

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Davit Kezerashvili Responds to Russia's Arrest in Absentia

Former Georgian Minister of Defense and founder of Formula TV, Davit Kezerashvili, has responded to the news of his conviction in absentia by Russia. Kezerashvili was sentenced to prison by a Moscow court, which accused him of large-scale fraud. According to Russian state media, an international arrest warrant has been issued for Kezerashvili, who was not present during the trial.

Kezerashvili dismissed the charges, stating that they were politically motivated and part of an ongoing effort to discredit him. "I don't know the details of the so-called case, and it doesn't matter much to me what they have made up this time to persecute and discredit me," he said in a statement. "I understand very well that I am an enemy of the Russian criminal authorities and their proxies and will remain so in the future."

Kezerashvili noted that the timing of the conviction is suspicious because it coincides with the announcement from the ruling Georgian Dream party of an investigation into the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia. He called it a clear attempt to undermine his credibility. "This



latest action on the part of Russia suspiciously coincides with the well-known announcement by Georgian Dream of the beginning of the investigation of the 2008 war," he remarked.

Kezerashvili stated that the Georgian government has launched numerous legal cases against him and claims that they have been conducting smear campaigns to tarnish his reputation. "The Russian government of Georgia has been trying to discredit and neutralize me for 12 years," he said. "A number of cases were initiated in Georgia. Black campaigns were carried out inside and outside the country. Now, it seems, 'big brother' was also called to help."

Despite the charges and the mounting pressure, Kezerashvili remains defiant. "I can tell you with certainty that all these efforts are in vain. The free world will definitely win," he wrote.

According to TASS, the Russian state news agency, Kezerashvili's conviction stems from charges of fraud on a particularly large scale. However, Kezerashvili remains confident that the charges are baseless and part of a larger political strategy to target him.

CEC Confirms Georgian Dream's Victory in Controversial Election, Protests Erupt

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On November 16, Georgia's Central Election Commission (CEC) officially confirmed the final results of the October 26 parliamentary elections,

marking a nearly 54% victory for the ruling Georgian Dream party. However, the announcement was marred by violent clashes and protests, with many opposition groups accusing the government of electoral fraud.

During the CEC meeting, tensions escalated when Davit Kirtadze, an opposition representative from Unity-UNM, confronted CEC Chairman Giorgi Kalandarishvili. Kirtadze splashed black paint on

Kalandarishvili's face, calling him a "black spot" in reference to allegations of ballot secrecy violations in the election. Specifically, concerns were raised about the thin ballot papers that made it visible which party a voter was supporting.

"You are the shame of our country and you are the black spot," Kirtadze exclaimed at Kalandarishvili. The incident led to a brief suspension of the meeting, with Kalandarishvili returning after a half-hour break wearing an eye patch. He described the incident as "malicious" and claimed that it proved there was no evidence of election manipulation.

In response, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) opened an investigation against Kirtadze under Article 118 of the Georgian Criminal Code, which addresses the intentional infliction of minor harm to health.

Following the altercation, Giorgi Javakhishvili, the CEC

Commission Secretary, announced the official election results. The total number of eligible voters was 3,508,294, with 2,111,834 casting their votes. The final tally showed Georgian Dream securing 53.93% of the vote, or 1,120,053 votes, winning 89 seats in Parliament. The Coalition for Change came in second with 11.03%, earning 19 seats, followed by Unity-UNM with 10.17%, securing 16 seats.

Other parties, including Strong Georgia, Gakharia-For Georgia, and Lelo for People, also passed the five percent threshold, each claiming seats in Parliament.

Despite the official results, protests erupted outside the CEC building as citizens voiced their discontent with what they deemed a rigged election. Law enforcement arrested at least three individuals, including Giorgi Liponava, co-founder of Formula TV, and Vano Gomurashvili, a member of the opposition Akhali Party.



Post-Election Uncertainty in Georgia: Tensions Rise Amid Legitimacy Challenges

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Following the October 26 parliamentary elections, Georgian Dream is occupied with ensuring the legitimacy of the election results and convening the new parliament. Meanwhile, the pro-Western opposition seeks to have the election results declared fraudulent and push for new parliamentary elections. This state of affairs cannot persist indefinitely, and greater clarity is expected by early December.

Georgian Dream faces the challenge of securing domestic and international recognition of the declared results of the October 26 parliamentary elections—its fourth victory in elections. Let's begin with the issue of domestic legitimacy. All four pro-Western political blocs that surpassed the 5% electoral threshold unanimously refuse to enter parliament. President Salome Zourabichvili, meanwhile, is reluctant to convene the new parliament, which she is obliged to do. Georgian Dream sees no issue with this and plans to convene the 11th Parliament on its own.

According to the electoral code, within 10 days of the CEC's summary of the election results,

the first session of the newly elected parliament must be held. In other words, the last possible date for the first session of the 11th Parliament is December 1. On that day, Georgian Dream's 89 parliamentarians are expected to enter the parliament building and validate the legitimacy of at least 100 parliamentary seats. Only after this can the opposition withdraw its lists, as they have declared since election day. Even if this happens and the opposition continues to boycott the new parliament, Georgian Dream believes the parliament's assembly will still be legitimate and will proceed to function, even with an incomplete composition.

The pro-Western opposition has gathered evidence of electoral fraud and has shared these materials with Western diplomats and parliamentarians. This effort appears to have been effective, as democratic countries have been slow to congratulate Georgian Dream on its election victory.

Meanwhile, the opposition kicked off mass protests, aiming to challenge and annul the declared results of the October 26 elections through this course of action. A critical date for these

protests will be Georgian Dream's attempt to hold the first session of the new parliament. It is likely that the opposition will coordinate a major protest on this day, attempting to block access to the parliament building and prevent deputies from entering. In such a scenario, Georgian Dream is expected to use force, drawing on their prior experience during the adoption of the "Russian Law".

Should events unfold this way, Georgian Dream could accuse the opposition of attempting a coup and arrest some of its leaders. This aligns with statements made by Bidzina Ivanishvili during the election campaign, where he threatened to ban the pro-Western opposition, labelling them collectively as the United National Movement, and pledged to prosecute the leaders of these parties. During the same period, Ivanishvili characterised the Rose Revolution as a Western-backed coup. However, Georgian Dream might avoid such a confrontation by quietly scheduling the first session of the new parliament and concluding it swiftly before the opposition can gather enough protesters outside.

Experts believe the opposition

is unlikely to prevent the assembly of the new parliament or replicate anything resembling the Rose Revolution. Moreover, Georgian Dream hopes that once the parliament convenes, opposition MPs will gradually abandon their boycott, either individually or as entire parties, as happened in 2020. However, the current situation differs significantly from then. At that time, the West acknowledged the elections as legitimate and pressured the opposition to join parliament. Today, the United States and European Union countries are questioning the election results and emphasising the need for an investigation into violations.

On November 6, high-ranking European officials, united under the Friends of Georgia group, released a joint statement calling for the creation of a commission to investigate election violations. They also demanded sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili, government officials, and political leaders responsible for Georgia's democratic backsliding.

The Georgian Dream's main hope now lies in Donald Trump. Irakli Kobakhidze congratulated

Trump on his win and spoke of the need to "reset" relations with Georgia. Georgian Dream anticipates that Trump will end the war in Ukraine in Russia's favour, thereby excusing Georgia's current government for its pro-Russian policies and allowing their continuation without objection.

Contrary to these expectations, pro-Western opposition leaders have repeatedly stated that Georgian Dream's hopes regarding Trump are baseless and that they will soon realise this.

Those with a more sceptical outlook suggest that even in the face of complete Western isolation and sanctions, Georgian Dream would remain defiant, ramp up anti-Western propaganda, and openly align itself with Russia. Russian officials have already signalled their willingness to strengthen ties with Georgia.

The opposition remains optimistic that mass demonstrations will disrupt Georgian Dream's Plans, block the convening of the new parliament, and force the announcement of new elections. Whether these efforts will succeed will become clear in the near future.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Protesters Rally Across Tbilisi, Set Up 24-Hour Camp Near University



On Sunday, November 17, the "Reclaim Your Vote" rally, organized by the local observer mission My Vote and opposition coalitions, culminated in front of the Parliament building. Simultaneously, the Coalition for Change, a political force that passed the 5% election threshold, set up tents near Tbilisi State University, announcing plans to remain there for 24 hours.

The protests began around 18:00 local time with multiple marches converging on Rustaveli Avenue. One group, led by the Coalition for Change, departed from Vake Park; another, organized by the Strong Georgia coalition, started at Marjanishvili metro; and a student-led march began from Chavchavadze Avenue. All

marches headed toward the Parliament building, where Rustaveli Avenue was blocked once again.

Observers of the October 26 parliamentary elections spoke to the crowd on Rustaveli Avenue, sharing firsthand accounts of alleged electoral fraud.

As the Coalition for Change march approached Tbilisi State University, halfway between Vake Park and the Parliament building, leaders announced their decision to pause on Chavchavadze Avenue, which was already blocked to traffic. They began setting up tents near the university, committing to a peaceful 24-hour protest.

The atmosphere remained calm, with police refraining from intervening as tents were erected. Later in the evening, protesters from Rustaveli Avenue joined the university camp. Opposition leaders periodically addressed the growing crowd, reiterating their commitment to peaceful demonstrations throughout the night.

Two Convicted of Attacking Journalists on July 5 Released Early

Two men convicted of assaulting journalists during the violent July 5 homophobic attacks of 2021 in Tbilisi have been released early from prison. Davit Kutaladze and Tornike Davlasheridze, who were sentenced in 2022 for their roles in the attacks, were reportedly freed under amnesty.

The violence targeted media workers, including the late TV Pirveli cameraman Lekso Lashkarava, who died shortly after the attacks, as well as other

journalists and cameramen. Initially sentenced to five years, the Tbilisi Court of Appeal reduced their sentences to four years and overturned charges of group violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The decision sparked outrage among civil society groups. The Media Advocacy Coalition described the ruling as "alarming," warning it threatens media freedom. The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association criticized the lack of accountability, stating that it emboldens hate groups and weakens protections for journalists.



Weather

Monday, November 18

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 12°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 5°C

Tuesday, November 19

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 16°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 5°C

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