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# Georgia's Post- Election Turmoil

Scenarios for the Future and the Regional  
Consequences

by Eugene Kogan  
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## AIIES COMMENT

## Georgia's Post-Election Turmoil Scenarios for the Future and the Regional Consequences

### Introduction

The Georgia parliamentary elections on 26 October 2024 have been highly contested with the opposition claiming that their win was stolen from them by the incumbent Georgian Dream party. As a result, the opposition initiated legal procedure, demanded new elections and started peaceful protests against the election result, apparently to no avail. On 16 November, Georgia's Central Election Commission validated the results of October's highly contested elections, despite weeks of protests by the opposition and accusations of widespread fraud and Russian interference<sup>1</sup> that were refuted by the Kremlin.

This AIES Comment provides a perspective based on a combination of issues that highlight not just a divided but also a traumatised Georgian society that remembers the August 2008 war and is not ready to fight Russia again nor to deal with potential Russian interference that is constantly refuted by the Kremlin. The article also discusses opinions about the elections from Georgia's neighbouring countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and offers three scenarios for its development.

### A Divided and Traumatized Society

It is important to remember and emphasise that the Georgian nation was and still is deeply divided and polarised. With the

older generation remaining nostalgic about their way of life in the former Soviet Union (FSU), the younger generation is travelling extensively to the European Union (EU) and looking forward to joining the bloc in the foreseeable future. This difference was clearly exposed in the final days of the parliamentary election campaign. At the same time, the scars of those from the older generations of Georgians who fought in the August 2008 war have not healed and the memories of defeat remain vivid. And this is exactly where the successful Georgian Dream propaganda campaign was aimed, namely towards a traumatised society.

In the final days of the election campaign, rallies were held on both sides, with the opposition coalition Strong Georgia rallying under a progressive pro-European banner. The Georgian Dream, however, appealed mainly to conservative and older voters, many of whom favour maintaining Russian ties. The resulting division reflects the nation's polarised political landscape, with each side advocating starkly different visions for Georgia's future.<sup>2</sup> Not least important, the Georgian Dream's effective propaganda framed pro-Western forces [name it the opposition] as agents of a global war party intending to draw Georgia into a confrontation with Russia<sup>3</sup> and, surprisingly, the Georgian Dream's propaganda was accepted at face value. Interestingly enough, in an article

published on 28 October by the Russian state-run media outlet *RIA Novosti*, the author Victoria Nikiforova claimed that "Aligning with Russia is the natural course for Georgia, and instead, it is the Euro-elites who wanted to pull the same trick with Georgia as with Ukraine, to plant their puppets in Tbilisi, who would drive the people to fight the Russians."<sup>4</sup> Thus, it can be said that the Georgian Dream's propaganda campaign and Nikiforova's claim reinforce and support each other by claiming that Georgia will fight with Russia.

An additional interesting factor that contributed to the dividing line is the below mentioned statistical data. The statistics showed the ruling party registering its greatest support in rural areas while losing in major cities. For instance, the maximum vote for the Georgian Dream within the capital Tbilisi was 44 percent while the minimum stood at 33 percent, highlighting the growing unpopularity of the party among urban-dwellers.<sup>5</sup>

The Georgian Dream received impressive but dubious results, however, in two regions of Georgia – Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti – territories populated almost exclusively by ethnic minorities. In the Marneuli and Gardabani municipalities in Kvemo Kartli, ethnic Azerbaijanis dominate, and in the Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki municipalities in Javakheti, ethnic Armenians are the predominant population. Ethnic minorities often do not

speak Georgian, especially in villages, and illiteracy rates are high.<sup>6</sup>

### Russian Interference in the Political System

When it comes to the recent parliamentary elections result, it remains very challenging if not impossible to lay blame on Russia's interference because we have no proof and Russia refutes any allegations. For instance, Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin Spokesman, denied any Russian interference in the vote on 28 October. Salome Zurbishvili, President of Georgia, referred to the result as a "Russian special operation." She did not clarify what she meant by the term. Peskov said: "Russia strongly rejects such allegations. There had been attempts by European actors to interfere in the elections, but not by Moscow. We strongly reject such accusations – as you know, they have become standard for many countries. At the slightest thing, they immediately accuse Russia of interference. No, that is not true. There was no interference and the accusations are absolutely unfounded."<sup>7</sup> President Zurbishvili, calling on citizens boycotting the election result, received a prompt response from Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council. He suggested that Georgian Dream remove Zurbishvili from office and arrest her for refusing to accept the election results. In addition, during the pre-election period, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service announced its support of the Georgian Dream. On the eve of the elections,

Christo Grozev, a Bulgarian investigative journalist, warned that "Russia can only ensure a pro-Russian regime in Georgia through radical election fraud" and pointed out the activation of Russian special services in this direction.<sup>8</sup>

The ruling party's victory, coupled with the deepening crisis in Georgia's relations with the West, strengthens Moscow's position in the region, although the extent to which Russia interfered with the election process is still unclear.<sup>9</sup> What is more, accusations that the Georgian Dream is in the Kremlin's pocket resonate with a significant part of Georgian society, and the party itself raised the stakes ahead of the election when it promised to ban opposition parties – although it did stipulate that it would need a constitutional majority to do that, something which it did not get.<sup>10</sup> The reader is likely to be disappointed that there is no smoking gun found but this is the reality that we need to accept.

### Regional Perspectives: Armenia

Under the Georgian Dream's leadership in recent years, Georgia has gradually shifted away from its pro-European stance, adopting a more pragmatic approach in its relations with Russia and China. This pivotal shift raises questions about its implications for Armenia.

Benyamin Poghosyan, a senior expert at the APRI Armenia think tank, warns that "If Georgia's current government maintains their positions and continues

their gradual departure from the West, Armenia's Western-oriented diversification strategy could face increased challenges. We find ourselves in a region – the South Caucasus and neighbouring states – where essentially no one is inclined toward deeper relations with the West. Georgia is shifting away, Azerbaijan was never inclined, Iran and Russia have extremely tense relations with the West, while Turkey maintains a balanced policy. Under these circumstances, the expert suggests that Armenia might find it increasingly difficult to maintain its Western-oriented foreign policy. I would not rule out the possibility of the Armenian government introducing changes to its foreign policy."<sup>11</sup>

While Poghosyan does not anticipate immediate significant economic changes, he cautions that prolonged political instability in Georgia potentially triggered by opposition protests, could adversely affect Armenia's economy. He emphasizes "After all, at least 70 percent of Armenia's external trade passes through Georgian territory" towards Russia. And this remains the only route since borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey remain closed.

In an interview with the *Civilnet*, Miriam Kosmehl, a Senior Expert on Eastern Europe at the Bertelsmann Stiftung (Foundation), raised a crucial question: What does it mean for Armenia to have an unstable neighbour in Georgia that it is closer to Russia and China than to the EU? Her an-

swer was: “Armenia is a landlocked country and thus at a disadvantage. Its diversification desires – and needs – will be less accommodated with a Georgia that isolates from the EU. And the risk of war with Azerbaijan remains over border demarcation and transport links. So, Armenia is in a very challenging spot with a more Russia-dependent Georgia on one side and difficult neighbours like Azerbaijan and Iran on the other side.<sup>12</sup> As for Turkey, it can be said that as long as Armenia has not signed a peace agreement with Azerbaijan that favours Azerbaijan never-ending demands there will be no signature of peace agreement between Armenia and Turkey and the borders between the two countries will remain closed.

### Regional Perspectives:

#### Azerbaijan

President Aliyev’s administration offered unqualified support for the incumbent Georgian Dream’s party efforts to retain power amid Georgia’s disputed parliamentary elections. According to information obtained by an independent, Berlin-based Azerbaijani media outlet, Mikroskop Media, Aliyev’s administration officials issued instructions to pro-government media outlets, along with government-organised non-government organisations (GONGOS), to praise Georgian Dream’s convincing victory in the 26 October elections.

Authorities in Baku urged Azerbaijani media to emphasise the high level of support given by

Georgian Azerbaijanis to the Georgian Dream. An editorial in the official government newspaper *Republic* stated: “The vote cast by Azerbaijani voters to the ruling party is between 7 to 8 percent of [the Georgian Dream’s] total votes, which shows that they have an important weight in the elections. Our compatriots opposed the pro-Western policy in the country and supported the peace and stability in Georgia.”<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt ...  
whoever controls Georgia  
also controls Armenia.

A shared desire to reduce Western influence in the Caucasus appears to be driving the Aliyev’s administration’s support for the Georgian Dream. Of late, Aliyev has been a vocal critic of the EU, in general and France, in particular, while he accuses the latter of favouring Armenia in the Azerbaijani-Armenian peace process. The Georgian Dream, meanwhile, has accused the United States and the EU of trying to foment coups and revolutions designed to create a pro-Western puppet state.<sup>14</sup> A shared desire to reduce Western influence in the Caucasus and to blame the West, in general, for all the evils are indeed a common denominator for the two ‘brotherly’ countries that see eye-to-eye on their present and future domestic and foreign policies.

### Scenarios for the Future

#### 1. The Long and Hard Road towards the EU

The implementation of this scenario cannot happen as long as the Georgian Dream remains the governing party. An annual report issued by the European Council states that the “course of action taken by the Georgian government runs counter to the values and principles upon which the EU is founded. The European Council recalled that such a course of action jeopardises Georgia’s European path, and de facto halts the accession process.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, whatever Georgian Dream politicians are saying; namely, that their country aspires to EU membership and will join the EU by 2030, this all should be taken with a pinch of salt.

#### 2. Under Loose But Nevertheless Control of Russia

Even though the preconditions are already in place for Georgia to begin moving quickly toward Russia by joining dubious interstate formations such the 3+3 (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia + Iran, Russia, Turkey) or BRICS<sup>16</sup> it does not mean that Georgia will move quickly in this direction. What is known, however, is that the Georgian Dream has already received such invitations from the Kremlin before and after the elections, and if the opposition does not make a concerted effort to combat the ruling party, Tbilisi will continue its turn towards Russia<sup>17</sup> despite Georgian citizens’ opposition to an alignment with Moscow.

It is in Russia's interest to discredit pro-Western forces, weaken Western influence in Georgia, and fully subordinate the government in Tbilisi. Therefore, Russia is likely to stoke the crisis using hybrid warfare tactics and may even consider open intervention in the future.<sup>18</sup> Such a possibility exists but should not be taken at face value. An additional crucial point was highlighted by Elene Khoshtaria, leader of the Droa party; namely, "Georgia is not only a transportation hub of great interest to Europe but also a key route for Russia to evade sanctions. That is why Russia is fighting so hard to have influence here."<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Abandoned, Irrelevant and Isolated

According to David Aprasidze from Ilia Chavchavadze University: "The likelihood that the Western community ultimately would not recognise the parliamentary elections is quite high, and we are already seeing this process unfold. Georgia is a small country, and such non-recognition would have wide-reaching effects. This will likely manifest most strongly in the economic sphere, impacting investments, economic relations,

and export-import frameworks. The most alarming aspect is that, from a geopolitical perspective, Georgia would become what is often termed a pariah state. Once we sever and completely halt relations with both our current and former partners, we will be left with only one major neighbour – Russia. In a situation where the legitimacy of the elections may be questioned by strategic partners, the possibility of any reset is completely ruled out."

Under such circumstances Russia will demand from the Georgian government to delete Article 78 from the Georgian Constitution which is related to the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In addition, Russia will demand a reduction in the size of the Georgian Defence Forces (GDF), the handing over of heavy weapons, leaving the GDF armed with only small arms and light weapons (SALW), and keeping what is left of the GDF in their barracks under constant surveillance. Such a demand may lead to GDF disobedience of government orders and a confrontation between the police, the Interior Ministry Special Forces and the GDF and,

subsequently, plunge the country into chaos.

## Conclusion

The highly contested elections put the country in an unstable situation. The illegitimate Georgian Dream-led government is likely to lead the country into isolation and the protest may continue to a violent confrontation between the illegitimate government and the opposition. If, however, the Georgian Dream is deposed by the opposition, then we may foresee Russia's intervention. There is no doubt that Russian officials continue to monitor developments in Georgia – since whoever controls Georgia also controls Armenia.

### About the Author

Dr. Eugene Kogan is an expert for military technology and the Caucasus as well as Black Sea region. He was visiting researcher at various renowned European institutes, such as the DGAP and SWP in Berlin, the FOI in Stockholm, and defence and security expert at the defunct International Institute for Liberal Policy (IILP) in Vienna under directorship of Prof. Dr. Erich Reiter.

<sup>1</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), "Black liquid splashed on election chief as Georgia validate disputed poll results" (2024), <https://www.rferl.org/a/33204481.html>

<sup>2</sup> Caucasus Watch, "Beyond the ballots: Georgian Dream claims victory in controversial election amid rigging allegations" (2024), <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/insights/beyond-the-ballots-georgian-dream-claims-victory-in-controversial-election-amid-rigging-allegations.html>.

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<sup>3</sup> Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), "The fourth term of Georgian Dream: a questionable victory" (2024),

<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2024-10-28/fourth-term-georgian-dream-a-questionable-victory>.

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<sup>4</sup> For the complete article, see OC-Media, “Colour revolutions, Western meddling – coups – how Russian media is covering Georgia’s elections” (2024), <https://oc-media.org/features/colour-revolutions-western-meddling-coups-how-russian-media-is-covering-georgias-election/>.

<sup>5</sup> CEPA, “Georgia braces for post-electoral trouble” (2024), <https://cepa.org/article/georgia-braces-for-post-electoral-trouble/>.

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<sup>6</sup> Eurasia Daily Monitor, Jamestown Foundation, “Georgian elections mark Western geopolitical defeat and win to Russian influence” (2024), <https://jamestown.org/program/georgian-elections-mark-western-geopolitical-defeat-and-win-for-russian-influence>.

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<sup>7</sup> Reuters, “Russia says attempts are being made to destabilise Georgia after vote” (2024), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-attempts-are-being-made-destabilise-georgia-after-vote-2024-10-28/>. According to author of the article, President Zurabishvili calling what happened in the aftermath of the country’s parliamentary election “Russian special operation” can be interpreted as the current Russian war against Ukraine. Such a war can be conducted by using hybrid measures or the direct military confrontation.

<sup>8</sup> Eurasia Daily Monitor, Jamestown Foundation, “Georgian elections mark Western geopolitical defeat and win to Russian influence” (2024).

<sup>9</sup> Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), “The fourth term of Georgian Dream: a questionable victory” (2024).

<sup>10</sup> Carnegie Endowment, Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, “As Georgians protest election, what next?” (2024).

<sup>11</sup> Civilnet, “Georgian elections and Armenia: What to expect” (2024), <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/802944/georgian-elections-and-armenia-what-to-expect/>. It is important to emphasise that this was the first article on the post-election results published on the Armenian website.

<sup>12</sup> Civilnet, “The EU has not yet shown itself ready as a security provider for Armenia” (2024), <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/804196/the-european-union-has-not-yet-shown-itself-ready-as-a-security-provider-for-armenia/>.

<sup>13</sup> Eurasianet, “Azerbaijan: Aliyev all in behind Georgian Dream election victory” (2024), <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-aliyev-all-in-behind-georgian-dream-election-victory>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission, “Georgia 2024 Report,” [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7b6ed47c-ecde-41a2-99ea-41683dc2d1bd\\_en?filename=Georgia%20Report%202024.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7b6ed47c-ecde-41a2-99ea-41683dc2d1bd_en?filename=Georgia%20Report%202024.pdf).

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<sup>16</sup> Eurasia Daily Monitor, Jamestown Foundation, “Georgian elections.” On the issue of 3+3, in particular, see Caucasus Watch, “Shifting dynamics in the relations between Georgia and Russia” (2024), <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/insights/shifting-dynamics-in-the-relations-between-georgia-and-russia.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Eurasia Daily Monitor, Jamestown Foundation, “Georgian elections mark Western geopolitical defeat and win to Russian influence” (2024).

<sup>18</sup> OSW, “The fourth term.” See also Chatham House, “As the ruling party claims victory in Georgia’s disputed election, Western condemnation is no longer enough” (2024), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/10/ruling-party-claims-victory-georgias-disputed-election-western-condemnation-no-longer>.

<sup>19</sup> Kyiv Post, “Can Georgia defend a democratic future? Interview with opposition leader” (2024), <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/41366>.

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Dr. Langweg 3, 2410 Hainburg/Donau

Tel. +43 (1) 3583080

office@aies.at | www.aies.at

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