

OSCE PA Vice-President Burjanadze Becomes Acting President of Georgia



President George Meets With President Burjanadze in Tbilisi

On 24 November, OSCE PA President Bruce George met with the new acting President of Georgia, Nino Burjanadze, in Tbilisi. Mr. George expressed his satisfaction with the fact that the constitutional and political crises had been resolved without bloodshed, and he congratulated the people of Georgia and all organizations involved for their self-restraint.

President George had arrived in Tbilisi on Friday 21 November to act as the Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Dutch Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, to lead the OSCE Observers for the second round of the parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for 23 November.

On Saturday and Sunday, Georgia faced a political crisis which resulted in the resignation of President Shevardnadze. In the hours before the resignation, Bruce George delivered a press statement appealing to all parties concerned to show restraint and not to resort to violence in the political crisis. In the statement the OSCE PA President emphasized that a free and fair election is the central pillar of a state's legitimacy and that the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE continues to stand ready to support the development of the democratic process in Georgia.

In his meeting with acting President Burjanadze, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament and Vice-President of the OSCE

Parliamentary Assembly for several years, Mr. George emphasized that the two elections he had observed in Georgia in 1999 and 2003 had been deeply flawed, both falling well short of the standards expected and desired by the international community and the people of Georgia.

Immediately after their talks, Ms. Burjanadze and Mr. George met the press. President George noted that Georgia is standing at a cross road of its history. He urged political parties to ensure genuine, free and fair elections that could be validated by the international community, proving that the country is committed to the path of democracy.

He also urged the international community to give its full support, not only to ensure good and honest elections, but also to assist Georgia in its time of economic need.

Finally President George announced that he would be returning to Georgia to head the next OSCE short-term observation mission for the Presidential Elections to be held on January 4, 2004.

Later on Monday, 24 November, President George also met with the Leader of the National Movement, Mikhail Saakashvili. The main points of discussion were the events preceding and following the resignation of President Shevardnadze and the timing of the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections.

During his visit to Georgia, President George was accompanied by Belgium MP Cemal Cavdarli as well as by Press Counsellor Jan Jooren and Program Officer Tina Schøn from the International Secretariat.



PA President Bruce George in front of the Georgian Parliament building during the demonstrations in Tbilisi