

Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

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Jittery Baku breaks up protest with rubber bullets and water-cannons.

Police tactics in dealing with street protests are often subject to criticism, in democratic countries as much as in totalitarian ones. The use of water cannon and rubber bullets is allowed under standard operating procedures in many countries. Usually it means that either the number of demonstrators was so huge that the police felt that they were losing control and that there was a threat to public order, or that the protest had become violent and there was danger to safety of citizens or property. It could also mean that the police were unprofessional or under instructions to use heavy handed tactics.

The protest held in Baku on 10 March was neither huge nor violent yet the police responded with tear gas, water-canon and rubber bullets, and arrested around eighty protestors.. The use of overwhelming force to break up a protest mainly by young people angry at the number of deaths in the Azerbaijani Army as a result of abuse by senior officers is a sign of the jittery mood in the Azerbaijani leadership ahead of presidential elections in October. The protestors were calling for the resignation of the Defence Minister. Amongst them were relatives of some of the hundreds of soldiers who died in the Azerbaijani military in non combat situations over the last years.

Azerbaijan is at a crossroads. The government has a choice: dialogue and reform or confrontation. It seems it has opted for the latter. If things do not change very fast the October election will be an irrelevance. The squeeze on the opposition continues; a leading Presidential contender, Ilgar Mammedov, is in jail; and the space for peaceful dissent shrinking by the minute.



Relatives holding pictures of death conscripts killed as a result of abuse in the Azerbaijani military during a protest in Baku on 10 March (picture courtesy of RFE/RL).



A demonstrator being arrested in Baku on 10 March (picture courtesy of RFE/RL)

The international community, particularly the EU and the US, are in a dilemma. Should they remain engaged with Azerbaijan, a country with which they have close political, security and economic ties, or should they ostracise it for its democratic failures and human rights shortcomings? Both the EU and the US need to avoid making the mistake of waiting for the October elections and should concentrate on urgent efforts to try to ensure that conditions are created now for those elections to be meaningful. The emergence of a determined group of people who are ready to challenge the government and who the government has failed to intimidate is against the odds, becoming a game-changing factor in Azerbaijani politics. Both sides need to show restraint and avoid violence. But the government needs to provide wise leadership in the form of a credible political reform programme. Otherwise it will only have itself to blame if a situation that is today a problem, becomes tomorrow a crisis. ■

Source: CEW 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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Rare show of Georgian Par

Government and opposition agree on joint

The governing Georgian Dream Coalition and the opposition United National Movement have despite their many differences, agreed on a joint resolution on Georgia's foreign policy. The resolution is the first document to come out from the two sides since the difficult process of political co-habitation emerged following the October Parliamentary elections. Relations between the government and president Saakashvili, who is in his last months of his Presidency remain difficult but the joint statement on foreign policy helps reassure foreign governments of continuity and unity in Georgian foreign policy at the same time as the process of political change continues internally. The following is the full text of the resolution adopted unanimously by the Georgian Parliament on March 7.

"Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy":

Relying on the Georgian constitution, existing legislation and international treaties;

Being guided by the interests of the Georgian public, including by the will expressed in the **results of the 2008 plebiscite** [on NATO];

Considering that ensuring national security, de-occupation and restoration of territorial integrity represent a priority and implementation of these tasks are shared responsibility of political forces;

Confirming Georgia's commitment for non-use of force, pledged by the President of Georgia in his address to the international community from the European Parliament in Strasburg on November 23, 2010;

Expressing an aspiration to foster establishing Georgia's reputation on the international arena as of a reliable partner having foreign policy built on the principles of international law;

Considering that the state strategy, built on the basis of cooperation and multilateral consultations between political forces, is essential for pursuing efficient policy and ensuring continuity in the sphere of foreign relations;

The Parliament of Georgia declares the basic directions of the country's foreign policy:

1. The foreign policy course of Georgia is defined by Georgia's national interests, stemming from the goal to ensure wellbeing of its citizens;
2. Creating security guarantees for the country; protecting its independence and sovereignty; de-occupation of its territories and restoration of the country's territorial integrity in its internationally recognized borders represent Georgia's foreign policy tasks;
3. Integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures represents the main priority of the country's foreign policy course. For the purpose of achieving strategic priority of achieving membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Georgia will take further steps for building and strengthening of democratic institutions; establishing governance system based on the principle of rule of law and supremacy of human rights; ensuring irreversibility of sustainable economic development. Georgia will not join such international organizations, whose policies contradict these priorities;
4. Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic foreign policy course, first and foremost, serves sustainable democratic development and the country's security and is not directed against any other state;
5. Georgia will pursue a consistent policy for implementation of the decisions made at the Bucharest [2008] and following

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nt declaration on Georgian Foreign Policy.

summits of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in respect of Georgia. The most immediate task is to achieve an agreement on the modalities and timeframe;

6. Georgia fully shares commitment to be part of international efforts in reacting on challenges facing the world. In this respect, Georgia's contribution to international peacekeeping, police and civilian operations represent one of the important components for protection of national interests;
7. The Georgian authorities will provide implementation of all those conditions, which will allow Georgia to successfully complete negotiations with the European Union on Association Agreement; Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and Visa Liberalisation Agreement;
8. Cooperation with the EU in frames of the Eastern Partnership and European Neighborhood Policy will develop in four main areas: democracy and human rights; approximation of EU legislation; environment protection and energy security; people-to-people contacts. Cooperation in development of peace processes is also considered as a priority area;
9. Georgia carries out its relations with the United States under the terms defined by **the Strategic Partnership Charter**. Four key areas are involved in frames of this Charter:
 - Cooperation in defense and security, including implementation of **enhanced program of defense cooperation**, which aims at strengthening Georgia's capabilities and preparing for NATO membership, as well as implementing train and equip program for the armed forces;
 - Economic, trade and energy cooperation, including reaching an agreement on free trade;
 - Strengthening of democracy;
 - Deepening people-to-people contacts, including reaching an agreement on visa-free regime;
10. Georgia considers implementation of tasks set in agreements with the United States and the EU, the main strategic partners, first and foremost as a commitment undertaken before its own society;
11. Georgia carries out dialogue with Russia with use of international mechanisms available in the Geneva [International Discussions], as well as in the bilateral framework. The goal of this dialogue is to resolve the conflict, to establish and to development good neighborly relations;
12. Georgia will contribute to rapprochement of positions of the United States, EU and the Russian Federation, as well as of other states, in South Caucasus in line with the interests of our country and principles of the Helsinki [Final Act];
13. Georgia will foster political dialogue in the Caucasus and economic cooperation for the purpose of concurrence in the basic interests of the states of the region. Relations with the peoples of the North Caucasus will be based on historic experience and traditions of good neighborly, cultural and humanitarian cooperation;
14. Deepening bilateral political and economic relations with neighboring Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey are important. Georgia should turn into the platform of implementation of mutually beneficial political and economic relations, as well as business opportunities for these countries.
15. Taking into view beneficial geopolitical location for the trans-national projects, it is one of the priority areas of Georgia's foreign policy to deepen economic relations with the countries of the Black Sea and Caspian regions and Asia;
16. Georgia will actively cooperate with the Baltic States. Experience and support of these countries is important in respect of European and Euro-Atlantic integration;
17. Deepening of the economic and political relations with the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, as well as with Scandinavian countries, and their support to Georgia's ongoing reforms and sovereignty is important for Georgia;
18. Georgia should not either have diplomatic relations or be in a military, political, customs alliance with a state, which recognizes independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/ former autonomous district of South Ossetia or has Georgia's territories occupied. Georgia will carry out consistent foreign policy in order to secure unwavering international respect to its territorial integrity and sovereignty;
19. Pursuant to strengthening national and regional interests, also for the purpose of security irreversibility of development of peace process and 'non-recognition policy', Georgia will significantly deepen multilateral diplomatic relations in frames of UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, European Commission, GUAM, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. ■

Source: This is an informal translation of the resolution adopted by the Georgian Parliament as carried by civil.ge

Claimant to the Armenian Presidency on Hunger Strike as the Constitutional Court discusses his challenge to the result of the February 18 Elections

Raffi Hovannisian who claims that he has won the Presidential Elections held in Armenia on 18 February, on Sunday 10 March started a hunger strike in the main square of the Armenian Capital Yerevan, as the Constitutional Court of Armenia started hearing his request for the election result to be annulled.

Hovannisian has called for the incumbent President, Serzh Sargsyan, who intends to be sworn in for a second term as president on April 9th to step down. "As long as Mr. Sargsyan has not stepped down, I will stay at Liberty Square and will not eat food," he noted.

Meanwhile the next rally of Hovannisian's supporters will be held on March 15 at 5pm. "On that day we will discuss the future courses of action, the Constitutional Court's ruling [on whether or not the presidential should be declared null and void], and together we will start the matter of [taking] actions, [making] decisions, and consolidate the triumph," stated the Presidential contender.

Asked about the reaction of international observers Hovannisian said "I do not have

any expectations from anyone, but you may read the last interim report of the observers which gives an opportunity to understand what the future and final report will be. They do not need to speak with me, they have already registered the widely spread frauds, especially in places where more than 70% voter turnout was registered. So, the international observers have registered the truth, which I welcome."



Presidential claimant Raffi Hovannisian on hunger strike in Yerevan's Liberty Square.



The Constitutional Court of Armenia in session on 11 March 2013 to consider challenges to the Presidential Election Results (pictures courtesy of news.am).

In the meantime the web portal Panorama.am reported that it was told by the Press Secretary of the Armenian President that "the Head of President's Administration phoned Mr Hovannisian yesterday [Sunday] to officially invite him to a meeting. We regret to say that Raffi Hovannisian declined the invitation to meet and thoroughly and comprehensively discuss all issues. We only have to hope that Mr Hovannisian assessed the situation correctly, and that he soberly realizes the dangers of de facto declining an invitation for dialogue."

In the meantime the Constitutional Court is expected to give its judgment to the challenge to the election results by Thursday, 15 March when Hovannisian plans to hold another rally in Yerevan's Liberty Square. ■

Source: CEW with news.am and tert.am