

## **More Election Turmoil in South Ossetia**

**Author:** [Gana Yanovskaya](#)

Front-runner says authorities have “deceived” opposition over compromise allowing rerun of presidential ballot.

As South Ossetia prepares for a rerun of a disputed presidential election held in November, the apparent winner of that contest has pulled out of a deal with the authorities, casting the whole process into doubt.

Alla Jioyeva was declared victor in November, but the result was cancelled under pressure from her Kremlin-backed rival. After her supporters staged street protests in the South Ossetian capital Tskhinval, Jioyeva reached an accommodation with the authorities. She agreed to a fresh elections on March 25, providing that President Eduard Kokoity resigned, and that Prosecutor-General Taimuraz Khugaev and Supreme Court chairman Atsamaz Bichenov both stepped down.

The agreement was brokered by Moscow, which recognised South Ossetia as independent after sending in troops in August 2008 to fend off an offensive by Georgian forces. Most other states support Georgia’s position that South Ossetia is merely a rebel territory.

Kokoity did step down, but his allies in parliament refused to approve the dismissal of the two officials. (See **South Ossetia Parliament Blocks Deal to End Protests**.)

On January 17, Jioyeva said the deal was off.

“The deal under which I ceded my election victory has not been kept. Key figures from ex-president Kokoity’s team have not resigned, and no one is in any doubt that I will be prevented from standing in the rerun election,” she said.

Jioyeva said that when she signed the agreement on December 9, she had struggled to keep her more radical supporters under control, and now she would not answer for any action they might take.

“At that time there were many radicals who tried to persuade me I was doing the wrong thing. And they brought strong arguments – that we’d been tricked many times, and it would happen again,” she said. “What has transpired is obvious to everyone. We’ve ended up being deceived in the same manner.”

Now Jioyeva is insisting that her election win stands, and that she must therefore become president.

A government spokesman, who did not want to be named, accused Jioyeva of creating instability.

“It isn’t the president’s fault that parliament issued a no vote and the officials remained in post. So the terms of the deal should be seen as having been fulfilled, and the objections brought by of Jioyeva and the opposition are inventions,” he said. “Jioyeva’s actions are harming the statehood of South Ossetia.”

Analysts predict that protests will resume if the authorities do not take Jioyeva’s objections more seriously.

“The situation could become tense again if talks don’t start. The authorities now need to start a constructive dialogue with Jioyeva, otherwise a new round of protests will begin,” Yury Vazagov, political commentator for the South Ossetia newspaper, said. “However, fewer people will come onto the streets than in the December protests. People are preparing for a fresh election.”

As South Ossetia’s electoral management body presses ahead with plans for the March poll and accepts applications from potential candidates, the opposition is split on whether to boycott the election.

Many of Jioyeva’s supporters were unhappy with the deal she cut in December and would not back fresh protests, while some opposition figures have decided to stand themselves.

Sergei Zassejev, one of Jioyeva’s closest allies in the November poll, has been nominated as a candidate himself in what he describes as a “second chance”.

“It’s a chance not just to take part, but even to win the election,” he said.

Another potential contender is Zurab Bazzaev, who heads a movement called “Forward, Ossetia!”, part of the newly-created Coalition of Patriotic Forces which he says will seek to “unite the electorate”.

“Alla Jioeva was the first person we told when we formed this bloc,” he said. “A new election campaign had begun, and we believed society was divided and people didn’t have confidence the election would be fair.”

“It’s a difficult situation. There is political chaos, hence we decided to create this alliance.”

Bazzaev said Kokoity was to blame for the political crisis, but he also criticised Jioyeva for abandoning a deal she had signed up to.

“Denying the legitimacy [of the March election] and not taking part isn’t the best solution,” he said. “A boycott would be a mistake.”

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**Topic:** Protests

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**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/more-election-turmoil-south-ossetia>