

Saakashvili Admits Defeat in Georgian Vote

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili admitted defeat on Tuesday by saying that his opponent Bidzina Ivanishvili had won Monday's parliamentary elections and that his United National Movement party would go into opposition.

"It is obvious that the Georgian Dream coalition has gained an advantage in these elections. ... This means that the parliamentary majority should form a new government," Saakashvili said in a televised address, a translation of which was posted on the civil.ge website.

He added that his United National Movement, which has dominated Georgian politics for the past eight years, will go into opposition.

His admission indicates that Georgia might see an orderly handover of political power for the first time in its post-Soviet history. Saakashvili himself came to power in 2003 after a peaceful revolution triggered by a rigged parliamentary vote.

The president said that his opponent's views were still "fundamentally unacceptable."

"There are very deep differences between us, and we believe that their views are extremely wrong, but democracy works in a way that the Georgian people make decisions by majority. That's what we, of course, respect very much," he said.

Earlier, preliminary elections results showed that Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition was leading with more than 53 percent of the vote, while Saakashvili's party stood at 41.6 percent, according to the state-owned PIK channel.

The vote has been dubbed as historic because parliament will elect the next prime minister, who according to a recent constitutional reform will become the country's most powerful political figure. The reform goes into effect after October 2013, when Saakashvili's second five-year term expires. He is barred to run for another term.

The president also praised the achievements of the so-called Rose Revolution as having "turned Georgia into one of the key countries for the rest of the world."

Moscow severed all its relations with Georgia after the 2008 war over South Ossetia, and leaders were slow to comment on the election's outcome. Experts both in Russia and abroad had warned of violent strife if the loser would not admit defeat.

Among the first to comment was Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko, who said that she expects an improvement in mutual relations. "We are interested in that, and with an adequate leadership we can always find a solution to open questions and build mutually useful relations," she said in comments carried by Interfax.

Matviyenko also said that Russia "will respect any choice of the Georgian people."

Georgia accused Russia of supporting the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, both of which were recognized by Moscow after the 2008 war.

Since then, the Kremlin has refused to speak to Saakashvili, arguing that he was a war criminal and should stand trial.

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