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ISFED releases interim report on the Monitoring of the 2020 Parliamentary Elections



ISFED

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR FAIR ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) presented its first interim report on the 2020 parliamentary elections on 7th of July.

The report mainly discusses the period from June 1st, 2020 to July 4th, 2020, as well as the events that began before June 1 and continued during the monitoring period.

According to ISFED, during the reporting period 19 cases of alleged voter bribery were monitored, including 16 cases by majoritarian MPs of the Parliament of Georgia, and 3 cases of movement by Momo for the future, 2 cases of alleged use of state resources, 1 case of pressure on an observer of fair elections, 2 cases of obstruction of political activities, presumably political pressure 1 fact of threat.

"The world pandemic of Coronavirus creates special needs for financial and

ISFED is particularly alarmed by the phone calls made indirectly to the organization's observer after the start of the monitoring, and hints that, if active, the observer's business will run into problems.

social assistance from citizens through the state. Observing the fair elections, there has been no active political agitation by the municipal authorities in the process of providing social assistance, but there is a clear gap between the state and the ruling party, which is actively involved in the social assistance of party majoritarian MPs." organization wrote.

According to the ISFED, in March-June, a separate majoritarian MPs presented food and/or medical packages to the population within the framework of various social events, which are signs of voter bribery under Article 252 of the Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens. Majority MPs are members of

the ruling party and some of them have publicly announced their participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

It should be noted that in 2 cases - in Gori and Senaki, the majority of MPs support the free medical-diagnostic action involved in the organization of Georgian Dream - Healthy Future, the alleged voter bribery of which was indicated by fair elections back in 2016, during the pre-election campaign.

Signs of voter bribery were also revealed in the activities of the opposition party Lelo Georgia and its affiliated organization Movement for the Future - Momo, which awarded scholarships to students and provided social assistance

to citizens in Gori and Telavi.

According to the organization, the state-funded print media publication 'Our Village' contains signs of useful agitation for the ruling party, and its leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili.

It is expected that the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture tries to win the hearts of a wide audience of teachers with an indefinite date of the mandatory compulsory exam for practicing teachers, postponed until the fall.

ISFED has also developed recommendations. Authorities, political parties/candidates and their representatives shall not exert pressure on observers or interfere with the conduct of observation activities. Political parties shall not use such form of communication with voters as to contain signs of voter bribery and to carry out their activities in good faith; Majoritarian MPs should refrain from participating in state and/or local budget-funded activities; In carrying out charitable activities, majoritarian MPs shall observe anonymity and donate to the funds operating in this direction; Political parties should refrain from mobilizing and attending their supporters at opposition campaigns. Also, they should not allow their supporters to obstruct meetings of other parties and campaign activities.

As for local self-government bodies, when acting with the help of state and local budget funds, they should act in accordance with the principle of good faith and not create a feeling in the population that the ruling party is behind the issued aid. Charity and Humanitarian Organizations are not to violate the prohibitions established by the Election Code of Georgia or hold similar events with political parties and their representatives during charity events; charitable activities should not be used for the benefit of any party and/or candidate.



ISFED says parties and candidates should make the information on meetings with their voters accessible for observers and the media to monitor election campaigns.

Outline of upcoming parliamentary elections

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Last week, parliament finally passed a constitutional amendment to the election model that came into force after the president signed it. Parliament immediately moved to discuss changes to the Electoral Code, and it is expected that it will be adopted soon. However, the opposition has remarks regarding a number of articles of the Electoral Code.

On June 29th, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the draft constitutional amendments in the third reading by 117 votes to 3, according to which the 2020 parliamentary elections will be held according to a model close to proportional representation. It has now been decided that 120 out of 150 deputies will be elected by the proportional system and 30 by the majoritarian system. Accordingly, the distribution of constituencies is also changing. The adopted model encourages the

separate participation of small parties in the elections, as a 1% threshold is set for political parties, and the registration of parties is simplified. The right to participate in the elections is a party that submits 5,000 signatures. 19 parties with qualified subjects and all those parties that have received more than 15 thousand votes independently or otherwise in the last elections are exempted from this obligation. However, the 1% threshold does not apply to party blocs that were often formed in Georgia before the parliamentary elections - the more parties that join the bloc, the higher the percentage threshold. This system does not encourage the creation of pre-election blocs; if we recall, in the past, the strong government party was opposed by the opposition in the form of blocs. Usually, not opposition parties but pre-election blocs managed to change governments.

The novelty of the electoral

system will also be that the undivided mandates will be distributed to the political parties that have received the largest balance; Also, in case of receiving 40% of the votes, the party will not be able to get more than 50% of the seats, or more than 75 seats in the parliament. Consequently, it will not be able to form a government independently and it will be necessary to form a coalition government.

The Georgian Dream has blamed the constitutional amendment on the election, accusing the opposition of trying to reform it. The United Opposition immediately responded that the constitutional amendments were the result of opposition unanimity and pressure from the international community, and it took almost a year to adopt.

With the adoption of the constitutional amendments, the government considers that the agreement reached with the United Opposition on March 8th

has been fulfilled, although the opposition parties participating in the agreement do not think so. They are demanding the release of Giorgi Rurua and consider it part of the March 8th agreement. That is why the MPs of the National Movement and European Georgia did not take part in the second and third hearings of the constitutional amendments. However, after the adoption of the constitutional amendments, the opposition has no leverage to influence the government on this issue.

If the opposition talks about the need to change the government in the upcoming parliamentary elections, the ruling Georgian Dream spoke about the need to change the opposition in the upcoming elections. Leaders of the ruling party made statements on this topic almost simultaneously. First, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said that "Georgia's enemies should no longer be in the parliament of the new convocation of Georgia." Archil Talakvadze, the chairman of the parliament, distinguished between the 'old' and the 'new' opposition. The 'old' opposition is the "National Move-

ment" and "European Georgia", which did not support the constitutional changes and "dragged the country into the past." They are opposed by the Georgian Dream and the New Opposition, which support constitutional changes.

Judging by these statements, the task of the Georgian Dream in the upcoming parliamentary elections is not only to stay in power, but also to replace the opposition - as one of the politicians noted, "in 2012, the Georgian Dream threw the UNM out of office; now, they should throw them out of opposition." The Georgian Dream is thinking about the desired opposition with which it will cooperate.

After the adoption of the constitutional amendments, the Parliament accelerated the amendments to the Electoral Code. These changes were approved by the first reading at the July 1st sitting of the Parliament (91 in favor, 5 against). The Electoral Code includes many positive changes, but, as many non-governmental organizations state, they still don't fully meet the recommendations from OSCE and ODIHR. However, this can be further discussed after the final adoption of the amendments to the election legislation.

(Translated by Mariam Mchedlidze)

On 29 June, a five-day water monitoring survey started in Batumi, Georgia, organised by the EU-funded project 'European Union Water Initiative Plus for the Eastern Partnership' (EUWI+).

The survey is carried out by Georgian experts from the National Environmental Agency. It aims to assess the quality of coastal and transitional water ecosystems to help identify appropriate measures to protect water resources.

Apart from the survey, the EU also supports the upgrade of Batumi's laboratory by organising training courses for experts and providing new state-of-the-art analysis equipment. This aims to improve Georgia's capacities to manage its water resources.

Two similar surveys were held in September and November 2019. The surveys allowed the National Environmental Agency to determine the ecological status of coastal waters in the Chorokhi-Adjaristskali River Basin District.

The EUWI+ project helps Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine to bring their legislation closer to EU water management policies, with a main focus on managing transboundary river basins. (euneighbours.eu)

EU supports Georgia in protecting its coastal waters



Photo: European Union

Weather

Wednesday, July 8

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 37°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 23°C

Thursday, July 9

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 33°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 21°C

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TI: More than 11,000 contracts signed without a tender during the state of emergency



By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Local watchdog, Transparency International-Georgia (TIG) released a study on 7th of July on examining the state procurements carried out during the state of emergency. According to the report 11,316 contracts were signed during the state of emergency, which lasted from March 21st to May 22nd, without announcing a tender. The state has purchased a total of ₾127.2 million, of which 35% (₾45 million) comes from Georgian Dream and Salome Zurbashvili's donors in different years.

"The government administration, the State Security Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) and some agencies under the MIA do not publish simplified procurement contracts. Therefore, it is likely that more money will be spent on direct purchases, but the information about them is not transparent, which complicates the analysis and control of corruption risks," the report reads adding that this

problem was urgent even before the state of emergency.

During the same period, 1,495 tenders were announced, with a total cost of ₾557 million. Most of all, 266 e-tenders worth a total of ₾460 million were announced for the purchase of construction works.

"Only one supplier participated in more than half of the tenders. Compared to the same period in 2019, the number of tenders announced has almost halved, and competition has decreased," the organization said.

TIG offers 5 recommendations to the government: The Audit Office should pay more attention to the connections of the companies participating in public procurement with the ruling parties; The Procurement Agency should pay more attention to the issue of publishing services purchased without a tender; Procurement Agency should tighten consent to procurement without tender; State agencies must be obliged to publish an argument on the basis of which they have purchased services without ten-

ders; Suspicious purchases should be investigated by the Anti-Corruption Department.

Note that restrictions and regulations may be extended without declaring a state of emergency.

The case concerns the draft law, which was approved by the Parliament of Georgia on May 22 in the third reading. The bill authorizes the government to impose legal restrictions without a state of emergency. The deadline for amendments to the law

on public health was July 15.

Mamuka Mdinardze, the leader of the parliamentary majority, spoke about the initiative to extend the restrictions, saying that there are 3 possible reasons for the extension: "health care for citizens, the economy and the upcoming elections." Mdinardze believes that the extension will allow the elections to be held in a safe environment by the end of the year.

The bill provides for a new definition of quarantine mea-

asures and includes measures related to restrictions on movement, economic activity, property, assembly, labor and other rights.

Parliament passed the bill in an expedited manner in May, citing the threat of the spread of the new coronavirus. On May 22nd, the president signed it.

Opposition groups, the Public Defender's Office and non-governmental organizations say the bill is unconstitutional and increases the risk of disproportionate rights by the government, adding that fines and criminal measures are disproportionate, repressive and dangerous to human rights.



The aim of the study was to determine how much the risks of corruption have increased in the force majeure situation caused by Coronavirus and in what directions significant sums have been spent.

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