



ISFED
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR
FAIR ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

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2017 Elections of Local Self-Government Bodies

Evaluation of the Pre-Election Period of the Runoffs

Runoffs of the 21 October 2017 local self-government elections will be held on November 12, in districts of Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Borjomi, Khashuri, Martvili and Kazbegi. The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) was monitoring the election campaign process in all six districts through its long-term observers (LTOs).

The monitoring found that the period between the first and the second round of local self-government elections was marked by **instances of harassment/intimidation on political grounds and misuse of administrative resources in Ozurgeti, which threaten equal and free pre-election environment.**

ISFED identified 4 cases of harassment/intimidation and 1 case of possible vote buying in Ozurgeti District. Almost all instances involved different civil servants of Ozurgeti Municipality, who were acting in favor of the mayoral candidate of the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, Beglar Sioridze. In some cases, in interviews with ISFED observer residents of Ozurgeti confirmed reports of intimidation and vote buying but have asked not to be identified with their name. In addition to Ozurgeti, one case involving a threat to terminate employment on political grounds was found in Khashuri District.

In view of these facts and trends identified during the first round, ISFED urges local self-governments, political parties and candidates to refrain from vote buying or harassment on the Election Day, as well as from any actions that may be perceived as exercise of control over the will of voters, including collection of information about voters that arrive at polls. ISFED also urges the electoral administration to ensure protection of personal data of voters and free expression of voter's will.

Acts of Harassment/Intimidation and Vote Buying

Ozurgeti

- Irakli Siradze, head of the campaign office of an independent candidate for the office of Ozurgeti Mayor - Konstantine Sharashenidze reported that their representative, Giorgi Rokva was harassed. Relying on eyewitness accounts Siradze declared that on November 7, around 15:00, strangers visited Rokva at work, had him get in a car and were talking to him for some time.

At 15:17, Irakli Siradze received several text messages from Giorgi Rokva. According to these messages, Beglar Sioridze was with Rokva and he was being threatened. Giorgi Rokva was asking the head of the campaign office to act like Rokva had never provided his ID or helped the independent candidate with his campaign. Rokva was also asking Siradze to cancel his status as a representative in PEC no.43 of Ozurgeti village because he did not want to have any problems.

In connection to the incident, head of Sharashenidze's campaign office Irakli Siradze visited Giorgi Rokva at work together with other members of the campaign office. According to Siradze, Rokva seemed scared and anxious; he did not talk about details of the intimidation and asked him not to make the incident public.

Later at 19:55, an interview with Giorgi Rokva was published on the website of Guria News. In the interview Rokva denied to have worked with Konstantine Sharashenidze, saying that he was registered as a representative of the independent candidate without his consent and he learned about it from his friends.¹

Of note is the fact that Giorgi Rokva was running in the October 21 self-government elections in the community of Ozurgeti Village as a majoritarian candidate of the European Georgia and he was [subjected to intimidation prior to the first round](#) in an attempt to coerce him into withdrawing his candidacy.² In an interview with ISFED representative then-candidate confirmed the act of harassment at the time. He however did not withdraw his candidacy and garnered 35.6% of votes in the elections. It has been reported that the reason why Rokva is pressured ahead of the second round is because he enjoys high-level of voter support and his supporters may potentially become supporters of the independent candidate during the second round.

At this time Giorgi Rokva cannot be reached by observers and media; he is not making any public appearances. In an interview with ISFED observer, Giorgi Rokva's father Davit Rokva denied reports about harassment of his family and said that he is unaware of harassment against his son, he only knows what has been publicly reported. According to Davit Rokva, in the morning of November 8 his son left home but he did not say where he was going.

- An employee of Ozurgeti Municipality informed ISFED observer that she and other employees of the municipality have been instructed to engage in Beglar Sioridze's campaign. According to her, employees of the municipality have been instructed to share and like the material that Khatuna Sharadze, Head of Ozurgeti City Hall Public Relations Office, publishes in social media. Khatuna Sharadze is currently on a leave of absence and serves as a PR manager of Beglar Sioridze's campaign.
- In an interview with ISFED observer, resident of Makvineti village, Elza Katamadze said that in the evening of November 3, a coordinator of the Georgian Dream visited her at home and demanded her personal identification number, cell-phone number and information about who she was voting for. Because Katamadze refused to provide her personal data, the coordinator threatened that "someone else" would contact her about this issue.
- One of the residents of Makvineti village told ISFED observer that in early November she was contacted by a coordinator of the Georgian Dream who implied that because her close relative works at the municipality, she cannot be a supporter of an independent candidate, Konstantine Sharashenidze.

¹Guria News article is available at: <http://gurianews.com/article/mtavari/politika/gamarkvevinet-saidan-mokhvda-sharashenidzestan-chemi-piradi-monatsemebi-tu-ar-unda-gamoitanen>

²Detailed information is available in the second interim report of monitoring of the local self-government elections by ISFED: <http://www.isfed.ge/main/1285/eng/>

- A supporter of an independent mayoral candidate, Konstantine Sharashenidze said that in the evening of November 4 she was visited by the head of the Department of Social affairs and Healthcare at Ozurgeti City Hall, Tamar Dumbadze and her spouse Vladimer Vadachkoria, who still serves as a member of Sakrebulo in Ozurgeti Municipality. Tamar Dumbadze promised the citizen to pay her gas bill if she and her spouse support Beglar Sioridze in the second round.

Khashuri

In early November, ISFED observer was contacted from the campaign office of an independent mayoral candidate in Khashuri, Ramaz Nozadze to report threats made against Giorgi Zghudadze, an employee of a non-commercial (non-profit) legal entity Savane.

In an interview with ISFED observer, Giorgi Zghudadze said that he was threatened he would be dismissed from work unless he agreed to work in favor of the Georgian Dream candidate, Giorgi Guraspashvili. Further, according to Zghudadze, his spouse who served as a PEC member from the Georgian Dream has already been dismissed by the party.

On November 6, ISFED observer and Zghudadze agreed to meet and talk about details of the incident in person but the following morning Zghudadze asked to postpone the meeting.

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