (OGFD);

Minister of Foreign Affairs – **Maia Panjikidze** (GDDG);

Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs – **Amiran Gamkrelidze**

Minister of Agriculture – **Davit Kirvalidze**

Minister in charge of penitentiary system – **Sozar Subari** (GDDG);

Minister of Culture and Monument Protection – **Guram Odisharia** (GDDG);

Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs – **Levan Kipiani** (GDDG);

State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Vice Prime Minister – **Alexi Petriashvili** (OGFD);

State Minister for Reintegration – **Paata Zakareishvili** (Republican Party);

State Minister on the Diaspora Issues – **Kote Surguladze** (OGFD); ■

Baku

Amnesty International and Sing for Democracy Azerbaijan have teamed up in a joint-letter sent to pop sensations Rihanna and Shakira urging the singers to “bear in mind the human rights abuses being inflicted on the people of Azerbaijan before they perform” in Baku later this month for the closing ceremonies of the FIFA Under 17 Women’s World Cup.

The letter, co-signed by John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Europe and Central Asia Programme Director and Sing for Democracy coordinator Rasul Jafaro, informs the singers of the current state of human rights and freedom of expression in the South Caucasus country highlighting the ban of anti-government protests in the capital.

It also mentions specific cases of political persecution, alerting the performers to the still unresolved murder of journalist Elmar Huseynov in 2005 and the on-going arrests and persecutions of journalists, bloggers and activists, including “the spurious criminal case against photo-journalist Mehman Huseynov on trumped up hooliganism charges.”

“Amnesty International believes that the Azerbaijani government should afford all artists, journalists, activists and ordinary citizens the right to express themselves freely without fear of reprisal. We hope that you share our belief,” the letter to Shakira and Rihanna concludes.

The letter from the watchdog groups comes amidst another recent arrest of a political activist in Azerbaijan. On September 29, 25-year-old dissident blogger Zaur Qurbanli was arrested on charges of resisting police in connection with possession of illegal substances, according to an official with the Ministry of the Interior of Azerbaijan.

Qurbanli was very active with the Sing for Democracy campaign during the Eurovision song contest held in Baku last May. Moreover, he is on the board of directors for Nida, a youth political movement working on a campaign to encourage Azerbaijani voters to vote incumbent President Ilham Aliyev out of office in the forthcoming 2013 Presidential elections. According to NIDA approximately 8,000 political leaflets were confiscated by the authorities following the blogger’s arrest ■

Civil society makes an important contribution to electoral democracy in Georgia

From her Tbilisi base Marion Kipiani followed day by day the build-up to last week's parliamentary elections in Georgia, and the events on polling day and immediately after. In this special report for Caucasus Elections Watch she reflects on the crucial role played by civil society in this important episode in modern Georgian history.

The parliamentary elections in Georgia set several precedents for the country. Apart from the extraordinary competitiveness of the election campaign and the democratic transition of power as a result of the elections, attention to the electoral process was at levels unseen before. More than 100 local and international organizations were registered by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Among them was a long-term international Election Observer Mission coordinated by the OSCE/ODIHR, in which also the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament participated. Almost 150 media outlets received CEC accreditation to cover the parliamentary elections

The climate in the country prior to the elections was tense. As the constitutional amendments coming into force after the presidential elections in 2013 will shift power away from the president to the prime minister, the stakes for the 2012 elections were consequently high for the main competitors. Thanks to the resources of Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, it was the first time since Georgia gained its independence in 1991 that the opposition set up a widely based coalition, which had real chances to win elections at the polls instead of through protest action in the streets. Even though the campaign saw many personal attacks between leaders of the governing United National Movement (UNM) party and the challenger "Georgian Dream" movement, it was also the first time that the parties made serious efforts to develop and present party programmes to the electorate.

Polls had the UNM ahead throughout the campaign, though it should be noted that in most of the surveys there was a relatively high percentage of respondents refusing to answer the question which party they would vote for or answering it with "do not know". But this picture was reversed after opposition-leaning TV channels released videos showing the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in Tbilisi's Gldani prison barely two weeks before Georgia went to the polls. Student protests were organised in Tbilisi continuously after 18 September, two ministers lost their posts and the opposition seized on the opportunity to denounce the government's record on human rights. The campaign then descended into an outright "battle by video", as audio and video materials compromising leading members of both camps were made public via TV and social networks on a daily basis.

Considering this heated lead-up to the elections, it is safe to say that the international attention focused on Georgia made an important contribution to keeping polling day and its aftermath peaceful. The international community had repeatedly called on both Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and opposition

leader Bidzina Ivanishvili to ensure a fair vote and to respect the will of the citizens. It was clear to both sides that Georgia's further progress toward Euro-Atlantic integration would depend on a democratic and peaceful outcome of the parliamentary elections. But there was another rather unprecedented factor that proved instrumental in this regard: the effective lobbying and E-Day mobilization of Georgian civil society.

Civil society organizations have played an important role already in previous election processes, mainly as observers and watchdogs. In 2012, however, this mobilization moved to a qualitatively different level. Helped by the structures created through the European Union's Eastern Partnership policy, notably the National Platform of CSOs, the more than 100 platform members united to observe the electoral process literally from the moment the "Georgian Dream" movement entered the scene in late 2011. Under the banner of a campaign called "This Affects You Too!" civil society drew attention to legislative changes that tilted the electoral playing field in favor of the ruling party, to violations of voting standards during the pre-election period, to the importance of a pluralist media environment for voter information and to the necessity to agree on a Code of Conduct for political parties in the campaign. These initiatives were supported by the active lobbying of society's demands vis-à-vis the government and the international community – the Georgian CSO National Platform for the EaP issued numerous statements calling on all sides to ensure and support an environment conducive to free and fair elections.

In addition, three well-known civil society organisations – the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), Transparency International – Georgia, and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) – joined forces to monitor the election process and denounce electoral violations. Together, the three organizations created <http://electionportal.ge>, a website where CSOs and citizens could register the election violations they encountered. On voting day, observers trained and fielded by GYLA, TI – Georgia, and ISFED were placed in polling stations on a nation-wide level, and their observations were disseminated "live" via social networks (in coordination with media and citizen journalist networks) and Twitter. The local watchdogs also reacted quickly to a particularly precarious situation during the vote count, when Interior Ministry forces entered electoral precincts in the town of Khashuri (central Georgia). Within an hour from the occurrence of the incidents, the organizations had issued statements calling on the authorities to take appropriate measures and remedy the situation immediately.

The results of the 2012 parliamentary elections have doubtlessly opened a new chapter in the process of Georgia's democratization. That local civil society so strongly contributed to this outcome is a sign that coordinated and professional civic activists can have an important and positive effect on public governance and electoral democracy in the region. ■

Marion Kipiani contributes regularly for Caucasus Elections Watch from Tbilisi.

Moving forward, Georgian Dream must now learn to work with the opposition

After the excitement of the election campaign, Elections Day and a tense counting process Georgia's political leaders last week had to figure out how to work with each other in the future. Karina Gould followed the day to day events as they unfolded.

After a particularly tumultuous campaign season and what can only be considered as a both surprising and relatively calm election day, Georgia's new parliament faces many opportunities and challenges in the coming months.

Early on 2 October, President Mikheil Saakashvili conceded defeat in the parliamentary elections to the opposition coalition Georgian Dream. He assured the public that his party, the United National Movement (UNM), would respect the outcomes of the elections and uphold the democratic wishes of the Georgian electorate. Despite the initial acknowledgement, his tone and his promises were not particularly conciliatory in nature.

"You know well," said Saakashvili in a televised announcement, "that the views of this coalition [Georgian Dream] were and still are fundamentally unacceptable for me."

"There are very deep differences between us and we believe that their views are extremely wrong, but democracy works in a way that the Georgian people make decisions by majority. That's what we, of course, respect very much."

The president announced that "the movement is going into opposition. As an opposition force, we will fight for our country's future, to protect and preserve all the achievements of the last few years."

The opposition also chose to begin its new political life with a rather tough tone. Georgian Dream leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili, called for the President's immediate resignation. Ivanishvili elaborated that if the President truly had the future of Georgia in mind he would step down from his position and not wait for the Presidential elections scheduled for the following year. Ivanishvili quickly retracted his brash statement trying to clarify that it was neither intended as a demand nor an ultimatum.

"I have stressed on numerous occasions that we are ready for constructive relations with the representatives of present authorities, including with the Georgian president," elucidated the businessman turned politician.

And, in fact, it seems like both sides are indeed making an effort for a smooth transition of power. Maia Panjikidze, spokesperson for

the coalition, reiterated the commitment of the Georgian Dream to working with the government in the months to come.

"The most important thing at this stage is not to hamper Georgia's constitutional order and the work of the government bodies," said Panjikidze. "So, this way or another, we will have to talk to the president, who will now represent the opposition forces. In order for everything to happen seamlessly and in order for the transfer of power to take place, we have formed a working group that will work along with the relevant group sent by the current government and go through all constitutional steps."

At the end of last week the two parties had established a working group with key leaders on both sides to develop a transition strategy. The UNM is represented by Giga Bokeria, Secretary of the National Security Council, Gigi Ugulava the Mayor of Tbilisi, Davit Bakradze the current speaker of parliament and Pavle Kublashvili, the incumbent chair of the parliamentary committee on legal affairs. Irakli Alasania, leader of Our Georgia-Free Democrats party, Davit Usupashvili, leader of the Republican party, and Irakli Garibashvili and Sozar Subari of the Democratic Georgia party represented the Georgian Dream coalition in the talks.

Working Group participants on both sides left the initial meeting with positive comments and an attitude reflecting much more good than ill will. This is hopefully an indication of a relatively efficient transition that keeps the interests of Georgians as the top priority of decision-makers.

Furthermore, despite fears that Ivanishvili would significantly alter the face of the Georgian public service, the Georgian Dream leader sought to assure public servants that their jobs were not under threat.

"[T]he absolute majority of public officials will keep their jobs," he announced on Thursday, "that will be the case in respect of police, prosecutor's office, special services – do not worry; those, who have not committed any criminal offences, will maintain their positions. Keep on exercising your duties, don't worry, everything will be OK."

With the host of issues Georgia has on its plate, from relations with Russia, a lacklustre economy and reforming the penitentiary system to name but a few, the new parliament and cabinet will need to find substantial political will and creativity to work together to keep Georgia moving forward. ■

This report was prepared for CEW by Karina Gould.

ARMENIAN POLITICIAN CHARGED

After two days of deliberations, Vartan Oskanian, a prominent legislator with the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) and former Foreign Minister of Armenia, lost his right to political immunity in a 64-6 vote in the Armenian National Assembly on Tuesday 2, October. The motion was put forward by the Prosecutor General of Armenia, Aghvan Hovsepyan, asking MPs to vote in favour of revoking Oskanian's political immunity in order to initiate a criminal investigation for allegedly laundering \$1.4 million from the charity he founded, the Civilitas Foundation.

The vote was boycotted by all four opposition parties, the PAP, Heritage, Dashnaktsutyun and the Armenian National Congress. According to reports from Armenianow.com, the opposition parties have called the accusations against Oskanian a "fabricated and baseless case."

The investigation into Oskanian and his dealings began on 25 May, the day after the PAP announced it would not enter into a coalition with the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), just two weeks following the May 2012 parliamentary elections - leading many political observers as well as members of the opposition to suspect political motivations behind these charges.

As reported in CEW in June, the criminal investigation arises from a \$2 million donation received by the Civilitas Foundation from two American corporations, Polymer Material and Huntsman International. The donation was made as a result of the proceeds from the sale of their Armenian subsidiary, Huntsman Building Products. According to a statement issued by the National Security Service (NSS – successor of the Armenian KGB), Civilitas failed to report the donation to tax authorities last year. The statement also claims that \$1,135,000 was transferred directly to the bank accounts of Oskanian and Tigran Karapetian, a member of the Civilitas Board of Trustees. While Oskanian has conceded that this donation was not reported to the tax authorities, he maintains that the process was transparent. The NSS also believes that some of these funds which were allocated for charitable purposes were in fact used by Oskanian for private matters.

In his appeal to the National Assembly last week, Hovsepyan stated, "Armenia's Prosecutor General's Office defends the interests of the Civilitas Foundation and the good name of the Huntsman family. We are not saying why have you [Oskanian], or have not, spend the money. We are solely maintaining that you have appropriated \$181,000 from the money spent at your [Oskanian's] discretion."

However, Tigran Atanesyan, one of Oskanian's lawyers, has responded that the transaction between the Huntsman family and Oskanian was done with "the consent of all parties [including the Civilitas Foundation], for an indefinite period of time and to be used at his discretion." Neither the Huntsman Family nor the

Civilitas Foundation need or ask for the Prosecutor General's protection, he added.

Noting that the full amount, plus interest has been transferred from Mr. Oskanian's account to the Civilitas account, Mr. Atanesyan wondered, "[i]f this is called embezzlement in our country, then I have no other legal interpretation of this." The lawyer added that such a case was a deliberate move to discredit Oskanian's political reputation.

It's not just Oskanian and his legal team that are raising concerns over the motives of this investigation. Many political observers are also weary about the timing. The donation was made in January 2011, yet the NSS only became interested following PAPs decision not to support the RPA.

"It's hard to believe the timing was a coincidence," said Ophelia Harutyunyan, who worked as a producer at CivilNet, the independent media website of the Civilitas Foundation.

The Prosecutor General stated that the case is not politically motivated. "The case is under investigation, and the objective of the petition is [to conduct] an uninhibited and impartial investigation."

Former President, Robert Kocharyan, extended his support to Oskanian in a statement released on 3 October.

"This is a case of the parliament discrediting itself, [together] with the adverse consequences to the country's standing," he stated.

"Vartan Oskanian was one of the most successful ministers and an Armenian politician who withstood the test of the authorities. He is effective and noble. He is exceptionally righteous. Such people need to be cherished and not persecuted," stated Kocharyan. Concluding, "the absurdity of this entire story is disappointing."

Both the U.S. And German embassies have released statements that they will be following this case very closely, cautioning the Armenian authorities against selective law enforcement.

Should Oskanian be found guilty, he could face between four and twelve years in prison.

Furthermore, concerns have been issued about the potential to freeze the bank accounts of the Civilitas Foundation should the case go to court. The Civilitas Foundation was founded by Oskanian in 2008 and is involved in the promotion of democracy and the strengthening of civil society in Armenia. It receives considerable financial and moral support from the governments of the Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States as well as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Oskanian resigned from the board of trustees prior to announcing his return to politics. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with additional reporting from Armenian news sources.

Georgian Dream calls for calm amidst recounts and rallies in post-election period

The official results are in. The Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia announced that Georgian Dream has received 54.9 percent of the proportional vote resulting in 44 of the proportional representation seats, and the United National Movement (UNM) 40.4 percent, thus 33 PR seats, resulting in a total of 83 seats for the Georgian Dream and 67 for the UNM, including majoritarian seats, (39 and 34 respectively).

Supporters of the former opposition coalition allege that the Georgian Dream has actually received more votes than indicated by the official CEC results. The Georgian Dream collected its own exit-poll data and estimates they received, at a minimum, 62 percent of the party-list vote as well as 42 out of the 73 single-mandate constituencies. The coalition has pledged to challenge the decisions made by the CEC in seven single-mandate constituencies, vowing to go through the court system and urging supporters to refrain from street protests during the transition period.

There is evidence to support the claims that the voting in the seven constituencies under scrutiny might have been tampered with. Transparency International Georgia (TI-Georgia), a local NGO monitoring Monday's elections, for example, obtained a copy of the final vote tally on October 3 from Signaghi in Kakheti region indicating that the GD candidate had received more votes than the UNM candidate, yet the official results posted on the CEC website showed the UNM candidate had actually won the race by 313 votes.

One of the more severe cases occurred in the district of Khashuri in the Shida Kartli region. Video evidence has surfaced illustrating armed and masked men breaking into a polling station after polls had closed and forcing electoral officials and observers to leave the building while waving a gun. According to reports from TI-Georgia, similar incidents occurred in at least 5 electoral precincts in Khashuri. The video evidence is from electoral precinct number 10. TI-Georgia claims that armed units broke into these precincts and changed the election protocols ensuring a lead for the UNM candidate.

Voters, frustrated by the alleged electoral fraud, have taken their anger to the streets and have been demonstrating in front of district electoral offices, in some cases putting heavy pressure on and attempting to intimidate both official elections officers as well as observers with local and international NGOs.

"Rallies are ongoing in Martvili, Senaki, Terjola. Ambrolauri, Signaghi, Dedoplistskaro, Lagodekhi, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Marneuli and Tetrtskharo. In some cases the protesters are

aggressive and our observers have been pressured," reads a joint-statement released on 4 October by democracy watchdogs the Georgian Young Lawyer's Association (GYLA), Transparency International Georgia and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy.

Though they have pledged to challenge the contested races, leaders of the coalition have called for Georgian Dream supporters to put an immediate end to their rallies and street protests and solve all problems through the court system.

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of the Georgian Dream coalition and the person most likely to become the next Prime Minister of Georgia, has personally appealed to his supporters to cease their demonstrations.

Reminding voters that even though there are still challenges ahead, the Georgian Dream is now going to form the authorities in Georgia, "we are no longer in the opposition," he said and entreated his supporters for "maximum calmness."

"So, this is my great request – return home and we will settle everything through the courts [and] in the Parliament," he said.

Even Irakli Alassania, Georgia's former Ambassador to the United Nations and a Georgian Dream majoritarian candidate in Zugdidi, called for Georgian Dream activists to move their rally away from the offices of the District Electoral Commission last week as it was disturbing the work of the elections officials. Alassania, according to the official results, lost the majoritarian race to UNM candidate Roland Akhalaia. The Georgian Dream candidate claims that the results were rigged in over half of Zugdidi's 109 electoral precincts and has filed complaints through the court. Akhalaia has said that he has been threatened and suffered intimidation by Alassania's supporters. The protesters, upon Alassania's request, did in fact move their demonstration.

The statement released by the NGOs informed Georgian voters that the district election commissions are indeed addressing the complaints. The NGOs also made it clear that the CEC has the right to annul results in certain precincts or districts if there is sufficient evidence of fraud.

On Saturday CEC spokesperson Eka Azarashvili informed the public that the results of at least eight electoral precincts, one in each of the electoral districts of Sagarejo, Marneuli, Tetrtskharo, Kaspi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Martvili and Khulo, have been annulled. She also confirmed that the Khashuri case has been referred to the Prosecutor's office for further investigation. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with additional reporting from Georgian media sources.

The following two maps of the results of the Parliamentary Elections in Georgia were published by the leading Georgian web portal civil.ge. They show a geographical divide in the distribution of votes and seats (see page 8 for an analysis)

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2012

» Parliament seats

» Majoritarians

» Proportional

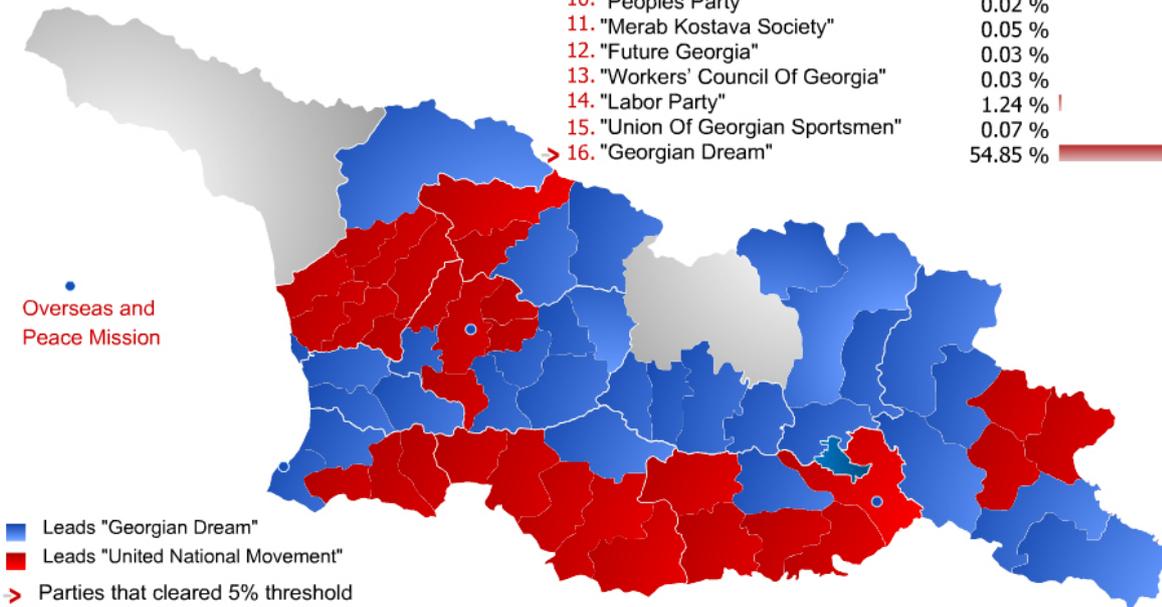
Overall Results

Party-list mandates by CEC current data:

44 ■ - "Georgian Dream"

33 ■ - "United National Movement"

1.	"Free Georgia"	0.27 %
2.	"National-Democratic Party"	0.14 %
> 3.	"United National Movement"	40.43 %
4.	"For Fair Georgia"	0.19 %
5.	"Christian-Democratic Union"	2.05 %
6.	"People Movement"	0.03 %
7.	"Freedom – Path Of Zviad Gamsakhur"	0.05 %
8.	"Kartuli Dasi"	0.11 %
9.	"New Rights"	0.43 %
10.	"Peoples Party"	0.02 %
11.	"Merab Kostava Society"	0.05 %
12.	"Future Georgia"	0.03 %
13.	"Workers' Council Of Georgia"	0.03 %
14.	"Labor Party"	1.24 %
15.	"Union Of Georgian Sportsmen"	0.07 %
> 16.	"Georgian Dream"	54.85 %



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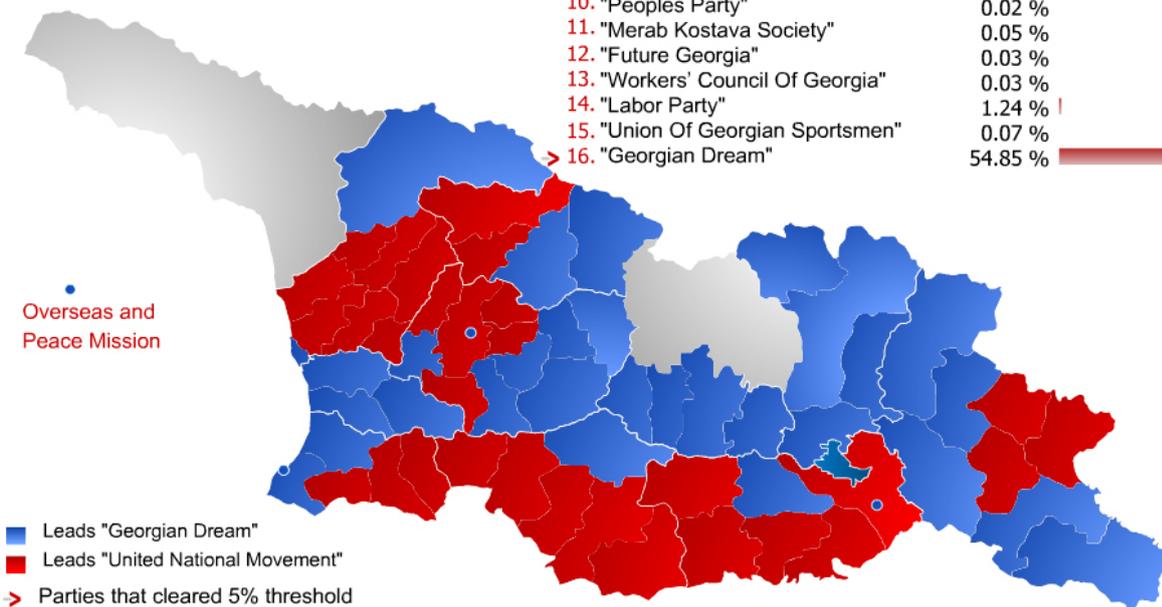
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The blue heartlands and the red borderlands: Danger of regional fault- lines in Georgian politics needs to be addressed

No doubt political analysts in Georgia and beyond will for some time be analyzing the results of the Georgian parliamentary elections to ask what exactly happened that saw such a dramatic swing in favour of the opposition, and why the party of President Saakashvili was so heavily punished by the Georgian voters.

There are however other issues that are going to require further study. On page 7 we republish two maps published originally by the leading Georgian news portal civil.ge - the first port of call for many who want to keep in touch with Georgian affairs. The two maps show the distribution of seats and votes in the election. They tell an important story.

The blue heartland and red borderlands denote a political faultline that has to some extent always existed in Georgia. It is however of some concern that it continues to define Georgian politics.

For some time it had become clear that President Saakashvili had lost the support of the people of Tbilisi who found his style of government patronizing and arrogant at best. The trend in the last

year extended to other parts of the Georgian heartlands in Imereti, Guria and beyond. As the poll showed in the end most Georgian cities voted for the opposition.

The United National Movement retained strong support in Western Georgia and in areas compactly populated by Georgia's large Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnic minorities. It is possible to dismiss the latter to the usual pressure traditionally exerted by the party in government on national minorities, which secures the bulk of their vote. But in truth the Georgian Dream has also failed to reach out properly to national minority communities. This is a problem that it is going to have to address sooner rather than later.

Bidzhina Ivanishvili has, in all his major pre election speeches made references to the national minorities and their place in Georgian society. He must now put these words into reality. Whilst it is good to see the Georgian political map in different colours, it is in Georgia's interest to have these colours more evenly distributed. ■