



2021 Local Self-government Elections

Official Pre-election Monitoring

Interim Report #1

1 September, 2021

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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 assistance component is supported by Open Society – Georgia Foundation.

The official pre-election monitoring interim report covers the period from 3 August to 30 August, 2021, as well as a few separate events that either began before 3 August and carried into the reporting period, or became known during the monitoring period.

Main findings

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

- District and precinct level commissions were composed during the reporting period. Conducting interviews for candidates for District Election Commission (DEC) members and broadcasting the interviews live should be assessed positively, however, some of the candidates did not consent to live-streaming of their interviews thus creating unequal conditions. It should be noted that the election commissions members were not always appointed through high quorum, which would have been of utmost importance for increasing confidence in the election administration. For example, 55% of DEC members were appointed by low quorum. In case of Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members, some newly appointed members had been imposed disciplinary liability during previous elections. There were cases when DEC members had lists of candidates to be supported prepared in advance. In most cases, DEC commissioners appointed by the United National Movement (UNM), European Georgia and Lelo did not participate in the process of appointing members to PECs;
- Advisory Group – a novelty envisaged by the electoral reform – was established during the reporting period. The Group provides advise with regard to dispute resolution process. ISFED – initially invited to participate in the selection of members of the Group – left the group, once the rule of decision-making based on consensus was amended and also because of bias and non-credible reputation of some members of the group;
- There is a tendency throughout Georgia of dismissal, pressure and the creation of a hostile work environment on the basis of possible political affiliation, mainly with regard to supporters or sympathizers of For Georgia party. ISFED is representing many of the dismissed people in court.

- During the reporting period, the office of the opposition party Droa was damaged in Zugdidi. Obscene graffiti was left on the office façade and the poster was damaged. It should be noted that this is not the first case of damaging Droa's office.
- With election day approaching, the facts of use of administrative resources and participation of unauthorized persons in the election campaign sharply increased.
- ISFED is also working on the issue of politicization of educational institutions, which is an especially acute problem during the pre-election period. There are facts of using school staff for electoral purposes in the regions in favor of the ruling party and involving them in the pre-election campaign.
- There was a tendency to restrict ISFED observers. Georgian Dream in most cases refused to allow observers to their candidate presentation events; according to party leaders, the events were open only to media and not the observers.
- Media environment in Georgia remains polarized. During the reporting period, few journalists left TV channels protesting changes in the editorial policy of the channel and attempts to limit their independence. A journalist from Public Broadcaster was dismissed - which may be connected to his recent critical statements against the government and the management of the television. It is also noteworthy that Imedi TV refused to broadcast advertisement of European Georgia alleging use of hate speech- the fact contains signs of interference of the TV channel in the content of the advertisement.
- Georgian Dream remained the most active party with regard to pre-election campaigning. For Georgia party actively campaigned as well.
- During the reporting period Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections (ICFF) held its meeting discussing various media reports about possible violations in the election process. ISFED called on the state agencies represented in the Commission to conduct an in-depth investigation into the facts of possible dismissal on political grounds, which has become a trend, and to give a substantiated and convincing answer to the public. The organization also focused on the frequent cases of campaigning by public servants on social networks – a fact that is not properly assessed by the relevant authorities;

During the reporting period and based on its observation, ISFED revealed: 15 facts of dismissal/pressure to resign on allegedly political grounds; 11 facts of pressure/intimidation/obstruction on allegedly political grounds; 13 facts of alleged misuse of administrative resources; six facts of campaigning on social networks; four facts of possible vote buying; eight facts of campaigning by acting officials; tendency of obstructing ISFED observers by the ruling party was noted throughout Georgia. In addition, there were cases of direct and / or indirect coercion of persons employed in educational institutions into participating in the Georgian Dream campaign.

I. Monitoring of Election Administration

On April 19, 2021, based on the agreement brokered by the European Union, signatory ruling and opposition parties agreed to implement “ambitious electoral reform”.¹ Among others, the reform envisaged increase of election administration commissioners and appointment of professional members through high quorum (2/3 of Parliament). Based on the amendments of June 2021, changes were made to the rule of composition of election administration.² According to the new amendments, commissions at all levels are composed of 17 members, where eight are appointed on professional basis and nine are appointed by relevant political parties based on the principle of parity.³

1.1. Activities of the Central Election Commission

On 3 August, 2021 the Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) commenced its work with full 17 members.⁴ In accordance with the electoral reform, the CEC for the first time elected a Deputy CEC Chair from members nominated by opposition political parties.⁵ ISFED assessed the process of composing the CEC in an interim report published on August 6.⁶

This year, for the first time, CEC meetings are livestreamed via Commission’s official Facebook page. ISFED believes that the livestreaming of the CEC meetings increases publicity and transparency of the election administration and improves access to information about its activities, especially in times of pandemic. ISFED has been advocating this idea and on 14 May officially addressed the CEC with a request to livestream its sessions taking into consideration necessity for social distancing due to Covid-19 pandemic and high public interest in the activities of the election administration.⁷

1.2. Electronic technologies

One of the main issues of the agreement between the political parties and the electoral reform implemented in June 2021 was the use of electronic technologies in the elections. According to the amendments to the Election Code, the CEC was empowered to carry out the procedures of voter registration, voting, counting and tabulation of results by electronic means, including through the photo-search system, video-recording of vote counting, scanning of ballot papers and use of ballots with barcodes.⁸

¹ 19 Aprils, 2021 Agreement - A way ahead for Georgia

https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/210418_mediation_way_ahead_for_publication_0.pdf

² Organic Law of Georgia on Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Articles 10, 12, 13, 20, 24 -

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5200931?publication=0#DOCUMENT:1>

³ Ibid

⁴ For the First Time CEC Elected Opposition Party Representative as the Deputy Chairperson - <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/124024-tseskom-tavmdjdomaris-moadgiled-opozitsiuri-partiis-mier-danishnuli-tsevri-pirvelad-airchia>

⁵ According to the Paragraph 2 of the Article 11 of the Election Code of Georgia: “one deputy of the CEC Chairperson must be elected from among the CEC members appointed by the parties provided for by Article 13 of this Law, who are not members of the parliamentary majority.

⁶ ISFED Presented Monitoring Report for the Unofficial Election Period <https://isfed.ge/eng/presrelizebi/ISFED-ma-2021-tslis-archevnebis-araofitsialuri-kampaniis-monitoringis-angarishi-tsarmoadgina>

⁷ ISFED’s 14 May 2021 application №21/1 – 023 to the Central Election Commission.

⁸ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 203¹ <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=69>

On 12 June, 2020, the CEC carried out a simulation of electronic technologies model. The voting process conducted by both electronic technologies and standard procedures was tested. ISFED observed the simulation of election day using electronic technologies at the CEC - including the voting and the tabulation of results, and presented the results of the observation to the public.⁹

As expected, due to the short time left from the implementation of the reform until election day, the introduction of electronic technologies failed. According to the information available at the moment, voters will vote in 2 October self-government elections under the usual procedures. However, according to the CEC, they are negotiating with a leading international company to introduce electronic technologies in the vote counting process.¹⁰

1.3. Video recording of vote counting process

According to the decision of the CEC, the whole process of counting the votes - from the opening of the ballot box / boxes to the sealing of the ballot boxes, will be filmed in video-audio format.¹¹ This a novelty of the election procedures. The video recording together with election materials will be handed over to DEC. According to the rule established by the CEC, no later than 10:00 am of the 5th day from the voting day, the election administration will ensure that all recordings of vote counting process are uploaded on internet. Anyone interested in the recording will have access to the files. When considering complaints related to vote counting, the complainant has the right to request the examination of only a 10-minute interval video recording indicating a specific time and violation. This will be possible in the district election commissions and courts.

Videorecording will not fully cover all polling stations of Georgia and will only be implemented in those polling stations, where there are more than 300 registered voters. This is about 87.3% (3198) of all polling stations.¹² According to the election administration, such a limit was introduced due to scarcity of technological resources.

According to the CEC, about 3700 video cameras to be used for video recording, were handed over to the election administration by the Georgian Dream. Some of them will be used to record the vote recount process.¹³

ISFED believes that the already blurred line between the state and the ruling party is further eroded by such actions.

ISFED considers audio-video recording of vote counting process as a step forward, which should aim at improving transparency of the election process and increasing confidence in election administration.

⁹ ISFED – Assessment of Simulation of the Conduct of Election Day Using Electronic Technologies

<https://isfed.ge/geo/gantskhadebebi/eleqtronuli-teqnologiit-archevnebis-chatarebis-simulatsiis-shefaseba>

¹⁰ CEC announcement on its official Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/CentralElectionCommissionOfGeorgia/photos/a.416988922669/10158747758427670/>

¹¹ 23 August, 2021 CEC Decree - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5246199?publication=0>.

¹² The data is based on the information provided by the relevant department of the CEC at the 23 August, 2021 meeting of the CEC.

¹³ The CEC was Provided with Video Cameras for Filming Vote Counting Process- <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/124741-tseskos-khmis-datvliis-protsisis-videogadaghebtvis-sachiro-kamerebi-gadaetsa>

However, it would have been better if the election administration offered a mechanism to post video-audio recordings of the vote counting process as soon as the process is completed, instead of five days.

Another problematic issue is also the permission to examine the video at short intervals, which may be insufficient and ineffective in identifying and investigating a particular violation, especially when the violation is persistent. The authorized person, including the observer, should not be restricted in the process of investigating the video recording and should be able to determine the amount of investigative material according to the duration of the violation. This will not only facilitate the effective use of this mechanism, but will also enable the DEC to make the administrative proceedings related to violations more inquisitorial.

As such, it is important for the election administration to ensure equal and timely access to audio-video recordings for all stakeholders.

The content of Article 12 of the decree is problematic as well, in particular the following statement: "upon request, the relevant video equipment or video recording may be transferred only to the investigative bodies and courts, in accordance with the rules established by the legislation of Georgia." Stakeholders in the election process are deprived of the opportunity to access the audio-video recording of the vote count until it is uploaded on the Internet by the election administration. Due to the tight timeframe for election disputes, five days may be too late, as it may be necessary to study and submit video recording as evidence when considering a complaint.

1.4. Electronic Complaints Platform

As a result of the reform, a new norm was introduced in the Election Code allowing submission of a complaint to the CEC and DEC's in both material and electronic form.¹⁴ Applications/complaints may be submitted to election commission on behalf of authorized persons, who are registered in the electronic register based on their application, request or nomination. According to the Code, the CEC was instructed to determine the rules for maintaining the electronic register.¹⁵

On 29 July, the CEC issued an ordinance defining the rules for electronic filing of complaints with the CEC and DEC's and the maintenance of the electronic register.¹⁶ Persons registered in the relevant electronic register on behalf of a party or an observer organization on the basis of the application or submission of their application also have the right to file an electronic complaint.¹⁷

The CEC has launched an online complaint system, which operates in a pilot mode and allows complaints to be filed electronically.¹⁸

¹⁴ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, article 77.5³

¹⁵ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, article 78.1¹

¹⁶ CEC Ordinance №94/2021 – „On submitting a complaint via electronic means and rules of maintenance of register of authorized persons” <https://cesko.ge/geo/list/show/123997-gankarguleba-94/2021-29072021>

¹⁷ CEC Ordinance №94/2021, attachment N1 – rules of submitting a complaint via electronic means, Article 2 (e) - [https://cesko.ge/res/docs/Dan CG_94_1_2021.pdf](https://cesko.ge/res/docs/Dan	CG_94_1_2021.pdf)

¹⁸ See: https://elsachivrebi.cec.gov.ge/?fbclid=IwAR2t2SizuSurY1iTCE6zIN_IsYO5ZZGUX81TizL6x0-jVzpQPQKQw3pIISU

1.5. Composition of district election commissions

According to the legislative amendments, professional members of DEC are elected by the 2/3 of the full composition of the CEC; if candidates fail to receive such support, a repeat vote is held and candidates are appointed by a majority of the full composition of the CEC.¹⁹

CEC announced the competition for the temporary DEC members on 3 August. The interview process took place on 7 August, within the short timeframe provided by the law. On 8 August, the CEC elected temporary members of the district commissions. Instead of 17, 15 members of the CEC took part in the work of the competition commission.²⁰

370 people participated in the competition for 219 vacant positions for temporary DEC members. CEC initially appointed 218 temporary members, and then one additional member. 98 temporary members (44.95%) were appointed with 2/3 support of the CEC, 120 members (55.05%) were appointed with a support of a majority of the full composition.²¹ Out of 370 candidates participating in the competition, only 180 were interviewed. There was no meaningful competition in 16.4% of the districts as only three applications for three positions were submitted.²²

The live broadcast of the interview process by the CEC deserves a positive assessment. This decision helped to ensure transparency of the interview, however, at the same time, the contestants had an opportunity to keep an eye on the questions asked during the interview and to prepare the appropriate answers in advance. At the same time, some contestants refused to broadcast their interview live, thus creating unequal conditions for other candidates.

A significant proportion of those selected as temporary DEC members are employed in public services and state-run non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities. In several cases, ISFED identified that individuals selected as professional members were affiliated with the ruling political party through their own and / or family members' current or recent past activities.²³ It should be noted that two candidates appointed to DEC were subject to disciplinary liability during 2020 parliamentary elections.²⁴

1.6. Composition of precinct election commissions

According to the CEC ordinance, DEC had to select PEC members from 14 to 17 August.²⁵ 30 580 candidates participated in a competition for 29 312 vacant positions, out of which DEC appointed 29

¹⁹ Organic Law of Georgia on Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 20 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5200931?publication=0#DOCUMENT:1>

²⁰ CEC members appointed by United National Movement and European Georgia did not participate in the process of selection of candidates.

²¹ The CEC Elected 218 Temporary Members at the DEC <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/124211-tseskom-saolqo-saarchevno-komisiebshidghes-218-droebiti-tsevri-airchia>

²² CEC – Interviews with Contestants for Temporary Membership of DEC was Livestreamed - <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/124202-saolqo-saarchevno-komisiebshidroebiti-tsevrobis-konkursantebtan-gasaubrebebi-laiv-rejimshi-tsarimarta>

²³ ISFED identified 29 persons in case of Sighnaghi, Akhmeta, Sagarejo, Gurjaani, Lanchkhuti, Poti, Batumi, Khobi, Martvili, Senaki, Baghdadi and Kareli DEC.

²⁴ Davit Kharchilava, a temporary member of Vake DEC, and Nato Laliashvili, a temporary member of Dusheti DEC Commission, have been imposed a disciplinary sanction during the 2020 parliamentary elections.

²⁵ 3 August 2021 CEC ordinance №97/2021 - https://cesko.ge/res/docs/CG_97_2021.pdf

086 members. For 226 vacancies for which candidates could not be selected, the competition was re-announced. It should be noted that using a special electronic program, candidates who were appointed to any level election commission by parties in the last general elections, were excluded from the selection process.²⁶ 25 730 (88.46%) of PEC members were appointed by 2/3 support of the DEC, while 3 356 (11.54%) of the members were appointed with the support of the majority of the full composition. It should be noted that in case of 58% of PECs, only eight applications were submitted for eight vacancies.²⁷

ISFED identified the following notable trends in composition of PECs:

- In some districts, where the number of candidates for PEC membership exceeded eight, the majority of DEC members voted for the first eight candidates on the list;
- Some members of precinct election commissions selected by district election commissions are affiliated with the ruling party through their current or recent activities;
- 161 persons elected to the position of PEC members were subject to disciplinary liability in the 2020 parliamentary elections;
- A DEC member had a list prepared in advance or dictated the list of candidates to be supported. Such facts were observed in the cases of Abasha, Senaki, Poti, Batumi, Khulo, Chokhatauri, Lanchkhuti, Kharagauli, Zestaponi, Akhaltsikhe and Tetrtskaro DEC;
- The applications of the contestants submitted to DEC were similar, presumably compiled by one person and were sent by the same e-mail. Such cases were observed in Vake, Saburtalo, Isani, Samgori, Gldani, Tskaltubo, Kutaisi and Khulo DEC.
- In most cases, members of the district election commissions appointed by the United National Movement, European Georgia, and Lelo did not participate in the voting process for PEC candidates.

According to the CEC information, “out of 29,086 PEC members appointed by DEC, 4,732 persons were representatives of various electoral subjects (representatives of political parties and initiative groups) in the 2013-2020 elections. Of these 4,732 people, 1,831 were representatives of the Georgian Dream, and the remaining 2,901 were representatives of other electoral subjects.”

1.7. CEC Advisory Group

As a result of amendments introduced to the Election Code of Georgia in June 2021, the CEC has an obligation to establish an advisory group. According to the Election Code, the advisory group should comprise experts selected by representatives of the Ombudsman, local and international organizations. The advisory group should work only during election period and should have no less than nine and no more than 15 members.²⁸

²⁶ According to Paragraph 2 of the Article 24 of the Election Code of Georgia, “a person may not be elected as a PEC member if he/she was appointed in the last general elections as a member of an election commission of any level by a party.”

²⁷ CEC Statement on Electing Members of Precinct Election Commissions - <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/124432-gantskhadeba-saubno-saarchevno-komisiis-tsevrta-archevis-shesakheb>

²⁸ Organic Law of Georgia, Election Code of Georgia, Article 16¹.1-2 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1557168?publication=69>

On July 29, 2021, the Central Election Commission of Georgia, on the basis of Decree №44 / 2021, approved the Statute of the Advisory Group, which additionally defined the powers and rules of procedure of the Group, as well as the requirements for members. According to the statute, the advisory group will submit recommendations to the CEC regarding the process of resolving election disputes. In addition, the group will be authorized to attend the vote recounting process in district commissions.²⁹

ISFED, along with other observer organizations, was invited to participate in the selection of members of the advisory group set up at the CEC. It should be noted that the composition of the selection commission and the decision-making procedure did not ensure the selection of persons as members of the advisory group, whose impartiality and objectivity would not raise questions in the future. Sources of funding of some organizations invited as members of the selection commission are unknown. Representatives of observer organizations had to nominate candidates for membership in the advisory council by consensus by 8 August, 2021. If a member of the Advisory Group could not be selected by consensus, support of the 2/3 of the full membership of the Group would be enough during a repeat voting held within the same timeframe.

On 8 August 2021, ISFED and TI-Georgia left the Advisory Group due to the changes made to the decision-making process and non-credible composition of the selection commission.³⁰

CEC Ordinance #156/2021 of 13 August, 2021 approved the composition of the Advisory Group for self-government elections with 12 members.³¹ Although the mandate of the Advisory Group does not allow for direct and binding decision-making and is limited to providing guidance, it is important that the activities of the Group influence the fair resolution of problematic issues raised during election disputes.

The analysis of the powers of the advisory group does not allow to say that the group's activities will be effective in solving problems raised during the self-government elections. This is due not only to the nature of the group's functions, but also to the problems that arose in the process of selecting members and the implementation of recommendations. Most of the selected members of the group and their nominating organizations do not enjoy high trust because their past activities, objectivity and competence are unknown to the public. In fact, there are no representatives of impartial and credible organizations with many years of experience in monitoring of the election process. With all this in mind, the Advisory Group is unlikely to play a significant role in improving the complaints discussion process.

II. Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections

According to the Election Code, in order to prevent violations of the election legislation of Georgia by public servants and to respond to the violations, an interagency commission is established under the

²⁹ 29 July, 2021 CEC Decree №44/2021, Decree on Establishment of the Statute of the Advisory Group under the Central Election Commission of Georgia, Article 2 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5226832?publication=0>

³⁰ TI Georgia and ISFED are leaving the process of staffing the CEC Advisory Group - <https://isfed.ge/eng/gantskhadebebi/tsekos-sakonsultatsio-djufis-dakompleqtebis-protsess-ori-arasamtavrobo-organizatsia-tovebs>

³¹ CEC Decree №156/2021 on Approval of the Advisory Group of the Central Election Commission of Georgia for the 2 October, 2021 Elections of the Representative Body of the Municipality - Sakrebulo and the Mayor of the Self-Governing City / Self-Governing Community - https://cesko.ge/res/docs/CG_156_2021.pdf

Ministry of Justice of Georgia, which in case of the next general elections is established no later than 1 July of the election year.³²

By the order of the Minister of Justice of 29 June, in order to prevent and respond to the violations of the election legislation by public servants during the October 2021 local self-government elections, Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections (ICFFE) was set up to coordinate inter-agency activities and develop relevant proposals. The composition and statute of the Commission was approved as well.³³

On 26 August, the fourth session of the commission was held online, where the possible use of administrative resources, cases of alleged violations of election legislation by public servants, and cases of dismissal were discussed. The issues discussed were related to the facts disseminated by the media during the period of August 10-23. Representatives of state and local authorities, members of the commission, provided information on response and preventive measures.

It should be noted that ISFED was not invited to the previous three sessions of the Commission and, therefore, was not given an opportunity to raise problems and discuss challenges.

At the 26 August meeting, the organization raised the issue of the superficiality of the inquiry conducted by state agencies into cases of dismissal on political grounds. The inquiry is not in-depth, does not provide for a thorough examination of the position of all parties, which is why the explanations presented are uniform, formal and leave certain questions unanswered. In order to get convincing answers, ISFED believes it is necessary to conduct a deep and comprehensive process and to rule out the suspicion of political bias, which leads to the question of the non-existence of political will.

ISFED also highlighted to the commission facts of campaigning by public servants on social media during work hours and the poor practice of the election administration when discussing such facts.

III. Media environment

In the run-up to the self-government elections, there were more and more cases of obstruction of journalists' activities and non-acceptance of critical opinion by political officials. Particularly noteworthy is the fact of journalists leaving a TV station due to disagreement with the channel's editorial policy, as well as the alleged dismissal of a journalist of the Public Broadcaster on political grounds. The public statements of the journalists carry certain messages that indicate the interference in the editorial independence and the existence of inappropriate, political influence on the policy of the broadcaster.

On August 9, Irakli Absandze, a journalist and host of the Public Broadcaster's "Weekly Interview" program, was fired. According to the order of the General Director of the Public Broadcaster, the dismissal of the journalist was based on a gross violation of the labor regulations. Absandze talks about

³² Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 48.3-4 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=69>

³³ 29 June, 2021 Order №728 of the Minister of Justice of Georgia on Establishment of Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections and Approval of its Statute - <https://bit.ly/3BnM8Wr>

the political motives of the release and connects this to his critical assessments of the events of 5-6 July.³⁴ It should be noted that journalist Irakli Absandze was among the 12 people detained under the administrative proceedings during the 12 July protest rally in front of the Georgian Dream office in connection with early July events. His hand was broken during the arrest. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the journalist was arrested under the Code of Administrative Offenses for petty hooliganism and disobedience to the police.³⁵ In addition, Absandze expressed critical views on the story aired by the broadcaster regarding Davit Gareji and called the story a contributing factor to the intensification of hatred against Iveri Melashvili.

According to the assessment of the Media Advocacy Coalition, the dismissal of Irakli Absandze by the General Director of the Public Broadcaster leaves a perception that the real reason for this may be the recent critical statements made by the journalist towards the government and the management of the television.³⁶

The dismissal of Irakli Absandze coincides with his publicly expressed critical views, which is why the dismissal is perceived as an instrument of suppression of a critical position. This contradicts the fundamental principles of the Georgian Law on Broadcasting, which obliges the broadcaster to ensure editorial independence, fairness and impartiality of programs.

On 12 August, anchor Guram Rogava left Rustavi-2 TV Station. He publicly stated that he did not see himself on this channel and at the same time he had some questions about the disappearance of the program "Postscriptum". Prior to leaving the TV station, Rogava expressed critical views on the social network regarding Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili and the events of 5-6 July.³⁷ Later, Rogava also drew attention to the government's attempt to interfere in editorial independence and noted that the government had reacted sharply to his tearing up of blank sheets live as a way of expressing criticism toward government's actions. According to Rogava, political leaders were demanding his release from the show.³⁸

On 17 August, another journalist – Teona Tskhomelidze – also left Rustavi-2 Channel. She posted the information on her Facebook page. According to the journalist, the changed editorial policy of the channel - which is also felt by the viewers - is unacceptable to her.³⁹

On 25 August, Tbilisi City Court sentenced all three defendants in the case of assault committed against journalist Vakho Sanaia to a minimum sentence of six months in prison, which expired on the day of the verdict. At the same time, the judge did not allow the victim journalist's lawyer into the courtroom.

Vakho Sanaia and his family member were assaulted on 25 February, 2021. The defendants in this case were detained under Articles 126 (violence) and 156 (persecution) of the Criminal Code of Georgia. The Court sentenced Suliko Sakevarishvili to six months in prison and community service for violence

³⁴ Radio Freedom – Public Broadcaster Dismissed Anchor Irakli Absandze - <https://bit.ly/3gHE0s0>

³⁵ Publika – Irakli Absandze was Detained - <https://publika.ge/kheli-momtekhes-mklavi-savaraudod-saoperacioa-irakli-absandze/>

³⁶ Coalition for Media Advocacy – Dismissal of Irakli Absandze may be Related to His Critical Opinions - <https://www.qartia.ge/ka/siakhleebi/article/89000-irakli-absandzis-gathavisufleba-shesadzloa-mis-kritikul-mosazrebebs-ukavshirdebodes>

³⁷ Radio Freedom – Anchor Guram Rogava left Rustavi-2 <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31405202.html>

³⁸ Civil.ge – Two Anchors Quit Rustavi-2 Citing Changes to Editorial Policy <https://civil.ge/archives/437000>

³⁹ Ibid

committed on discriminatory grounds. Giorgi Sakhelashvili and Vazha Gigauri were found guilty of committing crimes under Articles 126 and 156 and sentenced to six months in prison. The latter was also fined in the amount of GEL 2,500.

According to the assessment of the Media Advocacy Coalition, the state does not protect the lives and safety of media representatives. High officials from the ruling party respond to journalists' questions with aggression and boycotts, and are encouraging further attacks on the media. According to the Coalition (ISFED is a member too), in the case of Vakho Sanaia, justice was not properly served, and the court's soft attitude towards the attack on the journalist and his family members may further increase aggression against critical media.⁴⁰

On August 26, Imedi TV refused to air European Georgia's pre-election political advertisement because of alleged hate speech content.⁴¹

According to the statement of one of the leaders of European Georgia – Giga Bokeria, the real reason for the refusal to place political advertisements was the dissatisfaction of the government with the content of the ad. He also noted that ad did not contain hate speech and that the text fully fit within the freedom of expression. The political party intends to fight through legal means.⁴²

Prime Minister positively assessed the refusal of the TV station to broadcast the political advertisement saying that “violence, hatred and aggression come from them.”⁴³

Based on the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, the broadcaster is not responsible for the content of the pre-election advertisement, the legislator imposes responsibility on the customer.⁴⁴ However, the law also obliges the broadcaster to ensure that the advertisement complies with the legislation. Such a wording of the norm leaves space for mixed interpretations, but this should not be construed as a right to control the content of advertising, as the right to express political views, including critical assessments, is protected by the right of freedom of expression. Even if the broadcaster inspected the legality of the advertisement, the content of the election advertisement did not violate the restriction established by the Election Code, which prohibits propaganda for war or violence, appeal for: change or overthrow of the existing state and social order by violence; violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia; national strife and enmity, or for religious or ethnic confrontation.⁴⁵

According to the recommendation adopted by the Committee of Minister of the Council of Europe in 1997, “a term "hate speech" shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite,

⁴⁰ Statement of the Coalition for Media Advocacy - <https://isfed.ge/geo/gantskhadebebi/210825030552koalitsia-mediis-advokatirebistvis-gantskhadeba>

⁴¹ Imedi TV Refuses to Broadcast Pre-Election Political Hate Speech - <https://imedinevs.ge/ge/politika/215545/telekompania-imeri-sidzulvilis-enis-shemtsveli-tsinasaarchevno-politikuri-reklamis-etershi-gantavsebase-uars-ambobs>

⁴² Bokeria: it is cynical when Imedi – propaganda arm of Dream – uses hate speech as an excuse - <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/672152-bokeria-tsinizmia-rotsa-imeri-otsnebis>

⁴³ “It is very good” – Prime Minister on blocking of the advertisement of the European Georgia - <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/672160-dzalian-kargia-premeri-imeris-mier-evropuli>

⁴⁴ Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, Article: 63.3 - The broadcaster is not responsible for the content of pre-election and social advertisements. The responsibility for the content of pre-election and social advertisements shall be borne by the customer of the relevant advertisement in accordance with the rules established by the legislation of Georgia.” - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32866?publication=60>

⁴⁵ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 45.3

promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.” Such an approach is well-established in practice. Article 7 of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics reflects an identical understanding of hate speech and states that “journalist should understand the danger of encouraging discrimination by the media and do everything to avoid discriminating a person based on their race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin or any other reason”.⁴⁶

Consequently, a sharply critical, even offensive, political assessment does not qualify as hate speech, no matter how unacceptable it may be to either party. Given that the above-mentioned signs of hate speech were not visible in the political advertisement of European Georgia, it is unclear on what basis Imedi TV decided to refuse to place the ad.

IV. Violations and trends identified as a result of the monitoring

4.1. Restriction of observation to ISFED observers

One of the components of election observation is the monitoring of the election campaign of election subjects - political parties and candidates - during the pre-election period. In accordance with the international standards for election monitoring, this component is important to identify violations of electoral legislation by political parties in the pre-election period, to assess the election campaigns of electoral subjects, as well as the equality of existing conditions. ISFED observed the election campaigns of all electoral subjects, including the nomination of candidates, meetings with voters, and other forms of campaigning during all elections. The organization also observes the audience invited to the election meetings, in order to exclude participation of unauthorized persons in the campaigning.

In the pre-election period of the local self-government elections, ISFED observers were mostly not allowed to attend the ruling party's pre-election meetings and candidate nomination events. In response to the organization's attempt to address the issue, Georgian Dream leaders said the meetings were open to media only and not to observer organizations.

Most of the meetings were held outdoors, where it was possible to comply with Covid regulations, but, nevertheless, observers were not allowed to attend. Sometimes, pre-registration was required, while the information about the event was not disseminated in advance. Observers were not allowed to be present outside, in the surrounding area and take photos.

Such facts were observed: 9 August –in Rustavi, 10 August – in Marneuli and Dmanisi, 11 August – in Tsalka, 13 August -in Lagodekhi, Telavi and Kvareli, 14 August – in Sagarejo, Sighnaghi, Dedoplistskaro and Gurjaani, 15 August – in Batumi and Kobuleti, 18 August – in Shuakhevi, 19 August – in Lanchkhuti, 27 August – in Poti.

⁴⁶ The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics – Explanations of Principle of the Charter - <https://www.qartia.ge/ka/mthavari-gverdis-aikonebi/article/30508-qartiis-principebis-ganmartebebi>

The case of Khelvachauri, where ISFED representative was not allowed to observe the meeting, is especially noteworthy. The observer was informed that she was not on the guest list. The observer tried to observe the process from the outside, but soon about ten employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs came up to her and started to exercise psychological pressure, in particular, they did not allow her to take photos and videos and even tried to read his/her correspondence while using the phone. These individuals forcibly evicted the observer from the surrounding area.

ISFED calls on the ruling party to ensure the publicity of campaign activities and to conduct a more transparent election campaign that is open to both domestic and international observers.

Kaspi

The fact of restriction of the right to attend a public session of an administrative body was also observed in Kaspi. ISFED sent a letter to the Kaspi Sakrebulo chairperson in advance requesting to attend the 20 August session and a Zoom link to the session. She received no answer. The observer also addressed the Chief of Staff of Sakrebulo Zura Chitishvili, who asked for time to find out, however, later did not answer the calls.

4.2. Dismissal from work on political grounds, coercion to resign

Pressure to resign or dismissal of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's supporters and "suspected supporters", which was a trend and was noted in the ISFED's unofficial election campaign monitoring report, continued during the current official pre-election campaign. An abundance of such facts is observed in municipalities.

ISFED protects the rights of people dismissed on political ground or whose rights have been abused in some other ways due to political motives throughout Georgia. A group of lawyers and the organization's regional offices take part in this process. The organization is already defending the interests of more than 15 citizens before the court and other competent bodies in order to establish discrimination on political grounds and eliminate its negative consequences.

Gori

On August 4, labor contract of Kakha Paniashvili, the financial manager of the Gori Municipality Transport Agency, was terminated due to expiration of contract terms. It is noteworthy that out of 150 people employed in the agency, everyone's contract was extended except Paniashvili's. He links the decision to the political activities of his brother, Mamuka Paniashvili. Paniashvili's brother was a member of the Sakrebulo from the Georgian Dream, however, he publicly left the party and joined Gakharia's team.

ISFED is representing the interests of Kakha Paniashvili.

Akhaltzikhe

- On 25 August, mother Marine Abuladze and aunt Tamar Abuladze of Levan Tatoshvili, coordinator of the Samtskhe-Javakheti branch of For Georgia Party, were fired. Marine

Abuladze was a lawyer at non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Kindergarten Union of Akhalstikhe Municipality Pre-school Educational Institution.

- Tamar Abuladze has been working as Chief of Staff of Akhaltsikhe Sakrebulo since 2001.

Prior to the dismissal, Samtskhe-Javakheti State Representative (Governor) summoned Marine Abuladze and her sister Tamar. According to them, the Governor demanded they submit letters of resignation. The dismissed connect the fact with the activities of Marine Abuladze's son Levan Tatoshvili in Gakharia's party. The decisions to dismiss both officials contain general norms governing dismissal, although the specific legal and factual grounds for dismissal are not specified.

ISFED is representing the interests of Marine and Tamar Abuladzes.

Dmanisi

- On 21 July, Avtandil Okmelashvili, the representative of the mayor of Dmanisi municipality in the administrative unit of Dmanisi community, was dismissed.
- According to Avtandil Okmelashvili, his alleged political persecution began after he refused to engage in pre-election campaign at the request of Dmanisi Municipality Mayor Giorgi Tatuashvili. Disciplinary proceedings against Avtandil Okmelashvili were launched on 26 July, after his dismissal. ISFED is representing the interests Avtandil Okmelashvili.
- On 21 July, Zakhir Murvaladov, a specialist in the Dmanisi community administrative unit, was fired. According to Zakhir Murvaladov, his alleged political persecution began after he refused to engage in pre-election campaign at the request of Dmanisi Municipality Mayor Giorgi Tatuashvili. Disciplinary proceedings against Zakhir Murvaladov were launched on 26 July, after his dismissal. ISFED is representing the interests Zakhir Murvaladov.

Dusheti

- On 13 May, Giorgi Mezvrishvili, the director of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Aragvi Protected Landscape, was fired. According to Mezvrishvili, he was dismissed because he is a supporter of Giorgi Gakharia's party. The dismissal order does not specify the grounds for dismissal. ISFED is representing the interests Giorgi Mezvrishvili.
- On 5 August, based on the inspection report, Teimuraz Gvritishvili was dismissed as the Head of the Protection Unit of Pshav-Khevsureti National Park. Due to pandemic and based on the verbal agreement with the director of the national park, he worked remotely and was not required to report for service. However, his physical absence from work became the basis for his dismissal. Gvritishvili connects his dismissal with him being a supporter of Gakharia's party. ISFED is representing the interests Teimuraz Gvritishvili.

Rustavi

On 23 August, Khatuna Begiashvili, a specialist in epidemiological supervision of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Union of Day Care and Kindergartens in Rustavi, was fired. According to her, the reason for her dismissal is linked to the comment she made on Facebook

in support of the former deputy mayor of the city, Irma Meskhi, as well as her expressing support to Nino Kviria. After these facts she was sent a dismissal letter via post. Khatuna Begiashvili believes that she was fired on political grounds because she is not a supporter of the Georgian Dream. ISFED is representing the interests Khatuna Begiashvili.

Sachkhere

On 23 August, Tedore Kalmakhelidze was dismissed from work. He has been working since 2017 as Occupational Safety Engineer at Accord-Georgia - a Georgian representation of open joint stock company Construction-Industrial Investment Corporation Accord. He links his dismissal to political activity. Kalmakhelidze is a candidate nominated by the United National Movement for the 2 October municipal elections. Questions about his political activities preceded his dismissal. ISFED is representing the interests Tedore Kalmakhelidze.

Poti

Khvicha Dolbaia was fired from the service of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Poti Municipality Melioration on allegedly political grounds. He was asked to submit a letter of resignation over allegations of friendly relations with Gakharia's associates. He refused to do so, after which his contract was terminated. The dismissal order did not specify the factual and legal grounds for his dismissal. ISFED is representing the interests of Khvicha Dolbaia.

Batumi

Suliko Beridze was fired from the LEPL Laboratory Research Center on allegedly political grounds. He was asked to submit a letter of resignation due to his presence at the opening of the Batumi office of For Georgia party. He refused to resign at will, after which his contract was terminated. ISFED is representing the interests Suliko Beridze.

Khulo

Guram Khozrevanidze was fired from the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Khulo Cultural Center on allegedly political grounds. His harassment as work began once he publicly announced about his joining of Giorgi Gakharia's Party on Adjara TV on 16 July, 2021. On the same day, Order N 01/06/30 on recalling Guram Khozrevanidze from vacation to work was signed at the Cultural Center. Then one after another, Guram Khozrevanidze was strictly warned and reprimanded and finally, dismissed on 21 July. ISFED is representing the interests of Guram Khozrevanidze.

Tkibuli

According to Neli Kareli, head of Tkibuli Municipality Health and Social Care Service, on 5 August, Tkibuli Mayor Temur Chubinidze summoned her to his office and asked if she had joined Giorgi Gakharia's party. Nelly Kareli replied that she had not gone anywhere yet, although she had previously expressed the opinion to the mayor that she did not like the statements of the ruling team regarding Gakharia. The mayor also told her that the party (meaning "Georgian Dream") had ordered him to fire Neli. Neli refused to write a letter of resignation.

Tkibuli Municipality Mayor Temur Chubinidze confirmed the fact of meeting with Neli Kareli to ISFED observer. However, he emphasized that he hadnot asked Neli to write a resignation letter. At the same time, the mayor positively assessed the activities of the Health and Social Protection Service and directly Neli Kareli.

Zugdidi

Kesaria Tsulaia, an employee of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Student-Youth Development Palace of Zugdidi Mayor's Office, was fired on political grounds. According to Kesaria, director of the Student-Youth Development Palace Davit Shamatava summoned her twice and told her that, based on the directive given from above, she should stop sharing videos related to For Georgia party on the social network Facebook. According to Tsulaia, her employment contract would expire on 31 December, 2021, however, Davit Shamatava dismissed her. It should be noted that due to the epidemiological situation, from 9 August, all employees of the Student-Youth Development Palace were transferred to remote work. Citing reduction in entertainment activities, the director of the Palace dismissed only Tsulaia while other employees continue to work.

Despite numerous attempts, ISFED did not manage to contact the director of the Student-Youth Development Palace.

Tbilisi

Irakli Baghdavadze, an employee of Tbilisi Mayors' Office company Tbilservice [was fired](#). According to Baghdavadze, he was fired because of his protest. Employees of Tbilservice went on strike on 6 August. Their main demands were salary increase and improvement of working conditions. [According to Kaladze](#), the protesters were "instigated by provocateurs." After negotiations with the City Hall and reaching an agreement, on 7 August, the strike was called off.

According to the Tbilisi City Hall, Baghdavadze was fired for organizing a strike, confronting employees and threatening them.

4.3. Allegedly politically motivated pressure / threats / obstruction

During the reporting period, facts of pressure, threats and obstruction of election activities were also recorded. In line with the trends reported by ISFED in its non-official campaigning monitoring report, this time too, most of these facts were committed against members and supporters of For Georgia party.

Pressuring and obstructing the opposition undermines the fairness of the electoral environment and prevents the election campaign from being conducted on equal terms.

Telavi, Gurjaani

According to the member of For Georgia party [Kakhaber Kemoklidze](#), Giorgi Gakharia's meetings in the regions are being watched by representatives of the State Security Service and the patrol police. The submitted images, he said, showed surveillance by security, criminal and patrol police and other individuals.

Giga Orkodashvili, Telavi mayoral candidate for For Georgia party, told ISFED representative that they are constantly being monitored, especially by the security services, and handed over previously unpublished photos.

Baghdati

Following confirmation of Covid-19, Vazha Kovzadze, a supporter of For Georgia party, closed his shop. Next day his mother, who had no contact with Vazha Kovzadze, opened the shop, but soon the patrol police requested her to close the shop due to the infection of the owner.

According to the head of the HQ of For Georgia party Vladimer Vardzieli, the patrol police did not explain how long the shop should be closed and what procedures should be carried out. After studying the mandatory procedures on their own and disinfecting the facility, it became possible to open the store three days later, which, according to the owner, caused quite a lot of material damage to the family. Vladimer Vardzieli links the incident to the discrimination of their supporters and points out that the City Hall building was not disinfected when one of the Mayor's Office employees was confirmed to have the virus. According to ISFED, one of the City Hall employees was indeed confirmed to have the virus and the City Hall building was not disinfected. A City Hall employee noted that although disinfection was not carried out, the room of the infected person was closed.

Poti

- The non-official campaigning monitoring report published by ISFED [mentioned](#) the fact of dismissal of Mindia Baramia, former Head of the Street Maintenance and Improvement Department at the Service Center of Poti Municipality due to his friendship with Poti deputy mayors who had joined Gakharia's party. ISFED is representing the interests of Mindia Baramia. Mindia Baramia's father, Nugzar Baramia, says that Poti City Hall has not paid him 136,938 GEL for the work done. Under a simplified procurement agreement with Poti City Hall, Baramia's company was obliged to reconstruct the roof of a multi-story building located at N9 Chanturia Street. Nugzar Baramia states that in order to confirm the quality of the work done, he also received a conclusion from the Samkharauli Expertise Bureau, however, Poti City Hall has not yet accepted either the conclusion or the work done. Nugzar Baramia explains the actions of Poti City Hall as politically motivated and says that his son was fired on political grounds and that his cooperation with Poti City Hall deteriorated following him supporting For Georgia party.
- According to Konstantine Topuria, the head of Poti branch of For Georgia party, on 6 August unknown persons took photos of the young supporters of the party from a Skoda car around the space designated for the youth wing of the party. He said there were criminal police officers in plain clothes in the car. Topuria suggests that the purpose of the photo shoot is to intimidate the parents of the young supporter.

Kvareli

On 23 August, Kvareli Police Department summoned Levan Khutsishvili, Chief Specialist of the Mayor's Office, for questioning. Levan Khutsishvili's sister, who is a member of Kvareli Municipality Sakrebulo, says that the summon was related to the comments made on Facebook and the accusation that Levan Khutsishvili verbally insulted one person on the social network. According to Nino Khutsishvili, the complainant is allegedly cooperating with the State Security Services. Levan Khutsishvili denies any activity on Facebook, for which he may be held responsible.

Nino Khutsishvili does not rule out that the ruling party may again use provocative actions against her family in the future. She links the persecution of the family on political grounds to her communication with Kakheti regional representative of For Georgia party, who offered Nino a place on the party list, though she refused.

On 26 August, Levan Khutsishvili was taken to hospital with a heart attack, which he also connects to political pressure.

4.4. Threats of removing social assistance

According to the statement of a citizen V.Ch, she was threatened with removal of social assistance because she is a supporter of Gakharia's party and openly expressed her position in the neighborhood. After that, an employee from the relevant territorial unit approached the citizen and threatened to check the family again and write high scores, thus removing the assistance. There are minors in the family, who fully depend on social allowance and child support.

The citizen refuses to speak in public and identify herself.

4.5. Damage of the office of a political party

Zugdidi

On 29 August, Zugdidi regional office of the political union Droa was damaged. According to the head of the office Mariam Sichinava, obscene texts and a damaged poster were found at the entrance of the office. According to her, this is not a first case against Droa's office. Recently, a man broke into the office, verbally insulting the party "Droa" and its founder Elene Khoshtaria.

4.6. Alleged use of administrative resources

In Georgia, misuse of administrative resources during election campaign is a sad practice. The use of administrative resources is traditionally carried out by the ruling power. The current election campaign is no exception.

One of the most common forms of misuse of administrative resources is the participation of unauthorized persons, in particular public servants and other persons employed in the public sector, in campaign meetings of the ruling party.

4.7. Participation of unauthorized persons in the pre-election campaign

Organized attendance of public sector employees was observed at meetings of the ruling party and its candidates in various regions. In some cases, the meetings were organized in the second half of the day, during non-working hours. However, according to the amendments to the Electoral Code, in particular Article 48 1 1 (d), the use of administrative resources in the course of the election campaign in support of or against any political party, candidate, election subject or candidate is prohibited. It is also prohibited for public servants, employees of legal entities under public law, employees of non-profit (non-commercial) legal entities established by the State or a municipality, directors, caregiver-pedagogues, caregivers, and teachers of pre-school educational institutions and general educational institutions established by the State or a municipality, or other persons employed there to meet together on account of official matters.

On a number of occasions, meetings of the ruling party and its candidates included signs of meetings with public sector employees on account of official matters. In some cases, they were brought and transported to the meetings in an organized manner. It should be noted that public officials, employees of public schools and kindergartens practically never attend meetings of opposition parties and candidates in a unified and organized manner. This once again indicates that the public sector is still not free from undue party influence and remains politicized. Georgian Dream candidates also have easy access to meetings and campaigning with employees of municipality non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities, including during working hours. Only the ruling party and its candidates enjoy such a privilege.

Telavi

In all villages where the meetings with the Georgian Dream mayoral candidate were held, mobilization of self-government administration staff and school teachers was observed. Meetings were usually held in the afternoon, during non-working hours, although there were signs of gatherings on account of official matters.

Ozurgeti

On 19 August, during working hours, principal of N1 Public School, the director of the Ozurgeti State Drama Theater and the troupe attended the meeting organized the Georgian Dream. [The video](#), which was filmed by the party during the nomination of the mayoral candidate, clearly shows each of them.

Lanchkhuti

- On 19 August, Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili nominated Georgian Dream mayoral and majoritarian candidates for administrative units in Lanchkhuti.

At this event, which took place during working hours, a representative of ISFED identified the presence of unauthorized persons, including:

- ❖ Head of Lanchkhuti Resource Center Nino Chitadze and her employee Tsira Mskhiladze;
- ❖ Ia Chkhaidze, Head of the Culture, Education and Sports Service of the City Hall;

- ❖ Ekaterine Gujabidze, Assistant to Mayor;
 - ❖ Rusudan Gvarjaladze, Head of Sakrebulo PR Service;
 - ❖ Iza Matitaishvili, representative of the mayor in Aketi administrative unit;
 - ❖ Lasha Duduchava, representative of the mayor in Lanchkhuti administrative unit.
- On 18 August, during working hours, at about 3:15 pm, Tornike Tikadze, Assistant to the incumbent mayor and Georgian Dream mayoral candidate Alexander Sarishvili, was spotted in the yard of the Georgian Dream local organization and election headquarters.

Mtatsminda

The Facebook page of Georgian Dream Mtatsminda has been reactivated since the last elections, after the official appointment of the 2 October, 2021 elections. They share posts about projects implemented by the City Hall and the Mtatsminda Gamgeoba. In the comment of the mentioned post, the population asks to come to a specific address and help in solving a problem. In response, [the page writes](#) - "We will hand over the issue to the relevant service of the Georgian Dream and Kakhi Kaladze himself."

Gori

On 8 August, in Gori, near Lomchabuki, the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs Ekaterine Tikaradze, the Director of the Agency of IDPs, Eco-migrants and Livelihood Provision Besarion Simonishvili and Shida Kartli State Representative Valerian Mchedlidze handed over apartments to 68 IDP families. Vladimer Khinchevashvili, the mayoral candidate of the Georgian Dream, attended the meeting.

Khashuri

On 8 August, Khashuri Mayor, Sakrebulo Chairman and Georgian Dream mayoral candidate laid wreaths at the graves of soldiers killed in the war. Tengiz Chitiashvili, the ruling party's mayoral candidate and the head of Khashuri majoritarian MP Dugladze's bureau, was with the officials. When asked why the mayoral candidate of the ruling party was along with local government officials, Chitiashvili said he was with them as an employee of the majoritarian bureau.

Ozurgeti

On 9 August, during working hours, at 2:05 pm, ISFED observers spotted Natia Zedgenidze, a PR specialist at Ozurgeti Sakrebulo office, in the Georgian Dream's office. She spent quite some time in the office.

It should be noted that according to the information obtained by the observer, the official break time in Sakrebulo is from 13:00 to 14:00.

Poti

Poti Mayor's Office brought construction materials for 30 families - 739 pieces of roof tiles and 6.9 cubic meters of wood for the total amount of 19 275 GEL. Construction materials were purchased to

help Poti citizens living in extremely difficult living conditions. The program is funded from the local budget.

This is the second purchase. The first materials were handed over to the population on 29 July. Poti Mayor's Office added the mentioned program to the budget this year and [allocated 50 000 GEL](#) for it (program code 06 04 19). However, the Mayor's Office started fulfilling its obligations under the program after seven months and during the election period.

Abasha

- On 27 August, during working hours, Maia Gabelaia, Head of the Human Resources Management and Case Management Department of the Abasha Mayor's Office attended the Georgian Dream event, where Prime Minister introduced Abasha Mayoral and Sakrebulo candidates to the party supporters.
- On 27 August, an advertising banner of Abasha mayoral candidate Giga Gabelia was hung on the building of the Abasha headquarters of the Georgian Dream. A car on the balance of the Abasha Municipality Amenity Service was used for this purpose.

4.8. Changes in the local self-government budgets

Abasha

On 4 August, less than 60 days before the elections, the Abasha Municipality Sakrebulo passed a resolution, according to which the municipal budget increased by 679.9 thousand GEL, which is prohibited by the Election Code of Georgia. Changes in the budget were made with external resources, in particular with funding from the Regional Fund. The money will be spent on infrastructure projects.

4.9. Campaign on social networks

Social media, and especially Facebook, is an important platform for pre-election campaigning, candidate advertising, or influencing voters. In Georgia, Facebook is actively and multifacetedly used by parties and politicians, both for their own promotion and to discredit their opponents. It should be noted that ISFED methodically and thoroughly studies use of Facebook in the Georgian political space and the patterns of behavior of political actors. The findings of the study are available in a number of reports published by the organization.

The term social network is not mentioned in the Election Code, however, the definition of campaigning is quite wide and includes **any public action that facilitates or hinders the election of an electoral subject / candidate**. Such a formulation quite logically may include campaigning on Facebook, as sharing the information on social network about electoral subjects, their activities, program, promises, etc, facilitates dissemination of information, connection to voters and demonstrates support of the sharer of the post. Therefore, such an action has all the characteristics of electoral campaigning.

Campaigning also occurs when a particular Facebook user spreads messages against a particular political subject, because according to the definition provided above, campaigning also includes a public action that hinders election of an electoral subject.

In addition to traditional forms of pre-election campaigning, public officials are also actively expressing support for the government on Facebook. It is a common practice for them to share information about the activities of the ruling party and its candidates during working hours. Such information is often re-shared from Facebook pages of the party / candidate or their supporters.

Restrictions on participation in pre-election campaigning stem from the principles established by the Law of Georgia on Civil Service, which obliges civil servants (except political and state-political officials) to adhere to the principle of impartiality and political neutrality.

The Resolution #200 of the Government of Georgia of April 20, 2017 “On Defining General Rules of Ethics and Conduct in Public Institutions” was amended on 31 August, 2020 and according to Article 6, Paragraph 5: “When carrying out his / her official duties a public servant refrains from actions statements and / or social activities through means of communication, including the use of social networks, that may be perceived as pursuing the interests of a particular political party.”

According to the Article 79 of the Election Code of Georgia, participation in the pre-election campaigning in violation of the requirement of the law is an administrative violation and carries a fine in the amount of 2000 GEL.

Lanchkhuti

Davit Tsuladze, the director of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Lanchkhuti Amenity and Service Center posted the election number of the Georgian Dream – 41 - as a cover photo on his personal Facebook page.

Kobuleti

Tsetskhlauri school principal Lado Khozrevanidze shares the election banner of mayoral candidate Levan Zoidze on his Facebook page.

Poti

- On 2 August, Facebook page of the administrative unit of Kundzuli and Poti Mayor’s Office, during working hours re-shared a post about the nomination of Beka Vacharadze as Poti mayoral candidate by Georgian Dream from the page of Irakli Khakhubia, a majoritarian MP of the Georgian Dream.
- On 2 August, Davit Jgerenaia, Head of the Architecture, Spatial Planning and Administrative Supervision Service of the Mayor’s Office, during working hours, shared a post on his Facebook page about nomination of Beka Vacharadze as Poti mayoral candidate of the Georgian Dream.
- Salome Sordia, a PR specialist at Poti Sakrebulo, systematically campaigns for the ruling party and its mayoral candidate through social media. While at work, [she shared a campaign post](#) of Poti mayoral candidate Beka Vacharadze on the social network.

Kazbegi

Manana Marsagishvili-Eloshvili, manager of Kazbegi House of Justice, who is the wife of Georgian Dream mayoral candidate Shalva Eloshvili, created a [Facebook support group](#) for the candidate during working hours and wrote several posts. Supporting posts and comments were also written in this group by local public officials during their working hours.

Later on, the Georgian Dream withdrew the candidacy of Shalva Eloshvili and the party's current mayoral candidate is Bakur Avsajanishvili, who served as police chief in Kazbegi in 2012-2019.

4.10. Alleged vote buying

Ozurgeti

[According to TV Pirveli](#), on 8 August, in Ozurgeti, a footage of money distribution was recorded at the headquarters of the Georgian Dream. Staff member Gela Chanukvadze hands over 400 GEL to a citizen. Guria majoritarian MP Vasil Chigogidze was also present in the building. According to him, the citizen was given money to buy water and products.

ISFED observer found out the identity of a woman who reportedly received the money: Aza Chelidze, coordinator of Roseta Skamkochaishvili, a candidate for the Sakrebulo from village Dvabzu. The observer spoke to the candidate from village of Dvabzu, who denied any connection with Chelidze and said she did not know her. But the observer obtained a photograph of Rosetta Skamkochaishvili with Aza Chelidze and her son with Georgian Dream MP Marika Chkhikvishvili.

ISFED also spoke to Giorgi Gurjumelidze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream local organization, who confirmed that Aza Chelidze lived in Dvabzu and was an active supporter of the Georgian Dream. As for the money, according to him it was given to buy water. Ghurjumelidze focused on the fact that the money spent is strictly controlled and is accompanied by relevant documentation.

On 10 August, TV Pirveli released an [audio recording](#) of an experiment: the journalist of the TV company introduced himself to Aza Chelidze as an employee of HQ of the Georgian Dream party and asked for details of what had happened in Ozurgeti office. In the recording, Chelidze says that it was money for moving around, transportation in case someone would need something.

Opposition parties appealed to the prosecutor's office regarding this fact.

Khulo

At the Shuamtoba public celebration, the newlyweds were presented with two gold jewelry – one from Khulo Mayor Vakhtang Beridze, who is the mayoral candidate from the Georgian Dream, and the other from Anzor Bolkvadze, an MP. The head of the Education and Culture Department of Khulo Mayor's Office told ISFED that the jewelry was purchased and handed over to the couple, but the value of the gift was not disclosed. Anzor Bolkvadze told ISFED that he was given the jewelry, but he does not know who bought it.

According to the [information](#) from Khulo Municipality, the newlyweds received gifts from the Chairman of the Government of Adjara and the Mayor of Khulo Municipality.

Khashuri

- On 19 August, on the occasion of the Transfiguration Day, members of the staff of Khashuri independent mayoral candidate Valeri Gelashvili visited the House of the Future, congratulated the residents with the holiday and delivered products. A member of the staff [shared a video](#) on the social network, where the employees of the "House of the Future" talk about assistance received from Valeri Gelashvili and wish him success.
- Khashuri Sakrebulo member Levan Gamrekeli plans to rehabilitate the road to the village of Kodistskaro with his own funds. ISFED representative also learned that Levan Gamrekeli rehabilitated the drinking water system in the village of Mitsobi at his own expense. Gamrekeli also donated the main door to the school in the village of Osiauri a few weeks ago and installed it.

4.11. Campaign of incumbent officials

In Georgia, where the issue of widespread use administrative resources during pre-election campaign is acute, the ruling party and its candidates have a far greater advantage over the opposition, as they are the only ones who have access to this type of resource. The situation is further aggravated when the candidate is at the same time an incumbent running for the same position. Mayors and Sakrebulo members, as political officials, enjoy unrestricted right to campaign. Thus, when an incumbent mayor who is at the same time a mayoral candidate, acts in accordance with his/her duties, meets with the population and presents them with social or other benefits, this assistance is often equated with the candidate. It should be noted that candidates quite enjoy this privilege and do not promote the separation of themselves as an official and as a candidate in the eyes of the electorate.

Acting officials, who are also candidates, can easily meet with staff from various fields and assemble them on account of official matters. At this point, the line between the candidate and his/her official status is blurred. It should be noted that restriction on campaigning during working hours does not apply in such cases.

According to the OSCE Copenhagen Document, which calls for a clear separation between the state and the political party, party activities should not be [merged](#) with the activities of the state. In many cases adherence to this principle often depends on the good faith of the candidate, rather than on legislative mechanisms.

Ambrolauri

Zviad Mkheidze, Georgian Dream mayoral candidate and the current mayor, is actively meeting with the leaders and employees of non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities and discusses

problems in their fields. On [17 August](#), the candidate met with representatives of the cleaning, amenity and water supply sectors, on 18 August he met with representatives of culture, art and tourism.

Kharagauli

On 5 August, the official Facebook page of Kharagauli Mayor's Office published information that at the initiative of Kharagauli Mayor Koba Lursmanashvili, so-called alternative water wells are being cut in the "water supply" area. Its purpose is to improve the timing and quality of water supply to the population.

It should be noted that in Kharagauli, water has been supplied to the population on schedule for years.

Gldani

- On 4 August, Kote Zarnadze, current Deputy Gamgebeli, who was nominated as a majoritarian candidate by the Georgian Dream in Gldani district, together with Gamgebeli and Sakrebulo MP attended opening of a recreation and entertainment space in the first micro-district of Gldani.

During the same event, Kote Zarnadze informed the public via [a live broadcast](#) on his Facebook page that a sports field and an entertainment area for adults and children had been opened in the first micro-district of Gldani.

According to him, there was a stadium in this area in 2008, but it was sold and the investor planned to build a high-rise building, however, in 2017, with the hard work of Mayor's Office, Gamgeoba and Mayor Kakhi Kaladze the area was reclaimed.

- Mayor of Tbilisi handed over [ownership certificates](#) to 36 families living in Gldani district at a symbolic price of one GEL. As such, the families legalized the areas they had lived in for many years. According to the City Hall, hundreds of applications have been submitted for legalization, which are being reviewed and satisfied in stages.

Kaspi

- On 5 August, Kaspi Mayor Vakhtang Maisuradze visited village of Khviti near administrative boundary line, which is part of the administrative unit of Lamiskana village. The mayor inspected the rehabilitation works of the access road to the village. According to Vakhtang Maisuradze, who is also a mayoral candidate from the Georgian Dream, they continue to pave roads in villages of Kaspi municipality where such a road never existed before. Once village access roads are paved, they will take care of internal roads and 459 784 GEL has been allocated from the local budget for the works.
- On 12 August, Shida Kartli Governor and Kaspi Mayor Vakhtang Maisuradze inspected the ongoing works in Kaspi within the framework of the "Renewed Regions" program. The incumbent mayor is still running for the Georgian Dream.

Krtsanisi

Arrangement of a new children's space has started on Grishashvili Street in Tbilisi. Within the framework of this project, Krtsanisi Gamgebeli Beka Mikautadze together with incumbent majoritarian MP of Krtsanisi district Levan Japaridze [met with the population](#) and discussed the details of the project. Levan Japaridze is again nominated as a majoritarian candidate for the upcoming elections.

Zugdidi

Zugdidi Municipality Sakrebulo Chairman Mamuka Tsotseria, who is also Georgian Dream mayoral candidate, continues public presentation of municipality projects, including: [arrangement](#) of a new drainage canal in Akhalkakhati and cleaning of the old drainage canals; [construction](#) of open sports fields with artificial covers on the territory of public schools in Tsaishi and Akhali Abastumani administrative units.

V. Politicization of educational institutions

Politicization of schools, kindergartens, out-of-school educational institutions is a sad practice established in Georgia. With each election, the urgency of this problem increases dramatically. In the regions, villages, staff of educational institutions are considered an important electoral resource by the ruling party and are often used for campaigning purposes, sometimes with coercion. Given the severity of the unemployment problem, a large proportion of teachers do not want to speak publicly about this practice. At the same time, the school staff enjoys authority among the local population, therefore, the government is eager to use them. This is especially true for principals, some of whom also act as voter mobilizers for the ruling party, including influencing teachers. Given such a key role, the government is doing its best to select obedient directors, while “disobedients” are punished in many ways: dismissals, unsubstantiated expiration of contract terms, audits and inspections of schools, etc.

ISFED provides free legal aid to victims of political discrimination and human rights abuses in the education system, and protects their interests before the courts and other bodies.

5.1. Involvement of employees of educational institutions in the campaign

In the months leading up to the local elections, the amendments to the Election Code introduced in June 2021, aimed to prohibit persons employed in state- or municipal-run preschools and educational institutions from participating in the election campaign during working hours or when exercising their official duties. There is an additional norm in the Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia that prohibits gathering of employees of state-funded educational institutions on account of official matters.⁴⁷

The use of schools as a political tool and the forced involvement of staff in the pre-election campaign violate not only the rules of the election law on campaigning and misuse of administrative resources,

⁴⁷ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 48

but also violate the principle enshrined in the Law of Georgia on General Education, according to which politicization of general education institutions is prohibited.

Senaki

According to ISFED, Senaki Public School principals and teachers are summoned to the ruling party's offices and forced to campaign, including through indirect influence. Similar instructions are given by principal of Senaki Public School N3 Marine Naneishvili and teacher of Public School N2 Guli Barkalaia. The chairman of Senaki Sakrebulo Kakhaber Rusia is involved in organizing the meetings. At meetings hosted at party offices, public school teachers are instructed to engage in compiling lists of supporters of the ruling party.

Khelvachauri

According to [media reports](#), principal of Zede Tsinsvla Public School Natalia Kechekhmadze sent a link to a Facebook live nominating Georgian Dream mayoral candidates to her teachers in a general chat and asked them to write supportive comments. The content of the principal's instructions is clear from the correspondence between the principal and the teachers.

5.2. Threats against a public school teacher

According to ISFED, a local coordinator of the Georgian Dream party threatened a teacher of one of the public schools following Lelo's offer for this teacher to be a member of the Precinct Election Commission. The representative of the ruling party "advised" the teacher not to accept the proposal of the opposition party and rather to get engaged in support of the Georgian Dream, otherwise she would face some problems. The public school teacher wants to remain anonymous.

5.3. Survey in a public school

ISFED recorded a survey of teachers conducted by a school administration representative on how they were involved in local self-government elections. The organization is not naming the school or the respondents. There was a list in the questionnaire: as a campaigner, a member of the commission, etc. Some of the teachers replied to the case manager that they were participating in the ongoing process as voters only. Relevant photos were also provided to ISFED observers.

Tsalka

Principal of Tsalka First Public School Marine Berianidze attended the nomination of the mayoral candidate organized by the Georgian Dream during working hours. ISFED observer learned from the Educational Resource Center that the principal of the first public school did not go on vacation or take a one-day vacation.

VI. Observation Mission 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 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 tendencies 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.electionportal.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.electionportal.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.