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Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Addresses Presidential Candidates, Calls for Accepting Election Results



Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II spoke on the upcoming presidential runoff, and expressed his hope that the candidates will accept the election results.

The Patriarch made the statement in his St. George's Day sermon on November 23 in the Holy Trinity Cathedral. Both Salome Zurbashvili and Grigol Vashadze were present at the ceremony.

"We are very happy to have our ministers and presidential candidates at the Holy Trinity Cathedral," the Patriarch said in his brief address.

"I am sure that you will accept the results with dignity be it victory or defeat. But I hope the winner will not think that he or she is better than the other," he added. "Having gone through this difficult period, I am sure that you will help each other, regardless of who will win the elections. St. George will help you," he concluded.

This is the second time the Orthodox Patriarch has publicly spoken on the

presidential polls. On September 19, following a wave of criticism against Salome Zurabishvili, he called on the Orthodox clergy to refrain from voicing political statements.

Grigol Vashadze, presidential candidate of the United Opposition, a coalition led by the United National Movement, congratulated the country's orthodox parish with St. George's day in a brief press statement after the sermon. He said: "there should not be any politics, particularly in Georgia, that is not based on Christian values."

The ruling party-endorsed candidate Salome Zurabishvili congratulated the Orthodox parish as well. In a Facebook post, the presidential hopeful said the day is "a symbol of good defeating evil and we live with this faith and hope." Zurabishvili also convened a special press briefing to congratulate the country's armed forces with the day. She said: "today, our armed forces are defending the country's name and honor in Georgia and in international missions; our troops are contributing to strengthening our independence, are contributing to global peace and are fighting international terrorism."

The candidate also touched upon "failed attempts" to divide the army "along political lines," apparently referring to some former servicemen's campaign against her presidential bid. Zurabishvili stressed that as president she will guarantee the armed forces' political neutrality, and will do her utmost to strengthen the army and serve its interests.

The first round of presidential election was held on October 28. No candidate garnered more than 50% of votes. Runoff between the two top contenders - Salome Zurabishvili and Grigol Vashadze, who finished with 38.64% and 37.74%, respectively, will be held on November 28.