

# Saakashvili Appoints Premier

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TBILISI, Georgia —  Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili named a close ally, Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili, as the new prime minister ahead of parliamentary elections in October.

Saakashvili, who faces growing competition from a newly created opposition group ahead of the elections, said Saturday that he wanted Merabishvili to tackle Georgia's 16 percent unemployment and implement agricultural and health care reforms.

Merabishvili's appointment will be formally approved this week by the Georgian parliament.

The new prime minister will replace Nika Gilauri, who has held the post since February 2009.

*(Reuters)*

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