

# The candidate in office, Giorgi Margvelashvili, favourite in the Presidential Election in Georgia

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## Analysis

On 27th October next, 3,537,249 Georgians will be electing their president of the republic. The election is important even though the constitutional reform of 2010 deprived the Head of State of some of his powers to be benefit of the Prime Minister and Parliament (Sakartvelos Parlamenti). The President of the Republic will no longer be able to dismiss the government and convene a new cabinet without parliament's approval. The latter will also be responsible for appointing the regional governors, which previously lay within the powers of the President of the Republic. The constitutional reform which modified the powers enjoyed by the head of State was approved by the Georgian parliament on 21st March last 135 votes in support, i.e. all of the MPs present. The outgoing President, Mikheil Saakashvili (United National Movement, ENM), in office since the election on 4th January 2004 cannot run for office again since the Constitution does not allow more than two consecutive mandates.

Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia in coalition with Our Georgia-Free Democrats led by former representative of Georgia at the UN, Irakli Alasania, the Republican Party led by Davit Usupashvili, the National Forum led by Kakha Shartava, the Conservative Party led by Zviad Dzidziguri and Industry will save Georgia led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili has been in office since the general elections on 1st October 2012.

The country's new leaders have made a great number of arrests. Former civil servants have been accused of managing the State's funds badly together with other types of embezzlement.

*"The next presidential election has to show that fundamental changes have occurred in our country,"* declared the head of government Bidzina Ivanishvili who wants to *"convince Europe that we can organise a democratic election."* *"Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia has ambition and wants to win with a wide margin. But our greatest ambition is to organize an exemplary, free, fair election that is worthy of a country which is on its way to Europe. This will be our common victory and the illustration that political order and democracy reign in Georgia,"* he said.

### The candidates

23 people are officially running to take over from

Mikheil Saakashvili. 10 have been appointed by political parties, 13 by initiative groups. 54 people registered to stand in all.

The candidates are as follows:

- Giorgi Margvelashvili (Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia), former Minister of Education and Science and the candidate of the party in office;
- Davit Bakradze (United National Movement, ENM), former President of the Parliament (2008-2012);
- Nino Burjanadze, leader of the Democratic Movement-United Georgia;
- Shalva Natelashvili, leader of the Labour Party;
- Giorgi Targamadze, leader of the Christian-Democratic Movement;
- Akaki Asatiani, former President of the Supreme Council under the government of Zviad Gamsakhourdia (1991-1992) and leader of the Traditionalist Union;
- Sergo Javakhidze, leader of the Party for a Just Georgia;
- Zurab Kharatishvili, European Democrats of Georgia, chair of the Central Electoral Committee;
- Koba Davitashvili, People's Party;
- Teimuraz Mzhavia, Christian Democratic People's Party;
- Nestan Kirtadze, leader of the International Mo-

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vement for Peace, Democracy and Development Georgia-Abkhazia-Ossetia appointed by an initiative group;

- Mikheil Saluashvili, appointed by an initiative group;
- Giorgi Liluashvili, appointed by an initiative group;
- Levan Chachua, appointed by an initiative group;
- Avtandil Margiani, appointed by an initiative group;
- Nugzar Avaliani, appointed by an initiative group;
- Giorgi Chikhladze, appointed by an initiative group;
- Teimuraz Bobokhidze, appointed by an initiative group;
- Nino Chanishvili, appointed by an initiative group;
- Kartlos Gharibashvili, appointed by an initiative group;
- Tamaz Bibiluri, appointed by an initiative group;
- Mamuka Chokhanelidze, appointed by an initiative group;
- Mamuka Melikishvili, appointed by an initiative group.

In Georgia any candidate standing in the presidential election must be aged at least 35 and have been living in the country for at least five years. He also has to have the signatures of at least 0.75% of all people registered on the electoral roll i.e. 26,530 voters.

Former Foreign Minister (2004-2005), Salomé Zurbishvili, registered to run in the election before being banned because of her dual Franco-Georgian nationality. According to article 29 of the Constitution the head of State, the Prime Minister and the leader of Parliament are not allowed to be any other nationality than Georgian.

*"The fundamental law prohibits a person from being President of the Republic if he/she has dual nationality but does not prevent him/her from standing for this post. If I won the election I would give up my French nationality before entering office,"* said Salomé Zurbishvili in her defence.

Giorgi Margvelashvili was appointed to run in the presidential election on 11th May last. Representative of the forces in office since the last elections on 1st

October 2012 his victory almost seems to be guaranteed. Giorgi Margvelashvili, who is not very well known to the public, was promoted to the position of Deputy Prime Minister and was chosen by Bidzina Ivanishvili for the loyalty he had shown towards him. *"A vote for Giorgi Margvelashvili means that you are giving me your vote of confidence,"* declared the outgoing Prime Minister adding, *"Giorgi Margvelashvili is in my opinion the only candidate to have the competence to become President of the Republic. He is modern, educated, balanced and honest. His past is a clear one. I am sure that we shall elect Giorgi Margvelashvili and vote in support of the development and the stability of Georgia."*

Outgoing head of state Mikheil Saakashvili indicated that the appointment of Giorgi Margvelashvili reminded him of Caligula and his horse Incitatus whom the Roman emperor wanted to appoint to the post of Consul.

The presidential candidate has been replaced by the Tamara Sanikidze as Minister of Education and Science.

In Giorgi Margvelashvili's opinion the economy's good health is a priority for Georgia. He believes that the Head of State's main task is to ensure the country's security. *"The guarantee of national security in Georgia means that it should belong to the free world which will be completed by its integration into the EU and NATO,"* he declared. *"Georgia has an historic mission: to become a hub of cooperation, dialogue and agreement between Europe and Asia,"* he stressed.

Nino Burjanadze supports a strengthening of ties between Tbilisi and Moscow. She has met the Russian president Vladimir Putin on several occasions and has clearly expressed her pro-Kremlin position. *"It is important for Georgia to improve relations and maintain a partnership with the countries in the West because we need democracy; however it is vital for us to have good relations with our closest neighbours like Azerbaijan, Armenia and of course, Russia,"* she declared on 25th July last. She who boasts that she knows *"how to speak with the Russian president,"* deems Georgia's entry into NATO as *"unrealistic"*.

A close colleague of Bidzina Ivanishvili, Nino Bur-

janadze did not however receive a ministerial post after the general elections on 1st October last. She is asking for stricter measures against all of those who have broken the law under the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili.

### One year of government by Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia

Bidzina Ivanishvili's popularity and his coalition Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia has been declining since the last general election but it remains high nonetheless.

In June 2013, the Georgian economy contracted for the first time since 2009 (-0.8%). In 2007 the GDP's growth rate lay at 12.34% and in 2011 it still totalled 6.95% after contracting (-3.78%) in 2009. In the first quarter of 2013, growth totalled 2.4% and 1.3% in the second quarter. In response to the decline in investments Bidzina Ivanishvili created private investment fund that will total 10 billion \$ before the end of 2013. The Prime Minister hopes to transform Georgia within the next 20 years and turn it into a society which is both European and where business and finance will be able to develop based on the model of Dubai.

Bidzina Ivanishvili hopes to normalise Tbilisi's relations with Moscow and at the same time bring his country closer to NATO and the European Union. The Association Agreement with Brussels could be finalized during the Vilnius Summit that will take place at the end of November and be signed in 2014.

"We are negotiating with the Russians over visas and on the resumption of regular flights between Moscow and Tbilisi" declared the Prime Minister. Exports of wine and mineral water to Moscow resumed in 2013. On 4th September last Bidzina Ivanishvili questioned the possible participation of his country in the Customs Union, the area of free-trade between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which will be called the Eurasian Union on 1st January 2015. "I am examining this carefully. At this stage we have not taken up a position. If we see that it is interesting for our country's strategy, then why not," he declared.

The head of government indicated that he would quit

office after a year and a half in power. He should – if he keeps his promise – withdraw from the political scene at the end of the year. "There has never been anything like it; a man, who enters politics with his money, creates and finances a coalition, wins an election and then moves on of his own accord. You will see that it will set a marvellous precedent," said Bidzina Ivanishvili. The Prime Minister's withdrawal might however create a vacuum and weaken already fragile Georgian institutions.

Three people have been pinpointed to succeed as head of government: Interior Minister Irakli Irakli Garibashvili, Irakli Alasania, Defence Minister and leader of Our Georgia-Free Democrats, and Deputy Prime Minister Kakha Kaladze, who is the favourite. Bidzina Ivanishvili indicated at the beginning of September that he would choose his successor himself. The Prime Minister thinks that the United National Movement will disappear rapidly from the political arena. In his opinion, without any external opposition his coalition Georgian Dream will split up to "form a new multi-party system".

### What future for Mikheil Saakashvili?

Speaking of the future of the outgoing President of the Republic, Bidzina Ivanishvili declared that it was possible that "he would be prosecuted" and that he had to "face justice". "I do not want Mikheil Saakashvili to be arrested but I am ruling out nothing. The law is applicable to everyone," he insisted at the end of June last. "Occupying a post of responsibility Mikheil Saakashvili took decisions. He pretended to be liberal but in reality he controlled all of the media, threatened families, tortured prisoners, killed people in the street – in the business world he controlled all areas of the economy," maintained the Prime Minister.

The former head of government (2012) and former Interior Minister (2004-2012) Vano Merashvili (ENM) was arrested on 21st May with Zurab Tchiaberashvili, governor of Kakheti, a region in the east of Georgia. He is accused of abuse of power and of having embezzled 5.2 million \$ from the State to fund the electoral campaign of the United National Movement,

of having created fictitious jobs for his party's supporters and of having illegally taken over a villa in the village of Kviriati which lies on the Black Sea. He has even been accused of being involved in the murder of Sandro Girgvliani, an employee of the bank United on 28th January 2006.

On 27th June last 23 employees from the town hall of Tbilisi, which is led by the United National Movement were also convened by the investigators from the Ministry of Finance who revealed the embezzlement of 23 million € from the town's development fund to the benefit of President Saakashvili's party in 2011 and 2012. The town's deputy Mayor Davit Alavidze was arrested and placed in custody with three other town employees. The chief magistrate Guigui Ougoulava has also been questioned. In the end after several defections from the ranks of the United National Movement Georgian Dream succeeded in taking over control of Tbilisi.

Some 20 days prior to this the Interior Ministry convened the foreign ambassadors, NGO's and the media for the screening of a film showing (supposed) scenes of rape and torture committed by the members of the police force on villagers. The videos are said to have been found on 17th June in the region of Samegrelo in a place where arms and drugs are also said to have been discovered. These accusations and arrests cast doubts about the intentions of the new Georgian authorities and many – both at home and abroad – fear that the methods employed by those in power do not respect the basic principles of justice.

*"It is important to restore justice in Georgia. We are not permitting a repressive policy, nor selective justice,"* maintained Bidzina Ivanishvili. However many analysts fear that after the presidential election Mikheil Saakashvili will suffer a similar fate to Yulia Tymoshenko in Ukraine. The outgoing head of state, who has accused Georgian Dream and the Prime Minister of wanting to import 1990's style Russian gangster methods into Georgia, maintained that he would continue his political activities after the presidential election and that he would remain in the battle for democracy and the country's orientation towards Europe.

## The Opposition Forces

The former leader of Parliament (2008-2012) Davit Bakradze was appointed candidate for the United National Movement in the presidential election on 28th June 2013 after a primary election in which the party's members and any citizens interested in the election could take part. Giorgi Baramidze, Zurab Japaridze and Shota Malashkhia were Davit Bakradze's rival in this unique election. *"The United National Movement is trying to establish new norms of transparency and opening so that the choice of candidate is not that of one man alone as is the case with some of our competitors,"* declared Davit Bakradze.

If Davit Bakradze does badly on 27th October next – since many see him as the future leader of the movement – Bidzina Ivanishvili may dissolve Parliament and organize early general elections to strengthen his parliamentary majority.

On 20th July last there were violent clashes between the Prime Minister's supporters and those of the United National Movement in the theatre of Zougidi where Mikheil Saakashvili's party was holding a meeting in view of the election to appoint the presidential candidate. A journalist and a primary candidate Giorgi Baramidze, were slightly injured. Bidzina Ivanishvili condemned his supporters' actions and said that he would exclude the members of his coalition who had committed these acts. 12 people suspected of being guilty of these acts were imprisoned at the end of July.

All of the polls announce the victory of the candidate in power Giorgi Margvelashvili with more than 50% of the vote. Davit Bakradze is due to win under 10%, Nino Burjanadze, 7% and the Labour Party leader, Shalva Natelashvili 4%. The latter asked Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili to transfer the ownership of the TV channel 9 which belongs to his wife Yekaterina Khvedelidze, over to its staff.

The future President of the Republic will live at 25 Atoneli Street in Tbilisi in a building that was formerly the seat of the American embassy.

# Giorgi Margvelashvili elected as president of the Republic of Georgia

Giorgi Margvelashvili (Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia), former Education and Science Minister and candidate of the party in power was elected as president of the Republic of Georgia in the first round of voting with 62.12% of the vote. He pulled ahead of the former leader of Parliament (2008-2012 Davit Bakradze (United National Movement ENM) who won 21.72% of the vote. Nino Burjanadze, leader of the Democratic Movement-United Georgia came third with 10.18% of the vote.

The election result was expected – the only issue at stake being the candidate's election in the first round or not. Turnout totalled 46.6% i.e. 17.87 points less in comparison with the previous presidential election on 5th January 2008. The election was monitored by 55 foreign and 57 local organisations.

*"It is our joint victory. I want to thank all of those who supported me. Thank you to the Prime Minister who helped me win,"* declared Giorgi Margvelashvili when the first results were announced. *"I congratulate Giorgi Margvelashvili on his victory and the confidence granted to him by the Georgian people,"* stressed Davit Bakradze as he acknowledged defeat.

"This shows that we are real Europeans. People can choose freely," indicated Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili (Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia). "Support to the head of government helped the new head of state, who is not known to the general public, to gain in popularity," highlighted Alex Rondeli, chairman of the Georgian Foundation for International Strategic Studies.

*"The importance of the presidential election on 27th October is relatively low: whoever the winner, it is the Bidzina Ivanishvili coalition which will continue to govern,"* declared Koba Tourmanidze of the Caucasus Research Centre. Indeed the constitutional reform of 2010 deprives the new president of some of the powers held by his predecessor to the benefit of the Prime Minister and parliament (*Sakartvelos Parliamenti*). The head of state can no longer form or dissolve the government without parliament's consent.

Bidzina Ivanishvili announced that he would leave office on 24th November next. *"I do not intend to lead Georgia into the shadows,"* he said adding, *"my programmed withdrawal from politics will help to attract*

*investments."* He promised to pay Georgia \$1 billion from his personal fortune (which was the 153rd biggest in the world in 2012 according to the American magazine Forbes and is estimated at 5.3 billion \$ i.e. one third of the country's GDP).

More important than the choice of President will be that of the Prime Minister. Three people have been pre-selected to take over from Bidzina Ivanishvili: Interior Minister Irakli Garibashvili, Defence Minister and also leader of the party Our Georgia-Free Democrats Irakli Alasania, and finally Deputy Prime Minister Kakha Kaladze, former captain of the national football team, who is the favourite. Bidzina Ivanishvili said in September that he would choose his successor himself.

His resignation, which 70% of his fellow countrymen oppose, according to a poll by the American Democratic Institute (NDI) does not mean that he will be retiring from political life. According to the Prime Minister the ENM should disappear rapidly. Moreover without any other opposition the coalition, Georgian Dream should divide until a *"new multiparty system emerges in the country."* *"Bidzina Ivanishvili will remain a key person in Georgia whilst leaving the country's daily management to the Prime Minister of his choice. He might have an appeasing influence over the next few months but long term it will not serve the interests of Georgian democracy,"* declared Lilit Gevorgian, an analyst at HIS Global Insight.

Results

"When Mikheil Saakashvili is no longer President of the Republic the situation will change and the government will no longer need my help," indicated Bidzina Ivanishvili. The Prime Minister qualified the outgoing head of State a "political corpse" "Mikheil Saakashvili will no longer be able to undertake a political career in Georgia," he added. The outgoing president might be questioned by the authorities when his mandate ends notably regarding the death of former Prime Minister (2004-2005) Zurab Zhvania and also about the repression of the demonstration in support of Bidzina Ivanishvili on 27th May 2011 in Freedom Square and Roustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi which lead to the death of four people including a policeman.

"I don't want Mikheil Saakashvili to be arrested but I am ruling nothing out. The law applies to everyone," stressed Bidzina Ivanishvili at the end of June earlier this year. "Occupying a position of responsibility the President of the Republic took decisions. He pretended to be liberal but in reality he controlled all of the media, threatened families, tortured prisoners, killed people in the street; in the business world he controlled all sectors of the economy," indicated the Prime Minister. The former head of government (2012) and former Interior Minister (2004-2012) Vano Merashvili (ENM) was arrested on 21st May last along with Zurab Tchiaberashvili, governor of Kakheti, a region that lies to the east of the country. He is suspected of abuse of power and of having embezzled 5.2 million \$ from the State to fund ENM's electoral campaign, for having created fictitious jobs for his party's supporters and for having illegally taken over a villa in the village of Kviriati, that lies on the Black Sea in Adjara and finally of being involved in the murder of Sandro Girgvliani, an employee of the United Bank on 28th January 2006. In addition to this former Defence Minister (2006-2008) Davit Kezerachvili was arrested in France on 16th October last.

"It is not the end but the beginning of a return," said outgoing President of the Republic Mikheil Saakashvili to his supporters. He hopes to remain active in politics. "We have done a great deal over the last ten years to turn Georgia into a successful, modern European country, which is developing rapidly in the international arena. It is our main legacy," he said. He called on his supporters to "respect the opinion of the majority" stressing that the result of the presidential election was a "serious turning point" towards modernisation. He foresees that his country will "experience a zone of turbulence." "No one can ban me or make me stay in the country. But I have no intention of leaving Georgia," declared Mikheil Saakashvili.

Aged 44 Giorgi Margvelashvili is a philosophy graduate from the State University of Tbilisi. He worked at the NDI and then at the Georgian Institute for Public Affairs (GIPA) and at the American-Georgian University of which he became the rector (2000-2006 then 2010-2012), as well a director of the research department (2006-2010). He entered politics in 2003. As of 2012 he criticized Mikheil Saakashvili's policies and supported the coalition Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia led by Bidzina Ivanishvili. He was appointed Education and Science Minister after the general elections on October 1st 2012. On 11th May last Giorgi Margvelashvili was appointed candidate in the presidential election for Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia. He has promised to improve Tbilisi's relations with the West and Russia – with whom Georgia has had no diplomatic relations since the war of August 2008 over the control of South Ossetia. "Parallel to the priority of Euro-Atlantic integration we must take the heat out of our relations with Moscow," he declared.

The future president will live at 25, Atoneli Street, Tbilisi, in a building that was formerly the HQ of the American Embassy.

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