

## NATION-BUILDING

**GEORGIA'S HISTORICAL ELECTION:  
A CHANGE IN POWER AND  
THE EMERGENCE OF  
A NEW POLITICAL TRADITION**

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*Introduction*

On 1 October, 2012, the Georgian people made an important historical choice in favor of the Georgian Dream political opposition coalition headed by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. This event will undoubtedly go down in the country's annals as the first time the opposition was brought to power not by revolution, but by election. And despite a certain opinion prevailing in society that a revolution might be possible, political tradition in post-Soviet Georgia took an extremely unexpected turn.

The thing is that elections of any scope in Georgia have long failed to be a mechanism for

bringing about a democratic change in power, acting instead as a pretext for carrying out coups or revolutions. Since the Soviet Union collapsed and Georgia acquired its independence, essentially no power change in the country has occurred by means of an election.

An exception was the first multiparty parliamentary election held on 28 October, 1990; at that time, the ruling Communist party conceded its position to a national political force in the form of the Round Table-Free Georgia opposition bloc headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. It is also worth noting that victory over the communists was sus-

tained while the Constitution of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and other Soviet laws were still in effect.

Another salient point is that despite the impressive victory of the opposition bloc and the antagonism existing between the national government (which struggled for Georgia's secession from the Soviet Union) and the communists, the latter also acquired deputy mandates; they were even able to create an opposition faction.

Fourteen political parties participated in the election of 28 October, 1990, held according to the mixed system. Two hundred and fifty members of parliament (125 under the proportional and 125 under the majority system) were elected for a five-year term. Furthermore, only two political parties—Round Table-Free Georgia (81 deputies plus 43 majority deputies) and the Communist Party of Georgia (44 deputies plus 17 majority

deputies)—were able to overcome the 4% election barrier.<sup>1</sup>

However, at that time six parties were represented in the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, four of which managed to acquire deputy mandates under the majority system. After Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government was overthrown, all the subsequent elections ended with the victory of the ruling party: first, of the Union of Citizens of Georgia party headed by Eduard Shevardnadze, and after 2003 the United National Movement party headed by Mikheil Saakashvili. This party came to power in November 2003 with the help of the Rose Revolution, after which it was able to win another two parliamentary elections.

On 1 October, 2012, the era of the United National Movement party came to an end.

<sup>1</sup>“History of Election,” available at [www.cec.gov.ge].

## A New Political Era

At the election on 1 October, 2012, Bidzina Ivanishvili's the Georgian Dream opposition bloc received 54.97% of the votes, while the United National Movement party received 40.34%, also losing in the majority districts. So it is appropriate to draw a parallel between the 1990 and 2012 elections; both the Communists and Mikheil Saakashvili lost even despite the fact that laws were in effect in the country aimed at preserving the existing government.

During Mikheil Saakashvili's rule, amendments were made to the election code calling for its adaptation to the current political situation. What is more, a law was even adopted on the financing of political parties, which became so rigorous before the election that the opposition leader (who had \$6.5 billion to his name) was almost entirely prohibited from spending money on the election campaign.

A total of 2,215,661 of the 3,613,851 voters registered in the country took part in the election on 1 October, 2012.<sup>2</sup> The Georgian Dream received 44 of the 150 deputy mandates (73 deputies were elected according to single-mandate districts and 77 according to party lists), while the United National Movement received 33 mandates.<sup>3</sup> The Georgian Dream received 41 deputy seats according to single-mandate districts, while the United National Movement acquired 32.

Consequently, Bidzina Ivanishvili's party received 85 seats in the new legislative body (although it initially counted on 92), while the United National Movement acquired 65. Furthermore, the Georgian Dream coalition is counting on swelling its ranks by means of majority deputies from the United National Movement and gaining approximately 101 seats in the parliament. Some of the majority

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cec.gov.ge/files/2012/shemajamebeli\_okmi\_2012.pdf], 2012.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cec.gov.ge/files/2012/shemajamebeli\_okmi\_2012.pdf], 2012.

deputies representing the United National Movement decided to disassociate themselves from their party immediately after the election and join the new parliamentary majority that the Georgian Dream has the opportunity to form.

Three factions will join Bidzina Ivanishvili's coalition in the parliament of the new convocation: the Georgian Dream, the Georgian Dream-Free Democrats, and the Georgian Dream-Republicans. If independent deputies join the Conservatives, Industrialists, and National Forum, a few more factions might be created.

The United National Movement party has also created several factions within the parliamentary minority. According to former Georgian parliament chairman David Bakradze, this party will act as a unified team, the decision to create several factions only being made to expand possibilities (more time for speeches and debates, more votes for the bureau, and so on). Incidentally, David Bakradze will be leader of the parliamentary minority.

A distinguishing feature of the election results of 1 October, 2012 is that in contrast to the former parliament, the newly elected legislative body will comprise of only two political organizations. Something similar also occurred after the special parliamentary election of 28 March, 2004 held in the wake of the so-called velvet revolution of 2003; the matter concerns distribution of deputy mandates according to the proportional system. At that time, two parties overcame the 7% barrier: 67.02% of the votes (135 seats according to the party list) went to the National Movement-Democrats party (Mikheil Saakashvili) and 7.62% (15 seats according to the party list) to the Industrialist-New Rights.

According to the results of the parliamentary election of 2008, the ruling party received 59.18% (48 seats) of the votes. The votes were distributed among the other parties as follows:

1. United Opposition-National Council—17.73% (15 seats).
2. Christian-Democratic Party—8.66% (6 seats).
3. Georgian Labor Party—7.44% (6 seats).<sup>4</sup>

Even though 41 parties participated in the election on 1 October, 2012, a two-party parliament was formed in Georgia. Furthermore, it should be noted that several parties belong to the Georgian Dream coalition: the Republican Party, the National Forum, Our Georgia-Free Democrats, the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia, the Conservative Party, and Industry Will Save Georgia.

Mikheil Saakashvili had no choice but to concede to the opposition's victory, otherwise a new revolution might have occurred. The opposition was supported by the majority of the population; if the government had decided to fiddle with the election results, this would have led without fail to mass demonstrations and unrest. And in that event, Saakashvili might not only have lost the parliamentary majority, but also his presidential seat.

Nevertheless, according to the Georgian Constitution, the president retains all the real attributes of power in the country until the presidential election in 2013. Before the parliament of the new convocation was convened, he held consultations with its majority regarding who would fill the positions in the future government. In the event that the newly elected parliament rejected the cabinet of ministers proposed by the president three times, the fourth time the head of government would have the right to personally nominate candidates for prime minister and ministers for approval without consultation. If the parliament rejected the nominated cabinet of ministers the fourth time, the president would have the right to disband the parliament, but no earlier than six months after its election.

The president also holds real levers for creating a political crisis in the country, although right after the election the members of Saakashvili's team assured that they had no intention of doing this.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.cec.gov.ge], 2008.

Moreover, after the preliminary results were announced, the government held meetings with representatives of the Georgian Dream and expressed their willingness to begin a gradual transfer not only of legislative, but also of executive power.

Even before the government was officially approved, so-called transition groups were formed from the winning Georgian Dream political coalition. In order to ensure a painless transfer of power, their representatives joined all Georgia's governmental structures; a corresponding agreement was reached at the first working meeting with members of the ruling United National Movement party held on 5 October. Some representatives of the Georgian Dream are also members of the Georgian delegation at the talks in Geneva and with the EU.

As early as 25 October, the parliament approved the new composition of the government headed by Bidzina Ivanishvili.

## Opposition President: A New Model of State Rule

Without waiting for the official results of the election to be announced, Mikheil Saakashvili declared that the United National Movement was going into opposition; neither society, nor the leaders of the Georgian Dream coalition were ready for this turn in events. On the one hand, the government's easy concession of its position took the Georgian Dream totally unawares. While on the other hand, the election results posed new challenges for the Georgian political system, since during the 20 years of its independence the country had pursued a different model of administration.

For example, during the rule of all three Georgian presidents (Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, and Mikheil Saakashvili), their parties had a majority in the parliament. For a long time it was considered that the head of state could not become a strong political leader without the support of the parliamentary majority (although during Eduard Shevardnadze's rule, there was talk of how the president should not head a political party at all). However, it is absolutely clear that all the above-mentioned presidents of Georgia were unable to rule the country without a party and without a parliamentary majority.

After the election of 1 October, 2012, the Georgian president was left without a parliamentary majority for the first time. For countries with a democratic political system, demarcation of power between the executive and legislative bodies is nothing unusual. But for Georgia's hybrid system, such a situation is fraught with diarchy and the emergence of a political crisis.

Even the Patriarch of all Georgia (the Patriarchy of Georgia, which billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili has been assisting for many years, supported the opposition) said in the Sunday sermon he gave after the election that "the change that has occurred in Georgia is God's will and for the good of Georgia. The government, the opposition, the patriarch, the president, the prime minister, and all the ordinary people should work for the good of the Homeland. How can the president be in opposition when he is president of the entire country?"<sup>5</sup>

Mikheil Saakashvili responded as follows to the Patriarch's statement: "We are not the country's opposition. We cannot be the opposition of the Homeland. We can only be the opposition of another political force, which is a healthy process, particularly for the political force that has come to power."

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<sup>5</sup> [<http://www.maestro.ge>].

The Georgian President also said that the views of the opposition coalition were alien to him and “remain so,” but democracy works in a way that the Georgian people accept the decision that is supported by the majority.

The fact that after its election defeat the ruling party was not automatically disbanded, as has happened over the past 20 years with other ruling parties, is an unprecedented event in the political history of the country. Furthermore, it should be noted that Mikheil Saakashvili’s party will continue to exist as long as he is president (despite the fact that disagreements have appeared within the party and there have been so-called “turncoats” to the Georgian Dream). But after he leaves the political stage, the future of the United National Movement will be questionable. Mikheil Saakashvili himself optimistically assesses the future of his party.

Immediately after the election, the president said at a meeting with the members of his team that “more and more people have recently been joining the National Movement. The party needs new faces; people of all ages are needed, including young ones.” In his words, this stage will become a period of cleansing and rejuvenation for the National Movement.

“The National Movement was able to create the most successful government in the country’s history. I am sure that the National Movement will maintain its key role in the country’s political life,” he said.<sup>6</sup>

According to a decision of the political council of the United National Movement party, Vano Merabishvili, who at that time was performing the duties of Georgia’s prime minister, was appointed as its secretary general; Vano Merabishvili took Mikhail Macharaviani’s place.

Based on Mikheil Saakashvili’s personal qualities, it can be presumed that he will achieve greater success as an opposition president. It is already possible to determine where his team will place the emphasis if it is mobilized and finds the strength to move on.

On 21 October, when speaking at the first session of the newly elected parliament, Mikheil Saakashvili repeated that from now on the government should be regularly replaced, and by means of ballots rather than bullets, tanks, or dramatic revolutions, including those dubbed as Rose. What is more, the president proposed introducing elections of regional governors.<sup>7</sup>

Such supposedly democratic initiatives from Mikheil Saakashvili took the new authorities by surprise, since during his rule the president had personally appointed regional governors, and during the election campaign said that his team had no intention of leaving the government. Now, however, after the election, he is talking about the importance of regular changes in power.

Saakashvili’s behavior suggests that he and his team will most likely step up their so-called democratic initiatives and try with the help of black PR (to which they have repeatedly successfully resorted) to discredit the new authorities, to which they have already hastened to attach the label of a pro-Russian force. They will try to secure political support, primarily from Western countries, by presenting themselves as being infringed upon. This is confirmed by the fact that the U.S. ambassador to Georgia has already welcomed the appearance of “real opposition” in the country in the form of the United National Movement.

According to a statement by Vano Merabishvili, the election results showed the need for renovations. He said he has drawn up a plan for creating a new contemporary-style national party that will protect and strengthen democracy in Georgia.

Today it is entirely clear that it will be very difficult for Mikheil Saakashvili to stay in power until the end of his presidential term, particularly since his political team is demoralized and several high-ranking officials have already left the country.

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<sup>6</sup> [<http://geo.interpressnews.ge/ge/politika/217562-mikheil-saakashvili-qnacionaluri-modzraobaq-qganakhlebis-dagatsmendis-etapzeaq.html>].

<sup>7</sup> [<http://1tv.ge/news-view/43238>].

Meanwhile, the opposition leader is already talking about impeachment of the president. After the election, Bidzina Ivanishvili, when talking about the opposition's victory on his television channel TV9, called on Mikheil Saakashvili to retire and schedule an early presidential election.<sup>8</sup>

However, Mikheil Saakashvili's retirement could lead to immense legal confusion since according to the amendments to the constitution adopted on 15 May, 2010, after 2013, the president of Georgia will be called the head of state and guarantor of unity and national independence, while real power will be concentrated in the hands of the prime minister. In so doing, the authority of the latter will significantly increase at the expense of a reduction in power of the president, but this will not happen until after the election of the head of state to be held in 2013.

It should also be noted that nothing is said in the constitution about who will rule the country (the president or prime minister) if an early presidential election is held, that is, before October 2013.

It can be presumed that the opposition leader, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, will in all likelihood become prime minister, who even before the presidential election of 2013 will try to at least weaken Saakashvili's power, right down to securing his retirement. Despite the fact that Saakashvili continues to hold the legal trump card, he will not be able to use it due to the political shock caused by the crushing defeat of the United National Movement.

According to the constitutional amendments of 17 May, 2011, the legislative body elected on 1 October will hold plenary sessions in Kutaisi (Georgia's second capital).

After the election of October 2012, Tbilisi essentially lost the status of Georgia's political center, since the government headed by the prime minister, who, according to the constitutional amendments, will rule the country beginning in 2013, should be in the same place as the parliament, i.e. in Kutaisi. As for Tbilisi, it will remain the site of the president's residence.

Before the election, the opposition leader said that if he won, he would give Tbilisi back its status of parliament capital and political center, but this will require amending the Constitution. It should be noted that even before the election, the authorities hastily dismantled the meeting hall in the old parliament building located in Tbilisi.

I would like to remind you that after the Rose Revolution, the Georgian political leaders had great ambitions aimed at removing the Soviet "blemish" and assigning Georgia a place among the East European countries.

The 2012 election was a kind of test in democracy; the Western political community waited impatiently for the results, which were to finally determine whether Georgia would assume its place in the community of civilized states or whether it would continue to be unhappily called part of the post-Soviet expanse.

A White House representative, Jay Carney, made a statement in which he called the parliamentary election in Georgia "another milestone in democratic development." Furthermore, the U.S. State Department made special note of the fact that the president "politely conceded" to the opposition.<sup>9</sup> Head of EU Diplomacy Catherine Ashton and European Commissioner for the European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle also expressed their congratulations and made special statements.

The election engendered serious processes, particularly a crisis in the electronic media that actively supported the government. They had played an important part in governing the country, but after the election they became disoriented and demoralized. A similar situation also occurred in the state power bodies.

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<sup>8</sup> [<http://www.tv9.ge/>].

<sup>9</sup> [[http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2012/10/121002\\_georgia\\_saakashvili\\_defeat.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2012/10/121002_georgia_saakashvili_defeat.shtml)].

## The End of Neoliberalism in Georgia: Will the Country Take the Path of Socialism?

Despite the fact that opposition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili is a businessman, he upholds socialist views; his long engagement in charity activity confirm this. In recent years, Bidzina Ivanishvili has built a genuine “socialist paradise” in the village in the west of Georgia where he was born and grew up. For many years, the fund he created covered the local population’s medical expenses; a modern hospital was built in his home village where local residents received free treatment. Moreover, the fund paid for the village residents’ electricity, natural gas, and other utility fees. Ivanishvili also rendered significant financial assistance to the creative intelligentsia, people of art, and athletes of Georgia.

As for Saakashvili and his team, they considered themselves adherents of neoliberalism and promulgated the state’s refusal to take responsibility for citizens’ social security.

According to Bidzina Ivanishvili’s world outlook, the most important thing is the people and their social security, and the government should take care of those who need help. The opposition leader has already promised that in the near future natural gas and other utility fees will be reduced in the country.

It is also well worth noting that despite its neoliberal views, the United National Movement party used leftist slogans during the election campaign (as the Georgian Dream and almost all the other parties did).

Moreover, it cannot be said that the United National Movement and Mikheil Saakashvili are advocates of neoliberalism, particular against the background of the infringement of property rights and business restrictions seen in the country since 2003.

Nevertheless, as we know, property, the development of free business, and encouragement of a real market economy comprise the nucleus of the liberal ideology. From this it follows that Mikheil Saakashvili and his team only paid lip service to their neoliberal views. In those cases when the authorities were unable to resolve urgent social and economic problems, they tried to put their helplessness down to conducting a premeditated policy, that is, to neoliberalism.

The president long harped on about the fact that the state should not take care of its citizens. But before each election live broadcasts were frequently aired on television about the masses of new jobs that were supposedly being created. Moreover, on the eve of the election on 1 October, 2012, a ministry of employment was established.

As the public opinion polls conducted in recent years show, one of the main economic problems in Georgia today is unemployment. For example, according to a poll conducted in February 2012 by the U.S. National Democratic Institute (NDI), 63% of the respondents noted that the most important national question is unemployment, 36% pointed to the country’s territorial integrity, 31% to accessible medical care, 26% mentioned poverty, 26% price increases and inflation, 21% small pensions, 15% low wages, 10% the quality of education, and 10% human rights.<sup>10</sup>

During the election campaign, the United National Movement put forward a slogan calling for “More Benefits for the People.” The party posed itself three main tasks: accessible medical care, an

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<sup>10</sup> *Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of a February 2012 Survey*. NDI, available at [<http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-0212.pdf>].

increase in the number of jobs, and strengthening of agriculture. It is worth noting that the election platform of Bidzina Ivanishvili's coalition targeted these very same issues.

It should also be noted that there are political parties in Bidzina Ivanishvili's coalition that uphold rightist views. However, Georgia's political parties are difficult to classify; only their names can give some inkling of their ideological orientation. As for programs, all of the parties pursue the same ones.

It is very unlikely that Georgia will take the socialist path; in order to effectively provide the population with social benefits, the country's economy must first be raised, and Bidzina Ivanishvili is unlikely to spend his own money on this.

## Another Change in Georgia's State Insignia?

During the political struggle for power that intensified on the eve of the election, representatives of the rivaling parties not only put forward different ideas, but also tried to distinguish themselves from each other by resorting to different symbols. At party meetings, the supporters of the current authorities wore white and red clothing symbolizing the country's national flag. The thing is that until the Rose Revolution Georgia's current flag, which depicts five crosses, was only the party banner of the opposition National Movement party at that time headed by Mikheil Saakashvili.

In the 1990s, after the country gained its independence, the national flag and coat-of-arms of Georgia used insignia created in 1917 during the existence of the first Georgian Democratic Republic. They were called insignia of the Georgian Mensheviks who ruled the country for a total of three years; in 1921, Georgia was occupied by Soviet Russia. It should be noted that the design of the Menshevik flag was influenced by the flag of Germany, which at that time (between 1917 and 1921) was an ally of the Georgian Democratic Republic.

After Soviet power was established in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, its own flag appeared, the insignia of which corresponded to the heraldic attributes of the Soviet Union (they were last changed in 1951).

It is worth noting that after first Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992) was overthrown, Eduard Shevardnadze, who took his place, did not change the state insignia adopted by his predecessor.

However, after the Rose Revolution, the country's new leadership decided to get rid of the remnants of the past and in its first decision of 25 January, 2004 approved new state insignia. The new authorities could not wait to use the new symbols; the parliament hurriedly approved a flag and, later, coat-of-arms portraying clearly Christian symbols before Mikheil Saakashvili's inauguration. For example, the flag depicts five red crosses, while the coat-of-arms portrays St. George (one of the most revered saints of Georgia). The new flag and coat-of-arms were to serve as a kind of advertising banner to show the country's European origin.

In the meantime, adoption of the five-cross flag as the national one aroused a certain amount of concern in society. This was because the four small crosses portrayed on it were very similar to Catholic ones, and on the whole the flag was reminiscent of a crusaders' banner. Under pressure from the Patriarchy of Georgia and public opinion, the revolutionary authorities were compelled to change the design of the crosses. It should also be noted that according to historical sources, as early as the Middle Ages, Georgia's national flag was a five-cross flag similar to the one



approved after the Rose Revolution. This was during the rule of Georgia's most powerful czar, David the Builder.

The new flag automatically began to be associated not with the state, but with the party that came to power by means of revolution. Unwittingly, parallels were drawn with Soviet times when the Communist flag was identified with the national flag. It can be said that the flag adopted after the Rose Revolution became a symbolic manifestation of the country's post-revolutionary political regime. This gave rise to worries that the "party-state" concept that existed in Soviet times would be transferred to present-day Georgia.

Meanwhile, no one in Georgia, in the throes of revolutionary euphoria, gave any serious thought to this; many liked the nice bright new national flag. Furthermore, the Christian community (to which the majority of the country's population belongs) and the Patriarchy of Georgia approved the fact it had crosses on it.

It should be noted that after the Rose Revolution, the opposition parties also unconditionally approved the new flag; people brought it with them to the meetings and demonstrations against Saakashvili.

Before the election, the opposite picture was seen: the opposition tried to disassociate itself from the five-cross flag as a symbol of the ruling party. For example, at the campaign meetings of opposition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili held in different regions of the country, the old tricolor flags began appearing along with the national flag.

It is possible that the opposition's victory will lead to restoration of the old national flag, since Bidzina Ivanishvili promised to revise many of the decisions of Saakashvili's team after he comes to power.

It is also intriguing that the opposition leader's many years of charity activity tie him closely to the Georgian Patriarchy. He participated in restoring many churches, as well as in building a cathedral in Tbilisi that is considered to be one of the tallest Orthodox churches in the world. So restoration of the Menshevik flag, which has no Christian symbols, will most likely arouse the Patriarchy's discontent.

After the Rose Revolution, a precedent emerged in the country for changing the state insignia to suit the political situation. So it is very likely that it will become a target of political confrontation.

## **The External Enemy Factor and Patriotic Rhetoric during the Election**

The parliamentary election of 1 October changed not only the domestic political lay of the land. It also gave a boost to various kinds of "speculations" (particularly outside the country) about a possible change in Georgia's foreign policy orientations. It is no secret that Mikheil Saakashvili, who obtained an American education, had the image of a pro-Western leader; after the defeat of his party at the parliamentary election some observers began talking about the imminent change in Georgia's foreign policy course toward Russia.

Such presumptions are related to the fact that opposition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili earned his money in Russia during privatization of the post-Soviet economy that occurred in the 1990s. This is precisely why the election campaign of Saakashvili's team was built on "exposing" Bidzina Ivanishvili as a Russian oligarch who is trying to return Georgia to the sphere of Moscow's influence. It should be noted that elections in Georgia always stir up the "external enemy" factor.

In 2011, after announcing his participation in Georgian politics, Bidzina Ivanishvili sold all the assets he had in Russia. In response, Saakashvili's team repeatedly pointed out that no one can become a billionaire in Russia, retain all of that wealth, or later sell one's assets at a fair price without the Kremlin's permission.

Meanwhile, at a press conference held immediately after the election, Bidzina Ivanishvili said: "Our strategy is NATO and movement toward NATO."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, on 3 October, the leader of the Georgian Dream said that he would pay his first official foreign visit as prime minister to the United States. Soon thereafter he changed his mind and said he would first visit Brussels.

It is also worth noting that almost everyone in Bidzina Ivanishvili's team and the government uphold a pro-Western political orientation, one of them being parliament chairman and representative of the Republican Party David Usupashvili (who studied social administration and law in the U.S.). In his very first speech, the parliament chairman (88 of 129 deputies voted for him) called Russia an occupant country. As for former Georgian ambassador to the U.S. Defense Minister Irakly Alasania, who graduated from the Sorbonne, he, like the coalition leader, said that Georgia's integration into NATO was continuing.<sup>12</sup>

The new Minister of Justice Tea Tsulukiani also studied at several prestigious universities in France and worked for 10 years in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Minister of Foreign Affairs Maya Panjikidze was Georgian ambassador to Germany and the Netherlands.

Bidzina Ivanishvili himself was a French citizen (after he became involved in politics, he gave up his French citizenship); in all likelihood, he sympathizes more with Europe (this is also shown by his choice of proposed first visit) and in this way wishes to disassociate himself from Saakashvili, who was unequivocally considered a pro-American leader.

In actual fact, it is not that important where Bidzina Ivanishvili pays his first visit. It is enough to recall Eduard Shevardnadze, who made his first official visit to Iran, but then knocked on NATO's door.

It would also be appropriate to mention the statement by U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Eric Rubin, who came to Georgia immediately after the election; in his words, everyone he met confirmed that Georgia's foreign policy course would continue to be aimed toward developing Euroatlantic values.

What is more, it is also very important that Bidzina Ivanishvili is not planning to visit Moscow. Before the election, Russian politicians said that they have a problem with Saakashvili but respect the Georgian people; now this formula has lost its meaning. It is worth noting that they also said the same thing about Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze.

Based on the above, it can be boldly presumed that after Saakashvili's departure, bilateral relations between Georgia and Russia are unlikely to clear up.

Nevertheless, when commenting on the election results, Chairman of the Russian Government Dmitry Medvedev said that "the information on the election results coming from Georgia shows that the population of this country wants changes." He also added that "if these results become reality, the political landscape of Georgia will become more diverse." Dmitry Medvedev thinks that this can only be welcomed, since, in his opinion, more constructive and responsible forces will appear in the parliament.<sup>13</sup>

However, it is now clear that it will be rather difficult to smooth out relations between the two countries in the near future; in any case, most Russian experts and politicians are not expecting any serious shifts.

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<sup>11</sup> [<http://inosmi.ru/sngbaltia/20121003/200287639.html>].

<sup>12</sup> [<http://pirweli.com.ge/?menuid=10&id=18354>].

<sup>13</sup> [[http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2012/10/121002\\_georgia\\_saakashvili\\_defeat.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2012/10/121002_georgia_saakashvili_defeat.shtml)].

“No matter who comes to power in Georgia, it will not radically change its relations with Russia,” said Chairman of the Federation Council Committee for Defense and Security Viktor Ozerov. He clarified that improved relations with Russia required Georgia recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and this, in his opinion, would be tantamount to political suicide for Tbilisi.<sup>14</sup>

Russian expert Andrei Epifantsev even put forward several conditions: rejecting anti-Russian rhetoric, closing the occupation museum in Tbilisi, cancelling recognition of the Circassian genocide, and opening the Transcaucasian rail road. The only thing Georgia can expect in return is the possibility of exporting its products to Russia.

According to a statement by Georgian Foreign Minister Maya Panjikidze, under the Ivanishvili government, the country’s foreign priorities will not change, and while Georgian territory remains occupied by Russia, relations between the two countries will be limited to economic and cultural ties. “Georgia’s foreign priorities are not changing, and they will continue to focus on integration into European and Euroatlantic structures, intensification of strategic partnership with the U.S., good-neighborly relations with our neighbors, and an attempt to begin a dialog with Russia, either directly or with the help of international organizations. But while the current situation remains, diplomatic relations will not be restored...,”<sup>15</sup> said Maya Panjikidze on 26 October.

So it is entirely clear that, contrary to the geopolitical expectations abroad, the change in power in Georgia will largely influence the domestic political processes in the country. In other words, it can hardly be expected that Georgia will change its foreign policy vector.

## *Conclusion*

At first glance, the October election of 2012 in Georgia cannot be viewed as a kind of democratic breakthrough. This is because during the election campaign, the authorities traditionally made use of the so-called administrative resource. But for a country like Georgia, recognition by the authorities of their defeat at the election is a great political achievement.

In Georgia, the presidency is associated with real power. For example, many of the politicians and a significant part of society at the time took Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s overturn as elimination of the institution of presidency. Even Eduard Shevardnadze, who returned from Moscow in 1992, did not at first resolve to preserve it; he was simply afraid of going against public opinion. He enforced the post of president later, referring in so doing to state expediency.

Keeping in mind Georgia’s political practice, it is hypothetically possible that the institution of presidency will be restored again after a while in the country. It stands to reason that the president will either be Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili or one of his followers (Bidzina Ivanishvili himself intends to leave politics in 2.5 years).

The election held in Georgia showed that there is objectively a so-called protest electorate in the country that votes not “for” but “against.” The reason that the Georgian Dream won the lion’s share of the votes was not because the people liked it, but because they hated the government. The electorate saw the new political alliance as a force capable of kicking out a government that had no intention of leaving the political stage any time soon. This is confirmed by Saakashvili’s statement on the eve

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<sup>14</sup> [[http://www.for.ge/view.php?for\\_id=17364&f\\_cat=3&a\\_title=%E2%80%9Ejer+nu+vityviT%2C+rom+opozicia+xelisuflebaSi+movida%E2%80%9C](http://www.for.ge/view.php?for_id=17364&f_cat=3&a_title=%E2%80%9Ejer+nu+vityviT%2C+rom+opozicia+xelisuflebaSi+movida%E2%80%9C)].

<sup>15</sup> [<http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/world-georgia-panjikidze/1534374.html>].

of the election at a meeting of his supporters when he said that he would not allow anyone to destroy what he had built.

The population's attitude toward the opposition and the possible change in power radically changed when Bidzina Ivanishvili arrived on the political scene; this caused a large part of the electorate to vote against Saakashvili.

It is worth noting that some of the electorate that voted for the Georgian Dream were motivated by pragmatic expectations that Bidzina Ivanishvili would continue his charity activity (now as a politician) and would personally help the state financially (for example, he would pay the population's utility fees). This attitude toward the new political leaders is nothing new for Georgia's political practice.

What are the reasons for the collapse of the Georgian model of modernization? Mikheil Saakashvili's rule can be provisionally divided into two stages: ideological and post-ideological. The reforms carried out in the country during the first years of his presidency were clearly radical and were implemented without a dialog between the government and society; this caused the rift between them to widen. Furthermore, political decisions were made within a narrow circle of the ruling elite. After 2007, when anti-government speeches began and an early presidential election was scheduled, all the most important political decisions were not made to modernize the state, but to strengthen the government.

The state interfered in essentially all spheres of society's life, beginning with business and ending with education, culture, and sport. On the one hand, they were all politicized, but on the other, they were controlled by the state. If the new authorities decide not to control public life, they will have to build everything anew.

For example, after the election people began talking about replacement of the rector of Tbilisi State University. This was related to the fact that after the Rose Revolution, higher education institutions were heavily politicized, and although they formally became autonomous under Mikheil Saakashvili, the university rector was almost a government official.

So modernization of the country from above and the use of command methods led to collapse of the Georgian model of reform. Moreover, the "Action rather Than Words" slogan was used at elections to local self-government bodies; in other words, the government totally refused to hold a dialog with society.

The new authorities will have to begin the difficult reform progress over again, although it is still not entirely clear what model of development they will prefer. And it should not be forgotten that the people voted not for them, but against Mikheil Saakashvili, who took the Singapore model as a basis.

Meanwhile, the new authorities have still not chosen a model for the country's future development. It is only clear that after acquiring its independence, the transit process in the country has become very drawn-out and the governments that come one after the other in Georgia have to build the state and its institutions each time from scratch.