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Georgia Inaugurates New President

By The Moscow Times

November 17, 2013



Giorgi Margvelashvili was sworn in as the new president of Georgia at an inauguration ceremony in the capital Tbilisi on Sunday afternoon.

Margvelashvili, backed by the ruling Georgian Dream party, won a crushing victory in the country's October presidential election to mark Georgia's first-ever peaceful power transition since it declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

The relative newcomer to politics garnered 62.12 percent of the vote, compared to his closest challenger, Davit Bakradze of the former ruling United National Movement party, who won 21.72 percent.

A ceremony to lay flowers at a monument for fallen soldiers in Tbilisi's Heroes Square was scheduled after the inauguration, followed by an official dinner, a gala concert, and a reception.

Outgoing president Mikheil Saakashvili, Tbilisi mayor Gigi Ugulava, and their National

Movement party declined to attend the inauguration, saying the new ruling party is unwilling to cooperate politically.

Russian officials were also absent from the ceremony, as bilateral diplomatic relations ended in 2008 after a brief war in the disputed regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Russian-Georgian relations are historically troubled, marred by repeated conflict over the southern nation's territory and independence.

Margvelashvili promised willingness to normalize relations with Russia during his inauguration speech, noting that the task would require Georgia's northern neighbor to respect its sovereign and territorial integrity.

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