



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# **Testimony :: Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin**

Co-Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

## **Statement by Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin**

**Co-Chairman**

**Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

**Hearing on Georgia's Parliamentary Election**

**September 20, 2012**

Like you, Mr. Smith, I have received many packets of materials and requests for meetings in the last 9 months related to the Republic of Georgia. I suppose it's nice to be the object of so much attention.

In fact, I've never been to Georgia but have been following events there so closely for so long, I feel as if I've been a frequent visitor. In Washington, I have met with representatives of the government and the opposition, more than once. Last January, for example, I met with President Saakashvili, when he came to Washington to meet with President Obama. At the time, the response of the Georgian government to the challenge posed by Bidzina Ivanishvili was already raising questions. I told President Saakashvili then that he had to be very careful about singling out Mr. Ivanishvili for special treatment and that the election had to be – and be seen as – free and fair.

Over the last 9 months, the temperature of this confrontation has only risen, both in Georgia and in Washington. That's not surprising; the stakes are high. The government sees this election as the voters' judgment on its policies of the last eight years, which it believes the opposition would undo. For the opposition, this election will demonstrate whether it is possible to change governments in Georgia by the ballot box.

Pundits often describe elections as 'critical' or 'historic' but Georgia's election next month really is very important. That's one thing the government and the opposition can agree on. The vote and vote count take place on October 1, so the focus of our inquiry will be on how the campaign has gone. For me, at this point, the key issue is fairness. I hope our

witnesses will tell us what they think about the claims of the contending sides. Can we conclude that the necessary steps have been taken to make possible a free and fair election? If not, what are the shortcomings and can they still be remedied? And what should be the role of the U.S. Government in this process.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.