

Court Tosses Out S. Ossetia Poll Result

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TSKHINVALI, Georgia — A court in the separatist Georgian province of South Ossetia on Tuesday annulled the results of a presidential election, hours after the opposition candidate danced before supporters to claim victory over her Kremlin-anointed rival.

Anti-corruption crusader and former Education Minister Alla Dzhioyeva was leading with about 57 percent of Sunday's runoff vote with ballots from 74 of the 85 precincts counted. Her rival Anatoly Bibilov, the emergencies minister in the provincial government, who had been endorsed by Russia's ruling party, was trailing with 40 percent.

The South Ossetian Supreme Court stopped the vote count and annulled the results after Bibilov complained of alleged election violations.

The court also said elections officials are to decide whether to allow Dzhioyeva to run in a new election, which was set for March 25. It remained unclear when the decision may be made.

The tiny territory of 60,000 people is dependent on Russia's political and economic support. Moscow recognized South Ossetia as an independent state after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war and expanded its military presence in the region.

Dzhioyeva had declared victory earlier Tuesday and ended her speech with a traditional Ossetian dance as her supporters shouted "Alla!" and "Victory!"

Dzhioyeva also supported close ties with Moscow. She had pledged to make the distribution of Russian aid transparent and rebuild houses and infrastructure destroyed by years of neglect and military conflicts between separatists and the central Georgian government.

Bibilov was the choice of the outgoing president, Eduard Kokoity, whom critics have accused of embezzling Russian aid.

Both candidates won about 25 percent of the vote in the first round of the election two weeks ago.

South Ossetians broke away from Georgia in a war in the early 1990s. Spiraling tensions between pro-Russian separatists and the Western-learning Georgian government triggered the brief war between Russia and Georgia.

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