

Bidzina Ivanishvili's Appeal to the Democratic Leaders of the International Community

August 30, 2012

By this letter I would like to appeal to the democratic world. The fate of our country will be decided in the October 1 election in Georgia, and it is up to you to a great degree how this election will proceed, whether the country once and for all will take up the path of democratic development or the fight will go on with authoritarianism and post-communism.

I entered politics because I saw how the country was perishing, and I considered it my duty to do everything to save it. The Saakashvili regime has damaged my homeland in a multitude of ways in the past years, exerting unprecedented violence on business and subjugating it almost entirely, turning rally crackdowns into a normal phenomenon, violating human rights, unbelievably simplifying the processes of imprisonment and plea-bargaining; people have been impoverished, intimidated, and abused; free speech has been limited, while state-controlled media have turned into propaganda tools; pseudo-opposition politicians, parties, and media outlets have joined the web of lies and created an environment in which people developed distrust of politics and elections.

It was for the sake of necessary changes, restoration of justice, and the country's democratic development that I decided to enter politics. From October 2011 to the present, I have been successful in uniting our previously scattered and weakened oppositional forces and formulating the following priorities on the agenda of our political coalition: to honor the Constitution; eradicate elite corruption; introduction of an independent judiciary; freedom of media; protection of human rights; empowerment of civil society; creation of prospects for the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; improvement of the investment environment; regulation of relations with Russia; European and Euro-Atlantic integration; intensification of strategic partnership with the USA. This is my action plan and program, the feasibility of which people have come to believe out of their high confidence in me and my reputation.

Along with our people, however, Saakashvili too realized immediately that my surfacing turned his plans upside down as an impassable obstacle appeared on the government's clear path to staying in power permanently.

That is why, from day one after I entered politics, Saakashvili openly started to persecute me as a political opponent and citizen, on one hand, and to embed hatred and confrontation in the public, on the other. He and his regime on the 4th day after my political bid revoked my citizenship and tried to marginalize me from the political process; in two weeks he launched the attack on my private property and hijacked the commercial bank's encashment vehicle; abused the Constitution; arrested our supporters and left them unemployed; developed a legislative package and created a new agency of political repressions – Political Parties Financial Monitoring Department specifically to restrict the Georgian Dream's and my personal political activities; auctioned off our contributors' personal residences; fined and subjected to degrading interrogation hundreds of our members and activists; in order to keep our population in isolation in terms of information, sequestered hundreds of thousands of satellite dishes, fined the companies distributing these dishes millions of GEL; even the Must Carry, which has only 25% coverage cannot be considered an alternative to satellite dishes, will be enforced only until the election day, for keeping population in the information vacuum during the ballot-count; using legislative and administrative gadgetry took away GEL 190 million and led Cartu Bank to bankruptcy; auctioned off the coalition's contractor companies; fined me personally over 130 million GEL; fined coalition member political parties millions of GEL, sequestering their bank accounts and practically starving their political activities; deemed dozens of millions of GEL as illegal expenditure undertaken by the Electoral Coalition Bidzina Ivanishvili – Georgian Dream in order to ensure grounds for the disqualification of the

coalition after the election, and banning them from the parliament. The election day was set for Monday, substantially complicating the participation in elections for the Georgians living abroad on a work day; as it was expected, the judiciary, in total obedience to Saakashvili, appeared as the government's notary.

All this created such an electoral environment in the country and impeded the coalition's political activity to such a degree that considering a fair and free election is already out of the question. Due to the matters discussed above and my responsibility before the Georgian people, it is my duty to announce that if no significant changes take place in the actions of the government from today through election day, no free and fair election will be possible in Georgia.

It is not our goal to fight against fraudulent elections but rather to win the election. Therefore, although it is impossible fully to remedy the results of repressions carried out against us in the past ten months, we are nonetheless willing to sign a commitment letter recognizing the validity of the election results only if the electoral environment radically changes starting today and through the polling day, and if the following demands are met:

1. The enforcement of all fines, sequestrations, or sanctions initiated by the State Chamber of Audit must stop immediately as it happened in line with recommendations provided by the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections in the case with the court order section imposing fines on the parties;
2. The Chamber of Audit must remove from the Coalition Georgian Dream incomes and expenses all sums, the relation of which to the constituent parties of the coalition has not been substantiated in any way, save the court decisions based on the speculations of the Chamber of Audit;
3. Ensure all necessary conditions for citizens of Georgia living abroad (25 percent of the voters) to participate in the election even it requires to have the polling day rescheduled;
4. Remove immediately all obstacles made for the private companies to distribute satellite dishes among the population, and the government support other projects planned for increasing the access to information for the population: e.g. initiative by Georgian emigrants;
5. A coalition representative must become a member of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections, and the agency must work on a daily basis and in a transparent manner, and immediately consider all cases of persecution of people by political motives;
6. In order to monitor compliance with the Code of Ethics proposed by the civic sector and accepted by the coalition, an effective mechanism must be created with the participation of international organizations.

The only effective mechanism still respected by Saakashvili is the stance of the international democratic community. For example, as a result of the recent harsh criticism by the European Council and OSCE representatives, the government made concessions in relation to a number of issues (removed holds on the parties' bank accounts, escorted unauthorized persons out of the coalition headquarters, postponed the enforcement of certain fines).

None of our demands require constitutional changes or a long time to fulfill. It is all doable provided that you will be willing to address Saakashvili and categorically demand from him to stop exerting violence against his own people and make our electoral environment compatible with international standards at least to some extent.

We and you are facing the same choice – either we take decisive measures immediately today and ensure the fairness and freedom of the elections, or in one month have to deal with the results of stolen elections and leading the country out of the political crisis.