



**2021 Local Self-Government Elections**  
**Official Pre-Election Period Monitoring**  
**II Interim Report**  
**(August 31 – September 22)**

September 23, 2021

This report was prepared by the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union and the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF). The opinions expressed herein belong solely to the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy and may not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the US Government, the European Union, or OSGF.



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## I. Introduction

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) started monitoring of pre-election period for 2 October, 2021 Local Self-government Elections on 1 June. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union (EU) financially support the monitoring efforts. ISFED provides legal advice and assistance to those whose rights were violated on political grounds during the current election period. The legal aid component is supported by Open Society – Georgia Foundation.

The second interim report of monitoring of official pre-election campaign covers the period from 31 August up to 22 September, as well as a few separate events that either began before 31 August and carried over into the reporting period, or became known during the monitoring period.

## II. Key findings

The following key trends were identified during the reporting period through ISFED's observation mission:

- The dynamics of the current pre-election campaign were significantly shaken by the publication on 13 September of information about covert surveillance by the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG). According to the reports, representatives of various media outlets received a link through social networks to a website hosting information about alleged surveillance of and collection of personal information about members of religious organizations by the SSSG. In addition to religious organizations, journalists, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and representatives of diplomatic missions were reportedly subject to surveillance;<sup>1</sup>
- It was alarming to hear the information, aired by TV Pirveli on September 11, 2021, that the SSSG was collecting information about school principals and teachers and creating so-called dossiers. The political views of persons employed in the educational institutions and the party activities of their family members have, in some cases, led to the termination of employment contracts with them. This includes public school principals whose six-year term employment contracts expired in the run-up to the 2020 parliamentary elections and were no longer extended as they fell victim of discrimination;
- On the night of September 17, banners with political content appeared in the capital and several major cities of Georgia displaying images of not only politicians and election subjects, but media representatives as well. Similar banners with violent content, depicting various politicians or members of the media have been posted several times in the past. Propaganda of violence during the election period is prohibited, as is an anonymous donation. ISFED appealed to the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the State Audit Office of Georgia (SAO) to investigate and respond to the case within their competences;
- During the reporting period, the process of staffing of precinct election commissions (PECs) by authorized parties was noteworthy. Not all the authorized parties were able to utilize the quotas for appointing members to the commissions. As such, some of the district election commissions (DECs) announced competitions to fill up to 17 commission members. It should be noted that the

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<sup>1</sup> The Prosecutor General's Office of Georgia has launched an investigation into the fact of violation of the secret of private communication on the grounds of a crime committed under Article 158, Parts 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code of Georgia. At the same time, the parliamentary opposition came up with the idea of establishing an investigative commission. The Public Defender also expressed readiness to join the commission.

proportion between members selected on professional basis and party-appointed members in such polling stations is violated: in those PECs, where additional commission members were appointed by DEC, the number of members appointed on a professional basis exceeds the number of members appointed by the parties;

- While monitoring the first sessions of the PECs, it was noticeable that the commissioners had little information about which political party nominated them. On a number of occasions, individuals appointed by DEC were surprised that they were not nominated by a political party. Also, some of the members appointed by opposition parties did not know specifically which party nominated them; They considered themselves to be the representatives of the ruling party and only found out a name of the nominating party during trainings, when filling out a registration form. This caused a discontent among some of them;
- With election day approaching, similar to previous elections, the nature of the violations observed during the pre-election period is getting more severe. Facts of physical confrontation and wounding of opposition supporters with a cold weapon were registered;
- There are still cases of dismissals from work and pressure / threats on political grounds. It is noteworthy that there were several cases of pressuring opposition candidates to withdraw from the race. Such a trend is observed throughout the country;
- There are again signs of the use of administrative resources for partisan purposes, in favor of the ruling party candidates. The tendency of participation of unauthorized persons in the election campaign, usually in favor of the ruling party, is still present and includes a large-scale campaigning on Facebook during working hours by public officials and other public sector employees;
- There were cases of violence against journalists while performing their duties, which also showed signs of illegal interference in the work of media. On 7 September, the operator of TV Pirveli was deliberately hit by a car while covering a story on a special police operation in Ponichala. The video footage shows the car plates. On 15 September, according to the cameraman and a journalist of Mtavari TV, they were physically assaulted when filming a story in the Kareli office of the Georgian Dream, where the cameraman was thrown from the second floor and received multiple injuries.
- Since the start of the official election campaign inclusive of 21 September, ISFED filed 27 applications and complaints with election commissions, courts, and other relevant agencies to address violations reported by the organization. The range of violations appealed includes the following: use of administrative resources in the election process; participation of unauthorized persons in the campaign; campaigning on Facebook by public sector employees during working hours; participation of election commission members in the party campaigning meetings; gathering of public servants on account of official matters for the electoral purposes; political campaigning on the official website of an administrative body; facts containing signs of vote-buying;
- Under the free legal aid project, the organization filed 19 lawsuits in public courts across the country to protect the rights of individuals dismissed from public service, state or municipal LEPLs, non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities, and public schools on allegedly political

grounds.

During the reporting period and based on its observation, ISFED revealed: two facts of politically motivated physical violence; four facts of dismissal or pressure to resign on allegedly political grounds; 20 facts of pressure/intimidation/obstruction on allegedly political grounds; 15 facts of alleged misuse of administrative resources and participation of unauthorized persons in the pre-election campaign; five facts of alleged vote buying; one case of campaigning by an acting official; five facts of politicization of educational institutions; one case of pressure against ISFED observer. Across the country, damage of campaign materials was observed. Similar to previous elections, high-ranking clergy is again present at the pre-election campaign and candidate nomination events of the ruling party.

### III. Legislative amendments

According to the agreement signed on 19 April and brokered by the President of the European Council Charles Michel, the Constitution should be amended to ensure that next parliamentary elections are held under a fully proportional electoral system. For the next two parliamentary elections the threshold should be between natural and two per cent. The second issue concerned the number of members of parliament (MP) needed to form a faction in parliament. According to the agreement, a group of at least four MPs will be able to form a parliamentary faction. It would be possible to include MPs from other parties as well.<sup>2</sup>

In order to reflect these provisions of the agreement, it was necessary to amend the Constitution of Georgia, as these issues are regulated by the basic law of the country. Accordingly, the draft constitutional law On Amendments to the Constitutional Law of Georgia was submitted to the Parliament of Georgia. According to the draft, the next two parliamentary elections will be held under a fully proportional electoral system and two per cent threshold. Also, the number of faction members in the current and next two convocations of Parliament should not be less than four.<sup>3</sup> On 18 July, the organizational commission to ensure the public consultations around the bill was established.<sup>4</sup> And from September, the bill moved to the consideration at the plenary session.

Part of the constitutional amendments concerned the rules for electing the Prosecutor General. The bill called for the election of the Prosecutor General by a three-fifths majority in the next two convocations. If no candidate was elected with such a quorum twice, the Parliament would appoint the Attorney General by a majority of the full membership. However, term of service for such an appointee would be limited to one year only.

Following the withdrawal of the ruling party from the 19 April agreement, the issue of constitutional amendments came under question, however, according to the chairman of the Georgian Dream Party Irakli Kobakhidze, despite the annulment of the agreement, the ruling party would still implement the amendments as a demonstration of a good will of the party.<sup>5</sup> However, the ruling party still rejected some

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<sup>2</sup> 19 April, 2021 Agreement - A way ahead for Georgia, Ambitious Electoral Reform, page 3

[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/210418\\_mediation\\_way\\_ahead\\_for\\_publication\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/210418_mediation_way_ahead_for_publication_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Draft Constitutional Law of Georgia on Amendments to the Constitutional Law of Georgia -

<https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/278611?>

<sup>4</sup> Resolution of Parliament - <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/279430?>

<sup>5</sup> "Irakli Kobakhidze to the Opposition - The April 19 agreement has been annulled and the constitutional amendments are being implemented from beginning to end with our good political will - remember all this well!" - <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/672914-irakli-kobaxize-opozicias-19-aprilis-shetanxmeba-anulirebulia-da-sakonstitucio-cvilebebi-tavidan-bolomde-chveni-ketili-politikuri-nebit-xorcieldeba-es-qvelaperi-kargad-daimaxsovret>

of its obligations under the agreement, including those related to the election of the Prosecutor General. Irakli Kobakhidze called the proposed rule a legal nonsense and noted that after the annulment of the 19 April agreement, the ruling party was under no obligation to reflect it in the constitution.<sup>6</sup> According to Kobakhidze, because the proposed change reduced the degree of independence of the institution and the opposition could not present convincing arguments in support of a such a rule, the voting on the part of the bill that related to the change of the rules for electing the Prosecutor General was removed from the agenda.<sup>7</sup> The opposition considered this position of the Georgian Dream as an attempt to maintain its influence over the prosecutor's office and supported the rule enshrined in the 19 April agreement.

The European Union (EU)<sup>8</sup> and the US<sup>9</sup> diplomatic missions criticized the non-compliance with the agreement related to the change of the rules for appointing the Prosecutor General. According to them, the change, which envisaged the election of the Prosecutor General with a qualified majority instead of a simple majority, would in the future reduce the risk of appointing a Prosecutor General by one party only.

As the issue of changing the rule for electing a Prosecutor General is part of a bill that also includes a fully proportional electoral system, reducing the threshold for parliamentary election and reducing the number of MPs required to form a faction to four, there was a danger that the constitutional amendments would not garner the required number of votes. However, given the importance of proportional elections and the low threshold, the amendments were unanimously supported by 126 MPs, including those from the opposition, and the bill was passed with the first reading.<sup>10</sup> At this stage, the Parliament continues to discuss the draft constitutional amendments.

The Parliament also approved an important bill stemming from the 19 April agreement and addressing the amnesty in connection with the 20 June events. According to the Law of Georgia on Amnesty, all persons who committed crimes related to the events of 20-21 June, 2019 and who do not refuse to be granted amnesty in accordance with the rules established by this Law, shall be released from criminal liability and punishment, as well as probation. The amnesty also applies to a person who has prepared the crime or attempted to commit a crime related to the events of 20-21 June, 2019. A person to whom the amnesty applies, will be deemed not to have been convicted.<sup>11</sup> The project was initiated by the Georgian Dream and approved by 79 votes to 15 against.<sup>12</sup> The opposition submitted an alternative bill that failed to gain enough support.

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<sup>6</sup> "Irakli Kobakhidze on the Rule of Election of the Prosecutor General - Due to the annulment of the April 19 agreement, we have no obligation to reflect this ugliness in the Constitution" - <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/672846-irakli-kobaxize-genprokuroris-archevis-cesze-gamomdinare-ikidan-rom-anulirebulia-19-aprilis-shetanxmeba-chven-ar-gvakvs-aravitari-valdebuleba-es-simaxinje-avsaxot-konstituciashi>

<sup>7</sup> "With 126 votes, the Parliament supported the constitutional changes in the first reading" - [https://parliament.ge/media/news/126-khmit-parlamentma-pirveli-mosmenit-sakonstitutsio-tsvlilebebs-mkhari-dauchira?fbclid=IwAR2dmTE0-Ck5sYqH\\_k9UB23tbm589EyS0wqNPvPhrxML6sMMzr2UEnfXd4g](https://parliament.ge/media/news/126-khmit-parlamentma-pirveli-mosmenit-sakonstitutsio-tsvlilebebs-mkhari-dauchira?fbclid=IwAR2dmTE0-Ck5sYqH_k9UB23tbm589EyS0wqNPvPhrxML6sMMzr2UEnfXd4g)

<sup>8</sup> "Refusal to change the rules for electing a prosecutor is the third failure in two months" - Hartzel - <https://netgazeti.ge/news/562325/>

<sup>9</sup> "Another Broken Promise of the Ruling Party" - US Embassy on Constitutional Amendments - <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/672694-mmartveli-partiis-kidev-erti-gatekhili-pirobaa>

<sup>10</sup> Voting records of the first reading <https://parliament.ge/legislation/22438>

<sup>11</sup> Law of Georgia on Amnesty, Article 1 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5199308?publication=0>

<sup>12</sup> "The parliament adopts the Law on Amnesty with the third reading" - <https://parliament.ge/media/news/parlamentma-amnistiis-shesakheb-kanonproekti-mesame-mosmenit-miigho>

## IV. Election Administration

### a. Central Election Commission

During the reporting period, the Central Election Commission (CEC) made several decisions regarding electoral procedures, including proportional voter lists and the pilot project on the use of electronic voting technologies.<sup>13</sup>

According to the CEC decision,<sup>14</sup> some election procedures in Krtsanisi District # 4 for the 2 October, 2021 municipal elections will be carried out using electronic technologies. This is a pilot project. The rules and conditions for conducting the election procedure in Krtsanisi District #4 by electronic means were determined by the CEC decree.<sup>15</sup>

Based on yet another CEC decision,<sup>16</sup> in case when there are less than the minimum number of candidates in the registered party list as established by the Code, the election registration of the party list will be canceled in exceptional cases.<sup>17</sup> This precludes the cancellation of a party list due to the resignation of candidates due to personal or family reasons. The CEC had made similar decisions during prior local elections as well.

The opposition parties responded positively to this decision. It is noteworthy that after the submission of proportional electoral lists by the parties in electoral districts, some of the candidates withdrew. Apart from the removal of a candidate for objective reasons, this particular challenge is mainly related to the proportional electoral lists of the opposition parties.<sup>18</sup> Opposition political parties talk about pressure on their candidates, which leads to the withdrawal of the candidate.

On 19 September, by the ordinance of the CEC, the CEC Advisory Group ceased to exist as seven members of the group withdrew.<sup>19</sup> According to the Election Code, the Advisory Group should consist of at least nine and not more than 15 members. By CEC Ordinance #156 / 2021 of 13 August, 2021, the Advisory

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<sup>13</sup> "Preparation for the implementation of a pilot project in #4 Krtsanisi District using electronic technologies" - <https://cesko.ge/geo/list/show/125087-mzadeba-4-krtsanisis-saarchevno-olqshi-eleqtronuli-teqnologiebis-gamokenebit-sapilote-proeqtis-gansakhortsieleblad>

<sup>14</sup> Decree of the Central Election Commission of Georgia #58/2021 of 3 September, 2021

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5252172?publication=0>

<sup>15</sup> Annex on Rules and Conditions for Implementing Some Electoral Procedures by Electronic Means for the 2021 Elections of Representative Bodies to the Decree of the Central Election Commission of Georgia 858/2021 of September 3, 2021 "On Determining the Rules and Conditions for Implementing Some Electoral Procedures by Electronic Means in Some Election District for the 2 October, 2021 Elections of the Representative Body of the Municipality - Sakrebulo and Self-Governing Community"

- <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5252172?publication=0>

<sup>16</sup> Decree of the Central Election Commission of Georgia #60/2021 of 7 September, 2021

[https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5253113?publication=0&fbclid=IwARONNaNUmFHOFCk3q4pH7M\\_tf6BJkKHEUI0W3IC4990EpGLSJ8zmXN537Bg](https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5253113?publication=0&fbclid=IwARONNaNUmFHOFCk3q4pH7M_tf6BJkKHEUI0W3IC4990EpGLSJ8zmXN537Bg)

<sup>17</sup> The election registration of the party list will be canceled only in the following cases: 1. The citizenship of the registered candidate has been terminated and the document confirming the mentioned has been officially submitted to the election commission; 2. The registered candidate was restricted from passive suffrage after the registration, and a document confirming this was officially submitted to the election commission; 3. A registered candidate was recalled by his / her nominating party no later than the 12th day before election day, in accordance with the rules established by law.

<sup>18</sup> Pursuant to paragraph 143 (3) of the Election Code, the number of candidates for Sakrebulo membership in the submitted party list shall not be less than the number of members elected by the proportional system and shall not exceed three times this number.

<sup>19</sup> Ordinance of the Central Election Commission of Georgia #285 / 2021 terminating the validity of Ordinance of the Central Election Commission of Georgia #156/2021 of 13 August "On the approval of the composition of the advisory group of the Central Election Commission of Georgia for the October 2, 2021 elections of the representative body of the municipality - Sakrebulo and self-governing community" <https://cesko.ge/res/docs/20210920001018gank285.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3j9xDU-QADUUC-5llpyTWU8Ss1NThwFkq40GBWtvKfrieTeHUR0EevXJo>

Group was approved comprising 12 members. Due to the withdrawal of seven members, there were less than the minimum number of members set by the law left in the group.

## **b. Activities of district and precinct election commissions**

### **i. Trainings for PEC members and election of leadership**

During the reporting period, ISFED long-term observers monitored the training of precinct election commissions (PECs) and then the first sessions of the commissions. Trainings for commission members were usually followed by holding the first session of PEC on the spot, rather than in polling stations. This was caused by COVID regulations. At the first sessions of PECs, the precinct commission officials - chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary - were elected from the professional members appointed by the district election commission (DEC). ISFED monitored the process in all districts, observing trainings and sessions of several PECs. The following key trends were identified in this process:

In fact, in some polling stations, the trainings of PEC members and then the first PEC sessions were not attended by members appointed by the opposition, mainly those nominated by the United National Movement (UNM), as well as European Georgia, Lelo and Girchi. Members of Third Force - Strategy Builder, European Socialists, Aleko Elisashvili-Citizens were present relatively often.<sup>20</sup>

UNM filed an application with several DECs and refused to participate in the first sessions. ISFED observed such a form of protest in Akhaltsikhe, Shuakhevi, Tkibuli, Gori, Baghdati, Samgori, Mtatsminda, Krtsanisi and Rustavi districts.

Given that amendments in the Election Code envisage some novelties with regard to the voting procedures, the trainings for PEC members are of great importance. Absence from trainings can negatively affect the competence of the commission members and may create problems on election day.

### **ii. The first sessions of PECs and election of leadership**

The trainings of the PEC members were followed by the first sessions of the commissions, in which part of the commission members appointed by the opposition parties did not participate.

The absence of members from PEC sessions has, in some cases, resulted in a failed quorum. For example, the first session of Lagodekhi # 6 PEC was postponed due to lack of quorum. The first sessions of the commissions of several precincts of Saburtalo, Samgori # 22, Rustavi # 4, Tetrtskaro # 9, also could not be held at the appointed time due to the absence of a sufficient number of members.

In most cases, no dissenting opinion was expressed when electing PEC leadership. As observed, in a number of cases candidates for chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary of the commission were predetermined.<sup>21</sup> For most of the vacancies, only one candidate was nominated. Some of those elected to PEC leadership positions are supporters of the ruling party on the ground.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Absence of PEC members was observed in: Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni, Marneuli, Kobuleti, Poti, Gori, Kaspi, Lagodekhi, Gurjaani, Ambrolauri, Kharagauli, Baghdati, Zestaponi, Khoni, Abasha, Martvili, Tskaltubo, Kuatisi, Samtredia, Saburtalo, Mtatsminda, Samgori, Gldani, Rustavi and Mtskheta.

<sup>21</sup> For example, similar cases were reported in **Kobuleti** PECs #24, #22, #27, #28, #29, #31, #41, #42, #45, #46; **Tsalenjikha** PECs #14 და #15; **Rustavi** PECs #1, #2, #4, #9; **Mtskheta** PEC #8; **Tskaltubo** PECs #3, #4, #32, #33, #63, #64; **Baghdati** PEC #9; **Poti** PEC #13.

<sup>22</sup> For example, in **Borjomi**, PEC #5 elected Nata Kopadze as Deputy Chair – she is employed at Borjomi Sakrebulo and is active supporter, PR and photographer of Georgian Dream. In **Khobi**, at Pirveli Maisi PEC #29, Commission Secretary had a newspaper of Georgian Dream

It should be noted that in some cases, as observed by ISFED, the polling stations are small in size and may not be convenient considering the 17 members of the commission and the large number of other authorized persons will be present in the polling station on election day.<sup>23</sup>

### iii. Appointment of PEC members by parties

Part of the opposition parties failed to appoint a commission member to all PECs within the timeframe set by law. Accordingly, after the expiration of this term, DEC announced competitions<sup>24</sup> to fully compose PECs. Consequently, the vacancies were filled by the members elected by DEC instead of the members appointed by the parties.

It is noteworthy that in such cases the ratio between the professional members and the members appointed by the parties, which is defined by law, is disturbed – different PECs might have different configuration of PEC members.

As observed by ISFED, some PEC members appointed by opposition parties did not know which party nominated them, some of them considered themselves representatives of the ruling party and found the name of the nominating party only when filling out a registration form at a training. This revelation upset some of them.

Before the first session of **Lanchkhuti** PEC #35, at the beginning of a training, when calling the list of the members of the commission, two commissioners: Ana Doborjginidze (Girchi) and Tamar Murvanidze (European Democrats of Georgia) expressed dissatisfaction as they anticipated to have been nominated by the ruling party. They left in protest.

Members of **Kharagauli** PEC # 15 asked each other who nominated them when filling out the attendance sheet. The trainer placed a piece of paper in front of them, listing each member and their nominating electoral subject. One member of the commission expressed surprise as she found out she had been appointed by a DEC, which she did not expect.

At the trainings for PECs #46 and #10 in **Samtredia**, members of the commissions also expressed surprise as they did not have information about which party had nominated them. The members of the commission appointed by Girchi and European Socialists protested. They refused to join the commission because they expected to have been appointed by the Georgian Dream.

Out of nine or 10 members from **Gldani** PECs # 21, # 24, # 25, # 26, some could not name which subject appointed them.

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majoritarian MP Irakli Khakhubia on the table; Member of **Mtskheta** PEC #2 Maia Khundadze – who was later elected as Chair, criticized opposition-appointed members who did not attend the meeting. At first, she did not allow journalists to film the session, but later reversed the decision. Maia Khundadze is Dimitri Khundadze's sister – Dimitri Khundadze is a Member of Parliament from Georgian Dream.

<sup>23</sup> For example, **Rustavi** PECs #10, #13, #14, #36, #37, #38 80, #81.

<sup>24</sup> In **Gori**, for example, the European Socialists and Girchi have almost no appointed members in precinct commissions. Also, the party Aleko Elisashvili-Citizens failed to appoint PEC members in 43 PECs in **Kobuleti** within the established period; The same party could not appoint members to PECs in **Chokhatauri**, **Khoni** and **Kvareli** districts. Aleko Elisashvili-Citizens and Girchi failed to nominate commission members to more than 50 PECs in **Batumi**. In **Tkibuli**, Girchi and the European Socialists failed to appoint commission members in some polling stations, namely Girchi in four polling stations and European Socialists in five. These PECs are: # 5, # 15, # 26, # 28, # 30, # 31, # 33, # 34. In **Rustavi**, in PECs # 1, # 12 and # 17, the party European Socialist could not ensure the nomination of candidates. In **Tsalka**, the authorized parties in PEC # 11 did not exercise their powers and did not appoint commission members within the timeframe set by law. In **Mtskheta**, European Socialists did not nominate candidate for 12 vacant positions.



In the case of **Mtskheta** PECs # 1, # 2, and # 21 it also appeared that some members did not know whether they were appointed by a party or by the DEC; At PEC # 3, one member of the commission appointed by the district verbally dictated to the other members which party they were nominated from. During the session, it was revealed that a member appointed by the European Democrats had signed the attendance sheet as a representative of the Georgian Dream. After that, Nino Shermadini, who was elected chairman, corrected the name of the nominating party; A member of PEC # 4 told ISFED that she had been nominated by the Georgian Dream, but in reality she had been nominated by the European Democrats. Later, a fuss ensued over who was appointed by whom. Members of PEC # 17 copied from a piece of paper in front of them whom they had been appointed by as they did not know.

Bella Jikuri, one of the members of **Dusheti** PEC #38, while signing the attendance form, indicated that she was a member appointed by the DEC, but it turned out that she was a member nominated by the Georgian Dream party. After this incident, prior to the beginning of PEC session, DEC members read the list of PEC members and highlighted who was appointed by whom.

At the opening of **Saburtalo** PEC # 54, one of the members refused to sign the attendance sheet because he did not know what his duties were and refused to sign until they were explained. The trainer then asked him about nominating subject and received an answer that he was appointed by the DEC, although it turned out that he was, in fact, nominated by Aleko Elisashvili-Citizens party.

### **c. Participation of underrepresented groups in elections**

#### **i. Challenges related to exercising of active suffrage by underrepresented groups**

Adaptation of the election environment is an obstacle for the realization of the suffrage of persons with disabilities. To date, most polling stations have not been adapted. According to CEC, there are 3,673 polling stations in Georgia, of which 257 are easily accessible and only 832 have ramps.<sup>25</sup> As a result of the amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia on the Election Code of Georgia, for the 2021 local elections, state, municipal and legal entities of public law are required to provide information about the adapted polling station to the election administration. In addition, buildings allocated for polling stations should be accessible to all voters. International agreements signed by Georgia directly oblige the state to protect persons with disabilities at the stage of implementation of the policy and program and to create appropriate conditions for their equal participation. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is of particular importance as it directly obliges the state to ensure equal, effective and complete participation of persons with disabilities in the public life, including the protection of their active and passive suffrage.

Among others, the body responsible for the administration of electoral processes - CEC - has an obligation to increase the participation of persons from under-represented groups in the electoral process and to promote the realization of their suffrage. In order to exercise active suffrage, wheelchair-bound voters can cast their ballots at any of the adapted precincts within the boundaries of the relevant local majoritarian district. For this they must apply to the relevant DEC or PEC no later than the 6th day before election day.

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<sup>25</sup> Map of the Central Election Commission: <https://map.cec.gov.ge/>

## ii. Challenges related to exercising of passive suffrage by underrepresented groups

Following the amendments to the Election Code in 2021, political parties are required to include one member of the opposite sex in each of the three candidates on party list for Sakrebulo elections. Against this background, under the proportional electoral system, 42.52% of female and 57.48% of male candidates registered for municipal elections. However, the number of female candidates nominated under the majoritarian electoral system is still alarmingly low: only 17.48% of registered candidates are women and 82.52% are men.<sup>26</sup>

Only 17.5% of the candidates running for a position of a mayor of a self-governing city are women and 82.5% are men. 8.96% of the mayoral candidates nominated in 59 self-governing communities are women and 91.04% are men.<sup>27</sup>

## V. Media environment

During the pre-election period, the ruling party still refuses to participate in the media affiliated with the opposition political forces. In some cases, the electoral subjects of opposition parties openly speak about them not being invited to the programs containing pro-government narratives.

On 5 September, the ruling party's mayoral candidate Kakha Kaladze told reporters that, despite several offers from TV stations, he would only take part in political debates organized by the public broadcaster.<sup>28</sup> Coalition for Media Advocacy criticized the statement and named the refusal to participate in debates as a barrier to voter information. The statement also mentions cases when other candidates of the ruling party refused to participate in regional televisions.<sup>29</sup> On 8 September, Tbilisi mayoral candidate Giorgi Gakharia issued an official statement accusing Imedi of spreading one-sided information. According to Gakharia, the TV station refuses to cover his campaign, which deprives him of the opportunity to respond to criticism from opponents. Gakharia appeals to Imedi TV to allow him to participate in the programs aired by the channel.<sup>30</sup>

On 21 September, the Public Broadcaster hosted a political debate between Tbilisi mayoral candidates. It is noteworthy that all registered Tbilisi mayoral candidates were invited to the broadcaster. The debates among the candidates mostly focused on political issues, therefore, it is important to continue the debates among the candidates on issues of local importance in the future and via various TV formats, so that a wide circle of voters can make informed choices.

On 10 September, 2021, the National Communications Commission decided to modify the broadcasting authorization of Alt Info Ltd, on the basis of which Alt Info Ltd will broadcast through a multiplex platform.

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<sup>26</sup> Gender statistics:

[https://genderstatistics.cec.gov.ge/ge/gender?tour\\_id=20&voters\\_list\\_category\\_ids%5B%5D=2&election\\_subject\\_category\\_ids%5B%5D=1&ob\\_server\\_category\\_ids%5B%5D=1](https://genderstatistics.cec.gov.ge/ge/gender?tour_id=20&voters_list_category_ids%5B%5D=2&election_subject_category_ids%5B%5D=1&ob_server_category_ids%5B%5D=1)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Statement of Kakha Kaladze <https://bit.ly/2YNuBsP>

<sup>29</sup> Statement of Coalition for Media Advocacy <https://www.gartia.ge/ka/ganckhadebebi>

<sup>30</sup> Statement of Giorgi Gakharia <https://netgazeti.ge/news/562707/>

The Alt Info applied to the commission with a request to modify its authorization on 6 September,<sup>31</sup> thus expressing its desire to distribute TV content.<sup>32</sup>

ISFED considers the decision of the Communications Commission to modify the authorization of Alt Info and to expand its broadcasting somewhat risky.

ISFED's social media monitoring back in 2018 revealed that Alt Info was distributing anti-liberal, openly anti-Western and anti-immigration messages through its Facebook pages. Moreover, in 2020, the organization revealed a network of Facebook pages, accounts, and groups connected to Alt Info that continued to spread anti-Western narratives and narratives harmful to the state's interests. Alt Info disseminated its content on Facebook in bad faith and in violation of Facebook's Community Standards, in a coordinated and inauthentic way and misled Facebook users. As such, Facebook removed the organization's networks from the platform and shut down its accounts.<sup>33</sup>

Particularly alarming was the wave of large-scale violent rallies in Tbilisi on 5-6 July, organized – among others - by Alt Info leaders, which turned into a large-scale violence against journalists. Moreover, this media outlet directly called on citizens to join the violent rally on 5 July. ISFED provided information about Alt Info's page to Facebook precisely because of hate speech content and mobilization of violent groups. On 19 July, Facebook deleted Alt Info's page.<sup>34</sup>

Following the violent events of 5 July, the Office of Prosecutor did not initiate criminal proceedings for organizing mass violence and publicly inciting violent acts. The Ombudsman's statement of 6 September mentions that the official video footage released by the media suggests that Zurab Makharadze, one of its anchors, and other representatives were calling for violence live on Alt Info.<sup>35</sup>

Particularly disturbing were the facts of violence against journalists while performing their professional duties, which also contain signs of illegal interference in the work of media. On 7 September, the operator of TV Pirveli was deliberately hit by a car while covering a story on a special police operation in Ponichala. The video footage shows the car plates. According to the head of TV Pirveli news service, the incident was committed by a person with some connection with the detainees. On 15 September, according to the cameraman and a journalist of Mtavari TV, cameraman Levan Ablotia and Beka Korshia were physically assaulted when filming a story in the Kareli office of the Georgian Dream. The cameraman was thrown from the second floor and sustained multiple physical injuries.

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<sup>31</sup> Decision to modify broadcasting license of LT Alt Info

<https://comcom.ge/ge/legal-acts/solutions/2021--21-2-489.page>

<sup>32</sup> On 9 September, a meeting was held at the Communications Commission, which was attended by Shota Martinenko, Director of Alt Info Ltd. According to the decision of the Communications Commission, the commission did not find any obstacles for the modification of the authorization. Accordingly, broadcasting technology of the multiplex platform of "Stereo +" Ltd was additionally added to the broadcasting technology of Alt Info. According to Article 2 of the Law of Georgia on Electronic Communications, broadcasting through a multiplex platform combines TV programs and related data and is an opportunity for broadcasters to disseminate information in digital format on the television network. Pursuant to Article 45<sup>1</sup> of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, if an authorized entity intends to modify the type of broadcasting, it is obliged to notify the Commission and the change must be reflected in the register of authorized entities. At the same time, the Commission conducts simple administrative proceedings to resolve the issue of modification of authorization and makes the relevant decision. Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, Article 38 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32866?publication=60>

<sup>33</sup> Alt Info Coordinated Covert Operation on Facebook

<https://fb.watch/7Zz40vp2pu/>

<sup>34</sup> Facebook has deleted Alt Info's official Facebook page: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31365991.html>

<sup>35</sup> Statement of Public Defender of Georgia

<https://bit.ly/2YGj26u>

## **VI. Violations and trends identified by monitoring**

### **d. Physical violence on alleged political grounds**

#### **Dmanisi**

On 21 September, two opposition supporters were wounded with a cold weapon during a pre-election meeting in the village of Gantiadi, Dmanisi Municipality, organized by the joint opposition candidate, incumbent Mayor Giorgi Tatuashvili. The wounded were first taken to a local hospital and then to Tbilisi.

Next day, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MIA) announced that it had arrested the son of a majoritarian Georgian Dream candidate on charges of committing the crime. The investigation is underway under Article 117 and Article 126, Part 1, Subparagraph B of the Criminal Code of Georgia - intentional gross damage to health and gang violence.

#### **Rustavi**

On 21 September, UNM supporter Ivane Gvelesiani was physically assaulted at the entrance of his apartment. He was diagnosed with a broken nasal bone and a concussion. He says that a representative of the Georgian Dream threatened him a few days before the attack. Gvelesiani is actively involved in the pre-election campaign of UNM mayoral candidate Davit Kirkitadze.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has launched an investigation under Article 126 of the Criminal Code.

### **e. Dismissal from work on political grounds, coercion to resign**

#### **Gurjaani**

Giorgi Solomnishvili, Shashiani-Vazisubani majoritarian candidate for the party For Georgia, who works in the Gurjaani Municipal Service - non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Rural Waters, was called by the lawyer of the service Kote Martashvili and asked to write a resignation letter. Head of the organization Levan Tsintsalashvili requested the same and added, that if Solomnishvili did not resign voluntarily, he would be dismissed on the basis of an order. Giorgi Solomnishvili did not write a statement and considered himself fired.

After ISFED inquired about the issue, Kote Martashvili clarified that Giorgi Solomnishvili had not been fired and no such order had been issued.

#### **Gori**

Following the expiration of the term of the director of the Gori Giorgi Eristavi Professional State Drama Theater – Givi Tsverava, the artistic director of the same theater Davit Chkhartishvili again nominated Tsverava for the position before the Minister of Culture. However, the Deputy Minister wrote a letter to the artistic director requesting nomination of a different candidate, noting that Tsverava had occupied the position since 2017 and “there were no tangible developments” in the theatre during his tenure as a director.

Givi Tsverava is a member of the party For Georgia and a candidate on the proportional list nominated in Gori district. Tsverava told ISFED that the refusal to extend the contract was politically motivated and had

nothing to do with the development of the theater. According to Tsverava, out of 20 theater directors, whose 4-year contracts expired in September, all were re-appointed at the nomination of the artistic directors except him. He was handed the relevant order on 9 September, according to which, due to the expiration of his contract, from 18 September, he was dismissed from the position of theater director.

### **Kobuleti**

On 2 August, Leri and Mirian Katamadze, brothers living in the village of Kokhi of Kobuleti Municipality, who worked for the Adjara Criminal Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, were summoned late at night by Khvicha Kadagidze, the head of the Batumi Division, and requested to write a resignation letter without explaining the reasons for such a decision. According to the brothers, they were fired because they were appointed during the time of Konstantine Ananiashvili, who now represents the party For Georgia.

According to the head of the Kobuleti branch of For Georgia party, Leri and Mirian Katamadze had been performing their duties with dignity, did not engage in political activities and they were fired illegally.

### **Tianeti**

Contract of Nino Gojiashvili, an employee of the Akhalsopeli village administration, expired on 1 August. It was not renewed.

According to Nino Gojiashvili's brother, Davit Gojiashvili, a member of For Georgia party and a majoritarian candidate from Akhalsopeli, Malkhaz Sinjaradze - a representative of Tianeti mayoral candidate Tamaz Mechiauri - warned him that if he did not "stop", his sister would be dismissed.

Nino Gojiashvili has been working as a specialist in Akhalsopeli village Gamgeoba of Tianeti municipality for six years.

Malkhaz Sinjaradze denied this fact to an ISFED observer, saying that Nino Gojiashvili's contract had simply expired and she resigned voluntarily because she lived in Tbilisi and could not commute to work. Nino Gojiashvili called Sinjaradze's statement a lie and noted that she was released on political grounds.

#### **f. Allegedly politically motivated pressure / threats / obstruction**

### **Tsalenjikha**

- According to Lali Shamugia, the majoritarian candidate for For Georgia party, she withdrew from the race of Chale-Muzhava majoritarian district of Tsalenjikha municipality because of pressure, namely: State Security Services officials threatened to fire her son and son-in-law if she did not withdraw her candidacy. Lali Shamugia is a teacher at the first public school in the Chale community of Tsalenjikha Municipality.
- On 6 September, in the same majoritarian constituency, Dato Khasaia, nominated on behalf of the United National Movement, withdrew his candidacy. He is a teacher at the first public school of Chale community. According to UNM, due to the fact that Dato Khasaia was a very strong candidate, he was pressured.

As a result, the only candidate contesting in the current elections in the Chale-Muzhava constituency, is a Georgian Dream candidate.

- According to information provided to ISFED observer, Jgali-Medani's majoritarian MP candidate from the Georgian Dream Lira Ghurtskaia, who is also Head of the Educational Resource Center, threatened to fire a teacher whose spouse is a UNM majoritarian candidate from the same village, unless he withdrew from the race. The candidate confirmed this information to the observer, but noted that, following negotiations, threats / pressure were no longer being used at this stage and that he was not going to withdraw from the race.
- According to Gela Abuladze, For Georgia's majoritarian candidate in Tsalenjikha Municipality, a politically motivated investigation was launched against him following his engagement in politics. Gela Abuladze has been running a family business (livestock) for many years and had previously registered a plot of land years ago. Currently, the investigative body accuses him of illegal land registration and had summoned his family members for questioning.

### **Samtredia**

On 19 September, Nika Sakandelidze, the majoritarian candidate of the political party Third Force - Strategy Builder in Ianeti-Bashi, was pressured and threatened. He was illegally deprived of his liberty and he was forced to withdraw his candidacy on the basis of his own statement. Threats were also made against Sakandelidze's family. He was questioned by the police about the incident.

According to the party representatives, the news about Sakandelidze's withdrawal from the race was aired on Imedi TV before the relevant application was registered with the DEC, which raises additional questions.

### **Khashuri**

According to Zviad Tepnadze, Khashuri mayoral candidate of For Georgia party, the investigation service of the Ministry of Finance has entered his companies. The agency became interested in the documentation of Teona Ltd and Bocatelo Ltd for the second time this year. Tepnadze says he and his family are threatened with liquidation and property destruction if he does not withdraw his candidacy. Tepnadze says he received threatening letters. He assesses these facts as politically motivated persecution. Tepnadze informed ISFED observer that he is being threatened with: burning his own and company cars and real estate; suspending the business activity; pressure from members of the criminal gangs; physical liquidation of family members; and several cars follow him every day. He calls on the investigating agencies to launch an investigation and said that he would cooperate with the investigation and hand over the evidence as well.

### **Zugdidi**

According to Tsira Chezha, number one on the list of the Labor Party in Zugdidi Municipality, the local government and the State Security Service are pressuring members of the Labor Party to withdraw their candidacy. They are threatened with dismissal, cancellation of social assistance and planting of drugs. She forwarded sms discussion to the ISFED observer.

## **Ninotsminda**

Taguhi Vartanian, chief of the UNM Ninotsminda branch, said she and her family are under pressure and political persecution: her nephew Ashot Vartanian, who worked as a specialist at Ninotsminda Mayor's Office, was fired during the 2020 parliamentary elections. In April 2021, Taguhi Vartanian's sister-in-law Ruzanna Vartanian, who worked at the Ninotsminda Public Health Center, was fired. In mid-April 2021, she herself was dismissed from Ninotsminda Kindergarten. And, a brother who was employed in the same kindergarten was fired at the end of August. Vartanian assesses all of the above as political persecution.

## **Khelvachauri**

On 28 August, an advertising banner of Mikheil Bolkvadze, UNM mayoral candidate, installed near the sports school in Khelvachauri, was stolen. ISFED representative contacted Mikheil Bolkvadze. Bolkvadze told ISFED that the banner was close to the Georgian Dream headquarters, and Georgian Dream supporters had warned him not to install the banner in this area.

Bolkvadze has already appealed to the police with a request to launch an investigation.

## **Khashuri**

According to civic activist Zaza Mekhrishvili, he is being threatened by Mikheil Janashvili - chairman of Khashuri Sakrebulo and the second on the list of the ruling party, because Janashvili does not like his activity on the social network Facebook, where Mekhtishvili runs a page called "Khashuri is my city" and exposes Janashvili for corruption. According to the activist, several months ago Mikheil Janashvili physically assaulted him and a case was launched in this regard. After that he heard that Janashvili passes the threats through his relatives.

Mikheil Janashvili expressed aggression towards ISFED observer, calling Mekhrishvili's accusation absurd.

## **Kakheti**

In early September, a kindergarten manager of a rural kindergarten requested a music teacher to submit a 10-person list of ruling party supporters from the neighborhood. The teacher refused.

Per teacher's will, ISFED is not disclosing the name of the teacher or the village.

## **Akhaltzikhe**

According to the local media outlet [Samkhretis Karibtche](#), governor of Samtskhe-Javakheti region Besik Amiranashvili is exerting pressure on businesses. The meetings with the businessmen were attended by the representatives of the Investigation Services of the Ministry of Finance and State Security Services. Consequently, during the period of 1-16 August, 87 business representatives from Samtskhe-Javakheti region donated a total of 661,000 Gel to the Georgian Dream.

Donor businessmen deny everything and are aggressive towards those interested in the fact.

## **Ninotsminda**

Gayane Ovanesyan, the wife of Hovhannes Ovsepiyan, For Georgia's majoritarian candidate in the village of Heshtia of Ninotsminda, told the party that he would not run in the election. She cited the fact that if her husband ran as a candidate, she would no longer receive hours as a local school teacher, and the family would face other problems as well.

Gevorg Babertsyan, the head of the Ninotsminda branch of For Georgia party and second on the party list for the Sakrebulo elections, who was also the municipal representative of the National Statistics Office of Georgia, was fired on 1 September, 2021 and asked to write a letter of resignation, to which Babertsyan agreed. The manager named party activities as the reason.

It should be noted that Babertsyan's wife Suzana Babertsyan, who works at Ninotsminda State Sanitary Supervision Service, was contacted by her boss Tigran Eghoyan, who said that if her husband did not leave politics, she would also be fired. There is also pressure on Babertsyan's sister, who works at Ninotsminda First Public School. The school principal threatened to dismiss her. Gevorg's sister's husband is also on the proportional electoral list of For Georgia party.

### **Chokhatauri**

According to Lia Chigogidze, the head of the Chokhatauri branch of European Georgia, majoritarian candidate of Georgian Dream Zviad Mamaladze is exerting psychological pressure on two of their majoritarian candidates. According to Chigogidze, the majoritarian MP from Guria Vasil Chigogidze is also exerting psychological pressure on them, summoning the majoritarian candidates of European Georgia and asking them to withdraw their candidacy.

ISFED spoke to both candidates, who wished to remain anonymous. They confirmed the pressure from Zviad Mamaladze and Vasil Chigogidze to withdraw from the race.

### **Adigeni**

- According to Levan Tatoshvili, Samtskhe-Javakheti coordinator of For Georgia party, sons of majoritarian and number four candidate on proportional list Koba Gelashvili - Nika Gelashvili and Akaki Gelashvili – are being threatened. Both were asked by their managers to write letters of resignation unless their father Koba Gelashvili withdrew his candidacy.

According to the head of the Adigeni headquarters, Akaki Gelashvili was asked to write a letter of resignation by the mayor of Adigeni municipality Zakaria Endeladze. The latter calls Tatoshvili's statement a lie and says such a fact never happened.

- Citizen Nuki Iakobashvili [stated](#) that For Georgia party included him in the proportional list for Adigeni Sakrebulo elections against his will. According to Nuki Iakobashvili, he is a supporter of the Georgian Dream and demands an investigation into the illegal use of his personal data against his will.

Levan Tatoshvili, Samtskhe-Javakheti coordinator of For Georgia party, [maintains](#) that this person has been included in the party's proportional list with his consent. Tatoshvili thinks that Nuki Iakobashvili wrote his Facebook post as a result of pressure.

### **Ozurgeti**



According to For Georgia party, their majoritarian candidate from Nasakirali Nona Tunadze withdrew her candidacy on the basis of intimidation and informed her teammates about this by phone. The party's mayoral candidate Gia Tsetskhladze suggests that the candidate's decision was linked to pressure and bribery involving the ruling party's mayoral candidate Avtandil Talakvadze and his brother, MP Archil Talakvadze, who is directly involved in his brother's pre-election campaign.

At the same time, an [audio recording](#) was released, where Nona Tunadze says that she wants to work in school to which the Talakvadzes promise to help.

### **Lagodekhi**

On 3 September, Lagodekhi Municipality Sakrebulo [dismissed](#) Salome Ghonghadze, chairwoman of the Social, Culture, Education and Youth Affairs Commission while she was on leave. Ghonghadze joined the ranks of For Georgia party on 23 August. According to Ghonghadze, she planned to retire after the end of her vacation. She assesses the incident as political persecution. According to her, some members of the Sakrebulo were forced to support the dismissal. This is explained by the fact that when counting the voting results, two ballot papers were marked with geometric figures.

According to Sakrebulo Chairman Karlo Jamburia, the reason for Ghonghadze's dismissal was not a political motive but the prevention of damaging consequences for the Sakrebulo. According to him, Ghonghadze's activities with Giorgi Gakharia's party and with the local representative body would contradict each other, which would have a detrimental result.

### **Abasha**

In Abasha, at the end of August, the owner of the office rented by For Georgia party requested the party to vacate the premises for unknown reasons. In September Georgian Dream party rented the office. It now houses the youth wing of the party.

### **Vani**

On 11 September, during nomination of opposition candidates in Vani, there was an attempt to disrupt the pre-election meeting. [According to the opposition](#), so-called criminal authorities and employees of non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity were involved in the incident.

### **Terjola**

Rusudan Kovziridze, director of the Terjola Student Youth Center, is a majoritarian candidate in the villages of Gvankiti and Rupoti on behalf of European Georgia. She was on leave when senior officials contacted her and told her that going into politics was not the right decision and advised her to refrain from political activities. Approximately at the same time, Rusudan Kovziridze received a message from the audit's office about the planned audit of the Terjola Student-Youth Center. Due to the fact that the center is working remotely, she requested in writing to postpone the audit, to which the auditor's office agreed.

Despite the agreement, the audit continued, during which various documents were requested from her, while Rusudan Kovziridze and her staff were in self-isolation. In order to submit the required documents for the audit, she was forced to go to work. She took a Covid test and went to work. On the way, the police fined her for violating the rules of isolation. Kovziridze later received a negative answer to the test. She intends to appeal the fine. Rusudan Kovziridze considers the audit to be politically motivated.

## **g. Alleged vote-buying**

### **Tsalenjikha**

On 9 September, a photo was posted on the Facebook page of supporters of Georgian Dream's Tsalenjikha mayoral candidate Goga Gulordava, showing the fact that party activists had bought food and distributed it to citizens.

ISFED appealed to the Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections (ICFFE) about this fact and requested to respond accordingly. According to the prosecution, due to the presence of signs of crime, the investigation was launched under Article 164<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code (vote buying).

### **Zugdidi**

On 20 September, Edita Kodua, a majoritarian candidate of the Georgian Dream in the Shamadela administrative unit of Zugdidi Municipality, participated in a charity event of the Abkhazeti Foundation, which provided relevant inventory to a person with disabilities.

### **Khashuri**

Levan Gamrekeli - a member of the Georgian Dream, a current member of the Sakrebulo and a Osiauri majoritarian candidate - brought firewood to one of the families living in Khashuri. The citizen himself wrote about it on the social network. "The whole family would like to thank Mr. Leo Gamrekeli who helped us and brought us firewood, for which we thank him and ask God to multiply charitable people like Leo. We wish him many successes and a long life with his beautiful family."

### **Marneuli**

On 26 August, citizen Ilkham Nabiev released a video showing Vasil Khakhuashvili, the majoritarian candidate of the Georgian Dream in the second district of Marneuli. Nabiev stated that Khakhuashvili promised the residents of this street to pave a road and now he is fulfilling this promise. The video shows several locals thanking the majoritarian candidate.

[According to Khakhuashvili](#), the road was built by one of the local businessmen and he just came to say thank you.

### **Tskaltubo**

On 11 September, Tskaltubo mayoral candidate Genadi Balanchivadze's official Facebook page "Tskaltubo elects Genadi Balanchivadze" [published](#) information about the transfer of apartments to IDPs living in Tskaltubo and pointed to a site listing the future owners of the apartment. The mentioned information was not yet published on the official Facebook pages of Tskaltubo Municipality and the IDPs of Tskaltubo were informed about this story by the official Facebook page of the mayoral candidate Genadi Balanchivadze.

## **h. Alleged misuse of administrative resources**

### **Tbilisi**

On 2 September, the official website of the National Agency of Public Registry posted under the main news story the announcement of the Minister's speech, which talked about assigning addresses on all territory of Georgia. The story mentioned that “the Minister of Justice Rati Bregadze spoke about it at the event of nomination of Georgia Dream mayoral candidate held in Vani today.” The information was accompanied by a picture where the Minister was standing in front of the tribune with Georgian Dream party attributes and the election number of the party was clearly visible.

### **Ozurgeti**

On 10 September, at 18:00, the incumbent Mayor of Ozurgeti Municipality and a mayoral candidate Konstantine Sharashenidze held a pre-election meeting with the participation of the employees of Ozurgeti Mayor’s Office and non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities. The event lasted one and a half hours. This pre-election meeting bore the signs of gathering on account of official matters.

Based on ISFED’s complaint, Ozurgeti DEC, taking into account a new norm of the Election Code, fined an official for gathering employees on account of official matters for a pre-election purpose. It should be noted that this is the first time such a decision was made in the practice of election administration.

### **Kareli**

Residents of an ethnic Azeri-populated neighbourhood in Kareli say Georgian Dream members promised to build roads and street lights, but because they supported of the opposition, Georgian Dream did not keep their promise. Speaking to the ISFED observer, the locals confirm this fact.

#### **i. Campaigning by incumbent officials**

### **Tbilisi**

Tbilisi mayor handed over the ownership certificates to another [55 families](#) in Samgori for a symbolic price of one GEL.

According to the mayor, the housing legalization program, which began in 2017, has benefited more than 2,000 families and legalized properties worth of more than a few hundred million GEL. The program continues and the mayor promised to help people who want to legalize the spaces.

#### **j. Participation of unauthorized persons in the pre-election campaign**

### **Tbilisi**

According to the information provided by Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia, on 12 September, 2020, a member of the Central Election Commission - Davit Kirtadze participated in the pre-election campaigning, which is an action prohibited by the Election Code.

### **Mtskheta**

Dimitri Zurabishvili, the Georgian Dream mayoral candidate, Tea Tsulukiani, the Minister of Culture and Sports, and Dimitri Khundadze, a member of the parliamentary majority, met with the population on 21 September. The meeting was attended by the chairperson of PEC #6 - a member appointed by the DEC.

### **Poti**

On 27 August, in Poti, presentation of Georgian Dream mayoral candidate Beka Vacharadze was held in the yard of the State Hydrographic Service of Georgia. The presentation started at 14:00 during the working hours and was attended by the staff of the Mayor's Office as well as Sakrebulo and the persons employed in the legal entities of the Mayor's Office.

ISFED observer was not allowed to attend the event.

### **Dmanisi**

- Arif Suleimanov, Deputy Mayor of Dmanisi Municipality, participated in the pre-election meeting of Koba Muradashvili, Georgian Dream mayoral candidate in Dmanisi.
- On 28 August, Valekh Aliev, a member of #26 Kizilajlo PEC appointed on a professional basis, attended a pre-election meeting with mayoral candidate Koba Muradashvili.

### **Ozurgeti**

On 20 September, in the village of Mtisdziri, Tamriko Vanadze, a member of the PEC # 38 of the same village, who is appointed by the DEC, attended a meeting with voters of the Georgian Dream mayoral candidate Avtandil Talakvadze

### **Kutaisi**

ISFED found out that Kutaisi Deputy Mayor Iuza Ugulava is forcing the heads and employees of the administrative units to engage in the pre-election campaign, including during working hours. Employees are tasked with scheduling election meetings for the ruling party and its candidates and also distributing photos depicting the mobilization of voters via the internal communication chat; otherwise, they are threatened with dismissal.

Iuza Ugulava denied this fact to ISFED observer.

### **Chokhatauri**

- On 23 August, Ivane Kekelidze, Assistant to the Mayor of Chokhatauri in Ianeuli administrative unit attended a meeting of Georgian Dream with population and presentation of GD mayoral candidate in the villages of Bukistsikhe and Ianeuli of Chokhatauri Municipality
- The same meeting held on 23 August was attended by the Chairman of PEC # 62/03 Meri Siradze. She is a member appointed by the DEC.
- On 27 August, in the village of Sachamiaseri-Zemokheti-Kvemokheti of Chokhatauri Municipality, nomination of Georgian Dream Chokhatauri mayoral candidate was attended by the Secretary of Sachamiaseri # 62/24 PEC Zeinab Beria. She is a member appointed by the DEC.

## Poti

- Facebook page of the administrative unit Kundzuli of Poti municipality posted a video, where Sandro Kushashvili, the former representative of the mayor in this unit and currently the majoritarian candidate of the ruling party, mentions that they started meetings with the population together with the mayoral candidate, to study the problems on the ground.
- On 30 August, Salome Sordia, Assistant PR Specialist of the Poti Sakrebulo Office, during working hours shared post of Beka Vacharadze, Georgian Dream Poti mayoral candidate, congratulating students.
- Tamar Gugushvili, a senior specialist of the second category of the material and technical support department of the Poti Sakrebulo, shared the address of the Georgian Dream Poti mayoral candidate Beka Vacharadze to students on the social network on August 30, during working hours.

### k. Politicization of educational institutions

#### Kharagauli

On 1 September, a post in support of Lena Abashidze, the principal of the same school and the majoritarian candidate of the Khunevi community, was published [on the official Facebook page](#) of Vertkvichala Public School. Abashidze is a Georgian Dream candidate. The publicly published post shows the photo of the candidate's nomination against the background of the Georgian Dream banner, which depicts the symbols of the party.

#### Sighnaghi

A representative of the ruling party approached a teacher of one of the public schools in Sighnaghi Municipality with an aim to engage her in the campaign and asked to compile a list of supporters in favor of the party. The teacher informed the representative of ISFED about the fact, but wished to remain anonymous.

#### Ninotsminda

On 6 September, Parvana TV broadcast information about a meeting of Georgian Dream with local population. [The video shows](#) Melania Vartanian, the director of the public school in the village of Patara Arakali. She speaks in support of the political party and calls on the population to vote for the ruling party in the municipal elections. An educator of Orojolari Kindergarten is also speaking in the same video.

#### Tsalenjikha

According to local representatives of For Georgia party, public school teachers are under pressure. As a result of pressure, they refused to represent the party in PECs. Teachers confirmed the fact to ISFED representative, but chose to remain anonymous. According to them, the pressure is exerted by Lira Ghurtskaia, the majoritarian candidate of the Georgian Dream. Ghurtskaia is also the head of the Tsalenjikha Educational Resource Center.

#### Kutaisi

The representative of ISFED was informed about the ongoing pressure on the director of Kutaisi Public School #38, Aleksandre Kereselidze, on political grounds. Representatives of the local government and the ruling party are trying to have him hire teachers whom they trust and are interfering in the personnel policy in this way. The director was directly asked by Iuzha Ugulava, Deputy Mayor of Kutaisi, to appoint a certain individual as a teacher, who is actively involved in the party activities of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia.

#### **I. Pressure on ISFED long-term observers**

##### **Tbilisi**

ISFED observer Tamta Virsaladze was also employed at edu.aris.ge as a journalist covering education related issues. The publisher knew about her employment at ISFED very well.

Per instructions of the editor, she prepared a material for the site based on the study by ISFED that talked about non-renewal of contracts for the directors due to the politicization of the system.

Following the publication of the material, the site's founder, Giorgi Kashia, summoned Tamta and strongly reprimanded her for covering the study. He described the organization as an "agent of State Security Services" and politically motivated. The owner told Virsaladze that there was a conflict of interest. Earlier, he had ordered the producer and editor to remove materials about the study and told them that the research should no longer appear on their web-site.

After being summoned to the office and talking about these topics, ISFED representative resigned due to a severe mismatch of values.

#### **m. Damage of campaign materials**

With the election approaching, facts of destruction of campaign materials are noticeably almost all over the country and target both ruling party and opposition parties and candidates. For example:

- After the incident in Kareli, when the journalists of Mtavari TV were physically confronted in the office of the Georgian Dream party, the posters of Georgian Dream mayoral candidate were damaged in the village of Ruisi, Kareli Municipality. According to the locals, Zaza Guliashvili's candidacy is unacceptable to them. Ruisi resident Gela Gasitashvili took down Guliashvili's posters in front of the cameras.
- In Poti, in the Nabadi territorial unit, the posters of the Third Force-Strategy Builder were damaged. The party says that when they approached law enforcement agencies last year, they received the answer that they themselves should guard and protect their party posters.
- In Didube and Mtatsminda, posters of mayoral candidate of For People party Ana Dolidze are damaged.
- In Abasha, according to the local leader of the Lelo party, the Georgian Dream posted posters of its own mayoral candidate over Lelo's campaign material near polling station #21.

#### **n. Participation of clergy in pre-election campaign**

Similar to previous elections, [facts](#) of high-ranking clergy's presence at the pre-election campaign and candidate nomination events of the ruling party are observed all over Georgia.

## **VII. Appeal of election violations**

Since the start of the official election campaign, ISFED has filed 27 applications and complaints with election commissions, courts, and other relevant agencies to address violations reported by the organization. The range of violations appealed includes the following: use of administrative resources in the election process; participation of unauthorized persons in the campaign; campaigning on Facebook by public sector employees during working hours; participation of election commission members in the party campaigning meetings; gathering of public servants on account of official matters for the electoral purposes; political campaigning on the official website of an administrative body; facts containing signs of vote-buying.

Based on ISFED's complaint, Ozurgeti DEC fined an official for assembling public employees on account of official matters for a pre-election purpose, based on a new norm of the Election Code. It should be noted that, in the practice of election administration, this is the first time such a decision was made.

The organization appealed to the Interagency Commission for Fair and Free Elections about facts of alleged vote buying. According to the prosecutor's office, signs of a crime under Article 164<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code (vote buying) have been identified and an investigation is underway.

Following the installment of banners on September 17 in the streets of Tbilisi with violent content and depicting certain electoral subjects and media representatives, in violation of the requirements of the Election Code, ISFED appealed to the State Audit Office and the CEC to address the issue within the scope of their competences.

ISFED is also implementing a free legal aid project to protect the rights of people fired for allegedly political reasons. The organization's lawyers provide legal assistance throughout Georgia to those, who were dismissed from public service, state or municipal legal entities of public laws, non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities, and public schools on political grounds.

The organization has filed 19 lawsuits in courts across the country. In some cases, a decision on interim measures has already been taken, namely: in four cases, at the request of the organization, the court banned employers from hiring a new employee on a permanent basis to a position that became vacant following the dismissal so as not to interfere with or complicate the recovery of rights of the organization's defendants by the time the court issues a decision. ISFED also appealed to the Public Defender, a national anti-discrimination mechanism, to establish a fact of discrimination on political grounds.

## **VIII. Observation Missions and Methodology**

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) is monitoring the local self-government elections in all electoral districts around Georgia through 71 long-term observers. In case of political discrimination in the pre-election period, the organization offers free legal assistance to the citizens.

The main issues of observation during the pre-election period include:

- Activities of the election administration;
- Public meetings and political activities of electoral subjects;

- Cases of pressure / threats or a dismissal from a workplace allegedly on political grounds;
- Facts of alleged vote-buying;
- Cases of use of administrative resources;
- Social media monitoring.

During the monitoring process, the source of information is public information requested from administrative institutions, as well as information received directly from electoral subjects, media outlets, non-governmental organizations, citizens and the information found as a result of social media monitoring. Each fact obtained by ISFED is verified with direct eyewitnesses and bystanders.

ISFED periodically submits reports and statements to the public on violations and trends revealed during the pre-election period.

ISFED also publishes information on each of the incidents and alleged violations during the pre-election period on the interactive map of the Georgian election portal at - <http://www.electionsportal.ge/>

Any citizen can submit information about alleged election violations via SMS to the election portal, via toll free number 90039 or on the web portal - [http://www.electionsportal.ge/geo/new\\_incident](http://www.electionsportal.ge/geo/new_incident)

ISFED is monitoring the pre-election period with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union (EU). The legal assistance is provided with the financial support of Open Society – Georgia Foundation.