

## President Zourabichvili Criticizes Georgian Diplomats' Silence on National Diplomacy Day

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

In a strongly worded message released on Georgia's Day of Diplomacy, President Salome Zourabichvili criticized Georgian diplomats, accusing them of silence concerning shifts in Georgia's foreign policy. Zourabichvili, who established the Day of Diplomacy twenty years ago to honor Georgian diplomat and writer Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, expressed regret that the anniversary was marred by current diplomatic challenges.

"I can't congratulate you on Diplomacy Day!" Zourabichvili wrote. "Despite the fact that 20 years ago it was on my initiative that this important date was established, which is connected with the name and work of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, and we should celebrate such an anniversary with pride! No, can't, no desire to congratulate, no feeling of pride! It is embarrassing, to say the least, to mention him today, when the government is trampling the long-awaited European path, when the majority of diplomats meet the steps taken towards Russia with silence and do not protest."

Zourabichvili's comments emphasized her concerns over Georgian diplomacy's perceived passivity in the face of growing Russian influence and what she describes as a shift away from European integration. She accused Georgian ambassadors in key European capitals of "sitting in



Brussels, Washington, and many other European capitals" without voicing objections or concerns. "If you don't dare to resign, you can't raise your voice, or express a different opinion, then what are you left with? Are you so afraid?! What peace, what dignity, what professionalism?"

The president's comment reflects her longstanding commitment to Georgia's European path, a sentiment that she argues is closely tied to Orbeliani's legacy. "Especially since Sulkhan-Saba is one of the main figures of our European aspirations. The European way, which we can reach only through diplomacy," she stated.

Zourabichvili also expressed alarm over Georgian diplomats' failure to advocate and protect the rights of Georgian citizens abroad, including the right to vote. She claimed diplomats have been "frozen, disappeared, hidden in embassies like in holes, no one heard their voice." She continued, "Peace is in danger when the country is not good at diplomacy! Freedom is in danger when those who serve the state are afraid of their own land!"

Zourabichvili accused diplomats of attempting to fade into obscurity out of fear. "But history will remember you. Don't mention Sulkhan-Saba; Mentioning him can't help you, and you're casting a shadow to his name!" she stated.

## Strong Georgia Coalition Calls for International Investigation into Alleged Election Fraud

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Ana Natsvlshvili, a member of the Strong Georgia coalition, addressed the media, responding to recent investigative reports by TV Pirveli alleging election fraud. She claimed the reports support her coalition's stance that the government manipulated the election, arguing that these actions should be investigated by an international mission.

"We are stating that the gravest crime has been committed, with clear signs of Russian interference in Georgian elections, alongside evidence of multiple criminal acts. This situation demands an urgent international investigation," Natsvlshvili said.

She criticized the Georgian Dream-led government's approach to election oversight, calling the prosecutor's office a "pocket prosecutor" unable to impartially investigate such incidents. According to Natsvlshvili, those involved in the alleged scheme "clearly had an absolute guarantee of impunity." She argued that without such assurances, no one "would have participated in this criminal scheme."

"The impunity syndrome we see is directly due to law enforcement agencies, including the prosecutor's office, which has neglected investigations for years, allowing evidence from important cases to disappear," she stated.

Natsvlshvili argued that if Georgian law enforcement genuinely wanted to address the alleged election irregularities, they would not need media investigations to prompt them into action. Instead, she called for an "extraordinary investigative mechanism" led by the European Union to ensure an impartial review of the evidence.

"In our view, this mechanism should be established by the EU, allowing for an unbiased analysis of the events without any conflicts of interest," she explained. Natsvlshvili affirmed that her coalition would continue to pursue both local and international efforts to gather and present evidence of election tampering.



# Georgia Plunges into Political Crisis Following Disputed Election Results

By MALKHZ MATSABERIDZE

The 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia were marked by a referendum-like significance. As with many previous post-Soviet elections in Georgia, they were hailed as crucial for the country's future—sometimes justifiably so, other times exaggeratedly. This time, however, nearly everyone agreed that the October 26 election was not merely a typical vote but a defining moment that would shape the nation's foreign and domestic policies for years to come.

The ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream, which has held power for 12 years, faced off against pro-Western forces represented by four opposition entities — formed around the United National Movement, For the People, Lelo, and Giorgi Gakharia's party. These opposition groups hoped to cross the 5% threshold needed to challenge the ruling party and form a coalition government. Meanwhile, Georgian Dream sought a constitutional majority to execute a controversial agenda that included distancing Georgia from the West and potentially realigning it with Rus-

sia. Their campaign focused on policies like prosecuting pro-Western forces, preventing the so-called "second front" narrative, declaring Orthodox Christianity the state religion, and claiming to restore territorial integrity, despite the unlikelihood of Russian cooperation.

In contrast, the opposition promised a pro-Western path, as outlined in a charter proposed by President Salome Zourabichvili. This document, signed by the opposition, pledged to repeal undemocratic laws, fulfil EU conditions, and lead Georgia back to genuine democratic processes.

However, the aftermath of the elections thrust Georgia into a deep political crisis. The official results, which declared "Georgian Dream" as the winner with 54% of the vote, were immediately contested by the opposition, who accused the ruling party of total election fraud and power usurpation. Initially, exit polls had led opposition parties to celebrate a supposed victory, with discussions about a coalition government already underway. But when the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced that the Georgian Dream had won decisively, ruling party supporters celebrated, leaving the oppo-

sition disoriented yet resolute by the next morning, armed with allegations of election irregularities and claims of systemic fraud.

"Georgian Dream" dismissed the protests as mere posturing, drawing parallels to the 2020 elections, when initial opposition boycotts ultimately dissipated, allowing the ruling party to hold onto power. However, this time, the circumstances differ drastically. One significant change is President Zourabichvili's stance; she declared the elections fraudulent, a move she had refrained from making in 2020. Standing with her were representatives from the four main opposition coalitions, all rejecting the results.

Western observers and politicians have also reacted more critically than in 2020. Back then, leaders like Charles Michel actively sought to mediate, encouraging collaboration with the Georgian Dream. But this time, Western leaders appear sceptical of the Georgian Dream's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration. Just four days after the election, the European Union announced a suspension of integration efforts with Georgia, citing failed EU criteria and poorly conducted elections.

According to the constitution, the president must convene the newly elected parliament within ten days of finalising results, but Zourabichvili has declared her refusal, citing fraudulent practices. She, along with the opposition, is calling for an investigation into these alleged violations and demanding new elections overseen by an international administration, as they no longer trust the "Georgian Dream"-controlled CEC.

In response, Georgian Dream has proposed a local investigation into these claims, summoning President Zourabichvili for questioning—a move seen by many as signalling a biased investigation. The opposition, in turn, has no faith in a domestic inquiry and insists on an international investigation, which "Georgian Dream" rejects.

In the meantime, "Georgian Dream" remains resolute in its stance that the elections were legitimate, and it does not plan to reassess the results. With 89 of the 150 seats, they theoretically hold a quorum to form a parliament even if the president and opposition refuse to convene it. This "self-convening" plan would allow the ruling party to validate the parliament's au-

thority, disregarding opposition claims. They also hope that eventually some opposition members will relent and enter parliament, lending it a semblance of legitimacy.

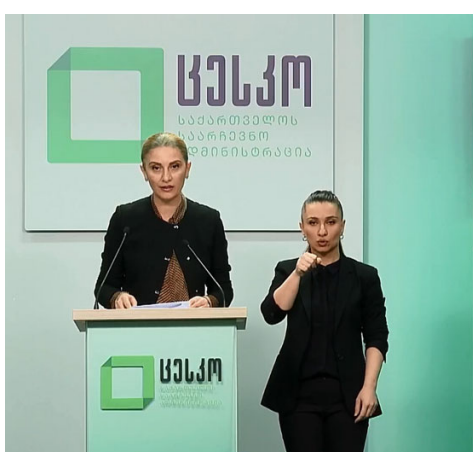
The looming constitutional crisis is further complicated by Zourabichvili's term ending in November. The next president will be selected not by popular vote but by an electoral college, primarily composed of local government representatives dominated by the Georgian Dream. Rumours have already circulated that Ivanishvili himself might be nominated for the presidency — a prospect likely to trigger even larger waves of protest and further destabilise an already fragile political landscape.

Georgia now stands at a crossroads, its future suspended between two opposing visions: one aligned with Western values, the other inching closer to Russia. The stakes of the October 26 election were high, and with both sides entrenched in their positions, Georgia's path forward remains uncertain, with the possibility of mass protests and prolonged political unrest on the horizon.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Central Election Commission Defends Accreditation of Russian Propagandist Amid Controversy



The Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia issued a statement on November 2 defending its decision to grant accreditation to Alexander Malkevich, a Russian government propagandist. The CEC clarified that the accreditation was "granted in accordance with electoral legislation," and that it has "no access to the legal status of this or that person," suggesting it is not within the Commission's purview to assess applicants' backgrounds.

This response came a day after the pro-opposition TV station Pirveli reported that Malkevich, known for his close ties to Kremlin propaganda networks, had not only visited Georgia on the October 26 election day but also received official CEC accreditation to observe the event. Malkevich's presence has sparked criticism, particularly given his history of involvement in disinformation efforts supporting Russian interests.

Natia Ioseliani, the spokesperson for the CEC, addressed the

issue during a briefing. Ioseliani emphasized that the Commission grants media accreditation to both local and foreign journalists through a straightforward process, typically requiring applicants to submit relevant information by email. If the provided documents meet electoral requirements, the CEC processes the application accordingly. Ioseliani accused unnamed "interested parties" of attempting to discredit the Commission and its Chairman, Giorgi Kalandarishvili, by highlighting that the accreditation request had been sent directly to Kalandarishvili. She clarified that it is standard protocol for all accreditation applications to be addressed to the Chairperson.

### Public Defender Levan Ioseliani Refrains from Judging Election Legitimacy, Draws Criticism from Former Ombudsman

Public Defender Levan Ioseliani stated that he could not comment on the legitimacy of

recent election results, as the Public Defender's Office did not observe the elections. When asked if he believed the elections were conducted in a free and democratic manner, Ioseliani responded, "This question is not



addressed to the Public Defender. Neither I nor any public defender who has been in Georgia has assessed the legitimacy of the elections, since this is not the mandate of the public defender. We are not an observation organization; we did not observe."

His statement has prompted criticism from former Public Defender Nino Lomjaria, who ar-

gued that the mandate of the Public Defender includes oversight of electoral rights. "300,000 people did not cheat, 1 voted instead of 100 people. Over the years, the reputation of the Ombudsman Institute has stood on the dedica-

tion of people, adherence to values and professional conscience, and at least respect the work of your employees. And yes, your mandate covers the right to vote (Article 24 of the Constitution), it is your mandate to protect and supervise the free expression of the voter's will, and please fulfill your constitutional obligation in good faith," Lomjaria wrote.

## Weather

Monday, November 4

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 12°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 4°C

Tuesday, November 5

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 10°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 3°C

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia  
Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**  
**Tamar Gachechiladze**  
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000  
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge  
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

**Nino Metreveli**  
Commercial Director

**Mariam Mchedlidze**  
Editor-in-Chief

**Khatuna Gogichaishvili**  
Layout Designer, Photographer

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