

GEORGIA UPDATE

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SPECIAL ELECTION EDITION

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- Incumbent Mayor Ugulava Wins Tbilisi Race in a Landslide, as UNM Dominates Nationwide
- Opposition Candidates See Elections as Marking Progress for Georgia



Incumbent Mayor Gigi Ugulava, seen here voting on Sunday, won re-election in a landslide with 55 percent of the vote. International monitors clearly judged the nationwide local elections to have marked "evident progress" in Georgia's democratic evolution. Said the EU's Special Representative to the South Caucasus: "The elections were fair and transparent, meeting international standards." Opposition parties offered a similar assessment.

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"The elections were fair and transparent, meeting international standards."

—Peter Semneby, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus

"No matter what differences we and the ruling party have, this is a step forward for strengthening Georgian democracy, improving our integration into European institutions, and bringing the population and citizens back into the political process."

—Irakli Alasania, opposition candidate who placed second in Tbilisi's mayoral race

"These elections were marked by clear improvements and efforts by the authorities to address problems occurring during the process."

—Audrey Glover, Head of OSCE/ODIHR Election Monitoring Mission

"These elections have represented a real step toward the democratic development of the country."

—EU Parliament Delegation monitoring Georgia's elections

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Jun. 2-4: President Saakashvili visits Romania

Jun. 6-8: President Saakashvili visits Paris

Jun. 8: Next round of Geneva talks

Jun. 10-12: Speaker Bakradze attends IPU Assembly meeting in Cyprus

Jun. 21-24: PM Gilauri visits UK

SPECIAL ELECTION EDITION**International Monitors Hail Elections as "Fair and Transparent," Step Forward for Georgian Democracy**

The international community praised Sunday's landmark elections in Georgia as a significant achievement in the country's democratic development. "The elections were fair and transparent, meeting international standards," said Peter Semneby, the EU's Special Representative to the region. A European Parliament delegation came to a similar conclusion: "These elections have represented a real step toward the democratic development of the country."

Sunday's vote was seen as a critical test for Georgia. It was the first ballot following Russia's 2008 invasion, and came a year after street demonstrations fizzled out last spring. Despite expectations in some quarters that the election could spark new protests, it was instead seen as elevating Georgia's democracy to a new level. The ballot also was seen as an indirect referendum on President Saakashvili's modernization and westernization agenda.

"Georgia has made considerable progress in respect of democracy, rule of law and local self government," said Guenter Krug, part of the Council of Europe's observation mission. "The campaign was characterized by a competitive atmosphere, substantive issues, and improved electoral legislation."

The preliminary report by the OSCE-led International Election Observation Mission found the "elections marked evident progress toward meeting OSCE and Council of Europe commitments." The mission commended Georgia's Central Election Commission (CEC) for managing the local elections in a "professional, transparent and inclusive manner." Voting was assessed positively in 96% of polling stations visited by mission observers.

"These elections were marked by clear improvements and efforts by the authorities to address problems occurring during the process," said Audrey Glover, ODIHR Mission head. Observers emphasized the election administration's "considerable effort" to recheck voters' list to ensure accuracy and improve its overall quality.

Along with the significant progress in executing a transparent, democratic, and legitimate elections, the monitors noted a handful of minor shortcomings. These included deficiencies in the legal framework, in maintaining an even a playing field for all candidates, and in preventing ballot box fraud. While observers acknowledged the Georgian government's progress in implementing sweeping changes to its electoral code earlier this year—heeding previous recommendations by the OSCE/ODIHR and the CoE's Venice Commission's—the report noted that changes on voting and candidacy laws, and the use of administrative resources for campaign purposes must be adopted to guarantee the equality of the vote and an even playing field for all candidates.

The observers also found the media environment to be "diverse" and the widely popular Georgian Public Broadcaster's First Channel to offer a "balanced picture of the campaign," although they noted the campaign coverage of other news programs lacked balance.

In light of the minor shortcomings, international observers emphasized the country's overall improvement, the Georgian government's political achievements, and the local elections as a major milestone in the country's democratic development.

"The Delegation noted that the process was well organized, without tensions, and managed in a quiet, peaceful, and orderly manner," the EU Parliament delegation said, adding that the "positive work of the government-created Inter-Agency task Force has to be underlined."

[NEW YORK TIMES: Mayoral Election Helps Georgian President](#)

[OSCE/IEOM: Georgia-Municipal Elections, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions](#)

[OSCE/ODIHR: Georgian local elections mark evident progress, but significant shortcomings remain to be addressed](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Observers Preliminary Report on Elections](#)

Incumbent Mayor Ugulava Wins Tbilisi Race in a Landslide, as UNM Dominates Nationwide

Incumbent Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava of the United National Movement won re-election in a landslide, with 55 percent of the vote. The victory was an extraordinary achievement for Ugulava, given that Tbilisi is considered an opposition stronghold, and served as testimony to the improvements his administration has made in the life of the capital city.

Ugulava's closest competitor and leader of Alliance for Georgia, Irakli Alasania, received 18 percent of the vote. Meanwhile Christian Democratic Movement candidate Gia Chanturia won 12 percent, the National Council's Zvidad Dzidziguri was at 8 percent, and Industrialist Party candidate Gogi Topadze earned 6 percent. The vote marked the first time Tbilisi's mayor was elected directly by voters (previously the mayor was chosen by the city council).

The UNM also dominated voting throughout the country. Election officials said Wednesday that the party won 65.6 percent of the vote in municipal elections after counting ballots from all 3,693 polling stations, confirming exit polls that forecast the landslide. The Christian Democratic Movement came in second across the nation, with 11.90 percent of the vote, while Alasania's Alliance for Georgia took 9.22 percent. Three election blocs and 14 political parties battled for the support of 3.5 million eligible voters for seats in 64 municipal councils nationwide. The Central Election Commission reported 49 percent voter turnout.

"The May 30 local elections have demonstrated that the ruling party still enjoys the trust and support of our population," President Saakashvili told jubilant supporters gathered at Ugulava's campaign headquarters Sunday, which he dubbed "a really beautiful day for Georgia."

"This is really historical moment for Tbilisi because for the first time in the history of Georgia, Tbilisites will elect a mayor directly," Ugulava said as he voted. "It will be a step forward towards democratization of our country and we need this democracy to ensure more stability and more jobs."

Prior to the election, the Georgian government made sweeping changes to the electoral code in efforts to ensure a free and fair election. According to the new electoral amendments, a candidate had to receive at least 30 percent of votes to be declared the winner. Ugulava easily surpassed the threshold.

[ASSOCIATED PRESS: Saakashvili wins huge vote of confidence as his party sweeps Georgia's local elections](#)

[CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR: Elections a triumph for Saakashvili](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ugulava: These Elections are Historic](#)

Opposition Candidates See Elections as Marking Progress for Georgian Democracy, Look to 2012 Parliamentary Vote

The major opposition leaders in Georgia acknowledged the validity of Sunday's elections, praised them as a step forward in the country's democratic development, and quickly turned their sights to the 2012 parliamentary vote.

"No matter what differences we and the ruling party have, this is a step forward for strengthening Georgian democracy, improving our integration into European institutions and bringing the population and citizens back into the political process," said Irakli Alasania, the leader of the Alliance for Georgia who came in second in Tbilisi's mayoral race. Meanwhile, the Christian Democratic Movement mayoral candidate in Tbilisi, Gia Chanturia, congratulated Mayor Ugulava and said the CDM was prepared to work together with him. "I want to sincerely congratulate Gigi Ugulava with this success and once again express my readiness to cooperate," Chanturia said. "I would like to thank him for expressing his willingness for such cooperation. I think this is an important step forward for democracy that we must take."

Said Irine Sarishvili-Chanturia, a former deputy prime minister who is now a moderate opposition figure: "The elections were democratic, and not a single party here—even the most radical—is going to accuse the authorities of any major manipulations."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Alasania: Elections Valid, Time to Keep Sight on 2012](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WASHINGTON POST: A hollow “reset” with Russia

Few accomplishments have been more oversold than the Obama administration's “success” in getting Russia to agree, for the fourth time in five years, to another vacuous UN Security Council resolution that tightens sanctions on Iran. What is bizarre is the administration's claim that Russian behavior is somehow the result of Obama's “reset” diplomacy. Russia has responded to the Obama administration in the same ways it did to the Bush administration before the “reset.” Moscow has been playing this game for years. It has sold the same rug many times. The only thing that has changed is the price the US has been willing to pay in its policy towards Russia.

www.washingtonpost.com

TIME: Is Sochi safe enough for the Olympics?

Putin in 2007 gave a “national pledge” that Sochi, Russia, would be a safe venue for the 2014 Winter Games, yet recent bombings have many experts concerned over the security situation. “The region is such a muddled and bloodied aquarium of conflict that to pick out any one fish is impossible,” says retired KGB Colonel Oleg Nechiporenko, now the chief analyst for Russia's National Anti-Terrorist and Anti-Criminal Fund. “Even the idea of holding the Olympics has to be predicated on the end of all violent conflicts in the area, and here we are preparing to hold the Games in what is virtually the front line in our war on terrorism.” As 2014 approaches, other countries will be watching to see what dangers their athletes might face in Sochi; if any large nation decides to pull out, security experts say it could cause a “chain reaction.” Says Nikolai Zlobin, a director at the World Security Institute: “It would be very easy to derail these Olympics, or at least show that the athletes there will be in a compromised position.”

www.time.com

NEW YORK TIMES: East Europe feels ignored by NATO, report says

The new US report was issued as Madeleine Albright, a former secretary of state, was preparing to propose on Monday a new strategic concept for NATO, the first major review of the Alliance's goals for more than a decade. NATO was unprepared for Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, the report says. It lacked intelligence sharing and a sophisticated crisis management mechanism. It has also ignored nonmilitary forms of intimidation such as cyberattacks, including one faced by Estonia two years ago. The report says that a sense of insecurity among East European countries, and members like Norway and Iceland, will make it more difficult for the Alliance to “reset” its relations with Russia, which is the ambition of the NATO secretary-general.

www.nytimes.com

JAMESTOWN: Turkey—a source of strategic reinsurance for Georgia

US policy in the S. Caucasus suffers from an erosion of credibility with regard to Georgia. This adds to Georgia's sense of exposure and apparent relegation to a grey zone of insecurity for some time to come. The Georgian government has thus far responded by reaffirming its Euro-Atlantic commitments. While these remain irreversible, Tbilisi is also embarking on a more active regional policy with Turkey and Azerbaijan, as a form of reinsurance against persistent security risks.

www.jamestown.org

BLOOMBERG: Egypt seeks to boost trade via Georgia, FM says

Egypt is “serious” about plans to boost trade via Georgia, including importing as much as 9 million metric tons of Kazakh wheat a year, Egyptian FM Ahmed Aboul Gheit said. “This will save time and money by avoiding Russia and Finland,” he said last week. In April, Kazakhstan said it planned to invest \$100 million to build wheat storage facilities in Georgia to reduce export costs to Egypt.

www.hurriyetdailynews.com

BLOOMBERG: Georgian central banker sees “no rush” to sell more eurobonds

“I see no rush for Georgia to sell bonds for the next year or so, since financial stability has improved recently,” Giorgi Kadagidze, Georgia's central bank governor, said last month. Georgia sold \$500 million of five-year notes in 2008, the first sale of foreign-currency bonds to international investors in its post-Soviet history. The yield on Georgia's 7.5 percent benchmark dollar bonds due 2013 fell 24 basis points to 5.8 percent as of last week. This compares to all-time high of 18.5 percent in April 2009. Bond prices move inversely to yields.

georgiandaily.com

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: French singers hold solidarity concert in Georgia

Jane Birkin, MC Solar, and other French music stars held a solidarity concert for Georgian refugees from the country's Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia last week. “People and the media have short memories,” Birkin said. “My message is to all European politicians that the Georgian refugees must not be forgotten,” she said. Today nearly 400,000 refugees from these occupied and “cleaned” provinces live in Georgia and abroad.

www.google.com

BROADWAY WORLD: The Battle of Stalingrad to replace Ermon and Ramona at Lincoln Center Festival

Master puppet theater artist Rezo Gabriadze's The Battle of Stalingrad, the critically-acclaimed elegy to individuals whose lives are ravaged by war, will replace his previously announced new production, Ermon and Ramona, at the Lincoln Center Festival in New York City this July. In response to the great public enthusiasm for The Battle of Stalingrad (which was a sell-out at Lincoln Center Festival 2002), Gabriadze's puppet theater company, Tbilisi Municipal Theatre Studio, has decided to revive it for this year's festival. The Battle of Stalingrad is told in miniature and understatement as it dramatizes a huge topic: the Nazi siege of Stalingrad.

www.broadwayworld.com

CNN: Cave tourism in Georgia

In an isolated mountain valley on the southern edge of Georgia stands a cliff honey-combed with caves. Vardzia, a cave monastery built in the 12th century by Georgian kings and queens, has only a handful of permanent residents: seven Orthodox monks who have become the de-facto guardians of this ancient site. Vardzia has long been a tourist destination for hardy tourists willing to brave hours of driving down pot-holed mountain roads. But road crews are now re-paving the road—and there are big plans to further develop this quiet corner of Georgia. “It puts joy in my heart to live here,” Father Lazar said.

edition.cnn.com

THINK TANKS/NGOs

UNICEF: Georgia is approaching international standards in juvenile justice

The Government of Georgia together with UNICEF and the EU reviewed last week the mid-term achievements of the two-year partnership project aimed at reforming the juvenile justice system in Georgia, applauding the country's reform progress. “The EU has been significantly promoting and supporting the reforms in the field of juvenile justice,” H.E Per Eklund, Head of the Delegation of the EU. “The progress made in the field is noticeable.” Added Eklund: “The cooperation of the main stakeholders of the Government of Georgia, UNICEF, and the Georgian NGOs has proved to be successful and EU shall be supporting the reforms in this sector for the future as well. UNICEF expertise and EU financial assistance of €1.2 million prove to be an important contribution into the reform process undertaken by the Government.”

www.unicef.org