

Georgian Billionaire Says First Visit Will Be to U.S.

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A musician sleeping under election posters in Tbilisi. Russia welcomed Georgia's parliamentary vote result. **Shakh Aivazov**

Georgia's richest man began talks on forming a government Wednesday and addressed fears over his links with Moscow by saying his first visit abroad would be to the United States.

Billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili urged President Mikheil Saakashvili, a staunch U.S. ally, to resign following Monday's parliamentary election, which the president conceded his party had lost to Ivanishvili's coalition.

Saakashvili, who has dominated Georgian politics for almost a decade, has not commented, but allies say he will finish out his final term, which ends next year, setting up an awkward period of cohabitation.

Ivanishvili, 56, has made it clear that he plans to be prime minister, meaning he will be

Georgia's most powerful executive official once reforms weakening the head of state take effect after the presidential vote, which is expected sometime in 2013.

A political novice who made his fortune mainly in Russia, Ivanishvili has acknowledged that his six-party coalition is fragile and that he faces a difficult balancing act between the West and Moscow, which welcomed his election victory as a chance for better ties.

"My first visit abroad will be to Washington, and the United States is our main partner," Ivanishvili told reporters Wednesday.

Russia welcomed the election results and said Wednesday that it hoped diplomatic relations, which were severed over a brief 2008 war, could eventually be restored.

"It is obvious that Georgian society has voted for changes," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said. "We hope that in the end they will allow Georgia to start normalization [and] establishment of constructive and respectful relations with neighbors. Such a development would be welcomed in Russia."

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