

General elections in the Republic of Zambia

On August 12, 2021, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Zambia. According to the country's constitution, the president is elected for a five-year term; he can remain in office for two terms. The deputies of the 167-seat unicameral parliament (National Assembly) are also elected for five years. 12 candidates ran for the presidency, but the main contenders, as in the elections in 2015 and 2016, were the incumbent President Edgar Lungu and the opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema. In 2021, this was the sixth Hichilema's attempt to climb the top of Zambia's political Olympus.

The winner of the presidential elections was the leader of the opposition from the United Party for National Development (UPND), H. Hichilema, 59 years old, with 59,02% of electoral votes. The actual President, E. Lungu, 64 years old (Patriotic Front, PF), received 38,7% of electoral votes. In the parliamentary elections, UPND won 82 places (which is 24 places more than in the 2016 elections), and PF- 59 places (21 places less). Women comprise 13,5% of MP. In the 30 years since the comeback of the multi-party system in Zambia, the democratic elections took place nine times already and the transit of power always happen peacefully.

The Russian President V.V. Putin was among the first persons to congratulate the new President of Zambia with the victory in the elections of the head of State. He pointed out that the election of Hichilema proves the confidence of the Zambians in him. The Russian President expressed his hope that Hichilema would enhance the relationships between our countries and would contribute to the stability on the African continent. Among African leaders who came to Lusaka for Hichilema's inauguration were the leaders of the country-members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC): S. Ramaphosa (South Africa), E. Mnangagwa (Zimbabwe), F. Nyusi (Mozambique), H. Geingob (Namibia).

The 2021 election campaign took place in the atmosphere of high political tension in the country, due to the result of the previous elections of 2016 when Lungu beat Hichilema with only 2% votes margin. After the 2016 elections a number of reforms were suggested concerning the electoral process, including the right of prisoners to vote (20 thousand of prisoners obtained this right). The tense political situation was aggravated by an economical crisis and the COVID-19 pandemics (on August 2021 there were 208000 positive cases in the country).

One of the most important issues connected to the general elections, planned for 2021, was a legislation act on amendment n°10 to the 2019 Constitution which suggested enhancements in the Constitution by the Parliament, not by a referendum. In case this amendment was adopted, the competencies of the executive branch could be considerably enhanced and the question of the President Lungu's third term could appear. Despite opposition's criticism, especially by UPND, the Constitutional Court recognized in December 2019 the actual term of President Lungu as the first one, which gave him the right to go for the 2021 elections.

Anticipating the beginning of the 2021 election campaign, the direction of PF has succeeded to enhance its image. An alleged radical growth of the party's membership was openly declared, especially due to the arrival of members of the opposition parties. The supposed main reason was that the PF, by contrast with other political parties, is not based on ethnic principles. Main newspapers wrote about a prosperous internal democracy in PF and about President Lungu's super-leadership.

It is necessary to point out that, according to the opinion polls, Lungu's and Hichilema's electoral support was the same. The Constitution of Zambia suggests that if none of the candidates gains 50% plus one vote, a second round should take place.

In November-December 2020, the Electoral Commission of Zambia composed a new electoral list using biometrical systems. At the same time, the Commission declared budget cuts on the registration process, planned previously, and that the Zambian diaspora could not participate on the 2021 elections, although these questions will be discussed again before the next elections. The number of registered electors was 7,02 million people, with 52,7% of women.

The Constitution of Zambia guarantees liberty and access to the media for all citizens, especially during election campaigns. But during this particular campaign, it was noticed that the information was biased in favor of the Patriotic Front by Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC).

Beginning from August 1, the streets and the polling stations of the country's cities were patrolled by the army. It was explained by acts of violence on the eve of the elections against the supporters of the ruling party, the PF. Lungu declared that the presence of the army in the polling stations should guarantee normal working conditions for the electoral commissions. The presence of the army caused an ambiguous reaction in society, especially among the opposition. But from the moment of the deployment of the army, there were no reports on human rights violation.

The PF, with E. Lungu at the top, promised in its electoral campaign to the voters that all their efforts would be focused on lowering the cost of living for the poor majority, on rising the productivity of the agriculture, on the growth of number of working places and on accelerated diversification of the economy. Meanwhile, the main direction of the Hichilema's electoral campaign was the launch of structural reforms for economic recovery. Among the main tasks proclaimed was a restriction of the public debt, an appeal for investments from abroad, creation of the new working places, development of the healthcare system and of education, extension of the social support for the population. As in the previous elections, Hichilema was insisting on the educational system reform.

In the history of independent Zambia, there were two cases when presidents died from diseases while being in office: Levy Mwanawasa in 2008 and Michael Sata in 2014. Early presidential elections in a country where more than 60% of the population live below the poverty line are an expensive test for its budget. That is why society's attention to the health and efficiency of acting president is fully justified. Lungu is suffering from achalasia (esophagus pathology). The first case time of a particular attention to the president's health was in March 2015, when Lungu was unwell during a military parade. Even though the president and his PR team pledged each time that he was quite well and could continue to work, this could serve as a bonus factor of choice for some voters in favor of an energetic Hichilema who is 5 years younger than Lungu.

The voting at the general elections started, as planned, on August 12. 70,6% of voters came to the polls (56,4% in 2016). In the African Union Observers' report it was noticed that the vote on the polling stations on August 12 took place in a peaceful and calm atmosphere, without any acts of violence. The long queues of voters were well organized in the majority of cases. The secrecy of the vote was respected. The European Union's observers also pointed out that the elections were, in general, well organized and took place in a calm environment. A hard competition between the candidates and parties was particularly noticed.

On August 14, Lungu who lost against Hichilema with 37,8% of votes, declared that the results of the general elections should be canceled because the acts of violence detected on the polls in the Western (Barotseland), North-Western, and Southern provinces. But on September 16 Lungu and the PF party recognized their defeat, and Lungu congratulated Hichilema with his victory in a television address.

The seventh President of Zambia, H. Hichilema declared that his government was adherent to reinforcing international cooperation and would concentrate its attention on the restoration of macro-economic stability and economic growth in domestic policy, giving particular attention to decreasing the budget deficit, reducing the State's debt and fighting corruption. H. Hichilema thanked E. Lungu for the organization of the general elections in the situation of pandemics and for a peaceful transfer of power.

For the second time the country has a woman Vice-President, now her name is Mutale Nalumango. On September 3rd, 2021, a woman, Nelly Mutti, became the speaker of Parliament for the first time.

The new leader of Zambia Hakainde Hichilema was born on the 4th of June, 1962, in the village of Kalomo, not far from Monze in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, also called Central African Federation, nowadays the Republic of Zambia. He was born in a poor family belonging to the Tonga ethnical group. He received elementary education in a local school, and higher education in the University of Zambia (Lusaka) where he was granted with a State's scholarship. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in 1986 in «Economy and business management» he continued his education through the MBA program at Birmingham University (Great Britain).

On returning home at the beginning of the 1990s Hichilema launched entrepreneurial activity. In the mid-1990s he worked successfully in the investment sector, directing Zambian agencies of the famous international consulting and audit companies *Coopers & Lybrand* (1994-1998) and *Grant Thornton* (1998-2006). In his track record, there is also presidency in the Zambian agencies of the British *Barclays Bank* and of the *Sun International Ltd.* holding (South Africa). A successful businessman and a millionaire, Hichilema owns one of the hugest agricultural farms in the country (more than 100000 heads of animals) which became one of the principal sources of meat on the local market and for export. The new president is one of investors to the tourist sector, he is involved in charity, he founded the Foundation for revival of the traditional culture of Zambia.

Hichilema's political career is associated with the United Party for National Development (UPND), founded in 1998 by Anderson Mazoka, Hichilema's countryman, friend, and mentor in the business sphere. In 2006, after Mazoka's death, Hichilema became the president of UPND. In 2006-2008 he was also leading the coalition called the United Democratic Alliance (UDA), which included, except UPND, such parties as United National Independence Party (UNIP) and Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD). Hichilema represented UDA in the presidential elections for the first time in 2006 and obtained 25,3% of votes. By the way, his candidature was supported at that time by the first President of the country, Kenneth Kaunda.

Starting with the early presidential elections of 2015, organized after the death of M. Sata, the opposition candidate Hichilema and his party UPND were constant opponents to E. Lungu and to the ruling PF party.

In April 2017, Hichilema was arrested for high treason and a coup attempt, but after four months of arrest he was released, and his case was closed for lack of evidence.

In 2020, Hichilema was arrested again, accused this time of fraudulent real estate transactions in 2004. But he was released soon afterwards.

Our country was the first to recognize the independent Republic of Zambia: diplomatic relations between the USSR and Zambia being established on October 30, 1964. On December 31, 1991, its government officially recognized the Russian Federation (RF) as the successor of the USSR.

In 2001, the RF written off 80% of Zambian debt. It created favorable conditions to continue economic relations between the two countries. In June 2018, during the 10th BRICS summit which took place in Johannesburg (South Africa), bilateral negotiations took place between the President of Russia V.V. Putin and the President of Zambia E. Lungu, during which the two leaders spoke out for enlargement of diplomatic connections between the two countries for the purpose of enhanced economical cooperation. The new important milestone in the relationships between our countries was the beginning of their cooperation in the sphere of atomic energy. In 2018 an agreement was concluded to build a Centre of atomic science and technology (it will be located 10 km from the capital of Zambia, Lusaka, and will include a nuclear research unit, a modern lab complex, a multifunctional center of irradiation and a center of nuclear medicine) and to begin preparing specialists in nuclear energy. In 2018, the National Research Nuclear University «MEPhI» in Obninsk started training Zambian specialists.

At the first summit and economical forum «Russia-Africa», which took place on October 23-24, 2019, in Sochi, with active participation of the Institute for African Studies of the RAS under the direction of its Director, Corresponding Member of the RAS, Professor Irina Olegovna Abramova, Zambia was represented by the head of its Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, Joseph Malanji. The President of Zambia E. Lungu could not participate in the summit due to the celebration of the 55th anniversary of the country's independence. On February 17-19, 2020, the delegation of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the RF headed by its Chairwoman V.I. Matvienko made an official visit to Zambia. During her negotiations with President E. Lungu and in her speech in the local parliament it was stated that Zambia is a reliable partner for Russia, with which it keeps the relationships of mutually beneficial cooperation. It was also noticed that Russia appreciates the high level of partnership of our countries on the international platforms, and that the regular political dialogue between them gives the possibility to support each other in issues of the international agenda.

According to the Russian Export Centre (REC), in 2019 the volume of Russian-Zambian trade was at the level of 98,2 million dollars (9,9 million dollars in 2018). In 2019, Russian export was at the level of 14 million dollars, import – of 84,2 million dollars. In the second half of 2020, the turnover of Russia and Zambia composed 6,1 million dollars (including 45% of foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco, and 19% of chemicals).

Zambia is a member of Southern African Development Community (SADC). Its economy develops in a close connexion with other members of SADC. The new Zambian leader as a successful businessman and manager is bound to be aware of the positive perspectives of future development of political, trade and economic relationship with Russia.

The transit of power in Zambia was peaceful. The basic directions of its foreign policy and economic relations with Russia will hopefully persist. In recent years Zambia has been facing the problem of deficit of energy, necessary, above all, for the functioning and development of its mining sector. It is most probable that the new country's leadership will appreciate the importance of the future execution of the Russia-Zambia project in the field of peaceful nuclear energy development approved by ex-president E.Lungu. In March 2021 the governmental delegation of Zambia headed by its then Minister of finance Bwalya Ngandu visited Moscow

and met the directors of the "Rostselmash" company. It would not be farsighted to ignore the work done by the previous government of Zambia.

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