

Politics

NGOs release assessment reports on 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia



FULL STORY ON Page 2

Georgia records 1852 new Coronavirus cases as PM tests positive for Coronavirus

NDI Report: Allegations of Irregularities, Intimidation and Abuses Detract from Legal and Administrative Improvements for Georgia's Parliamentary Elections

FULL STORY ON Page 3

Opposition refuses to enter Parliament



European Georgia refuses to enter parliament and refuses to run in the second round, where their two candidates, Shalva Shavgulidze and Elene Khoshtaria, have passed.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The CEC has completed the counting process of the election results that were held on the 31st of October and the constituency of the 10th convocation of the parliament became known - candidates from the list, as well as majoritarian party leaders. According to the CEC, in the proportional part, the Georgian Dream received 48.22% of the vote, which equates to 928,780 votes. The Georgian

Dream will get 61 out of 120 seats for the proportional list. Because the ruling party, according to the CEC, also exceeded the 40.5% minimum, the so-called Minimum locking threshold. The party also has the privilege of summarizing the mandates received from the proportional part and the majoritarian constituencies.

In the first round of elections in the majoritarian constituencies, according to the CEC, the Georgian Dream won 14 seats, the second round will be held in 16

constituencies, including all constituencies in Tbilisi. Thus, the Georgian Dream already has 75 seats, and to win a simple majority it needs to win only in one constituency.

The second round in 16 districts is scheduled for November 21st. The CEC should not postpone the publication of election summary protocols until December 10.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties consider the 2020 elections to be rigged and

do not intend to enter parliament. No opposition party that received more than 1% of votes recognizes the election results as legitimate and is not going to enter the new parliament.

All opposition parties the European Georgia, Lelo, the Labor Party, Girchi, UNM power in unity, Strategy Builder, Citizens, and Patriots Alliance have boycotted the election results and none of them is included in the 10th convocation of the Georgian Parliament.

Strength in Unity, an election bloc led by the United National Movement, which according to preliminary CEC results garnered 27,13% of votes, announced that it does not recognize the legitimacy of election results and will, therefore, boycott the next parliament.

European Georgia (EG) Chairman Davit Bakradze announced at a briefing that his party has decided to boycott the parliament, adding that EG, which according to preliminary CEC results accumulated 3.78% of votes, will not participate in runoffs planned to take place in 14 out of 30 single-mandate majoritarian districts.

Giorgi Vashadze, leader of Strategy Aghmashenebeli party, which received 3.15% of votes, announced that the party will boycott the next parliament.

Badri Japaridze, leader of the Lelo for Georgia party (3.16%) announced that his party does not acknowledge the legitimacy of election results and will also refuse to enter the next parliament. Japaridze called for snap elections to take place as soon as possible.

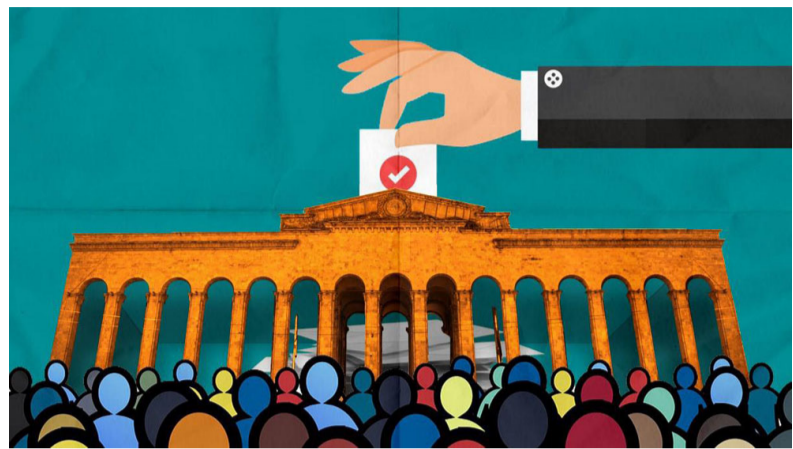
Zurab Japaridze, leader of the libertarian Girchi party (2.89%), announced that the party, refusing to recognize the results, will boycott the next parliament.



According to the preliminary data of the CEC, the Georgian Dream won 48.22% of the votes in the parliamentary elections.

CONTINUED ON Page 2

NGOs release assessment reports on 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia



As the Central election Commission's results indicate, nine parties have managed to cross the one percent threshold.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC) has counted votes in all electoral precincts of the October 31 Parliamentary Election. As the results indicate, the Georgian Dream has claimed victory, however, opposition parties that surpassed the one percent election threshold consider the results illegitimate and demand to repeat elections. While many international partners and organizations positively assess the conduction process of the elections, Georgian NGOs believe that the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia were accompanied by many shortcomings. NGOs have published reports where they assess the elections and focus on the violations that have been detected on October 31.

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) reports that the final turnout was 56.7%, which is higher than the 2016 parliamentary elections when the turnout

was 52.9%. As the report suggests, no unauthorized persons were present at 99.8% of polling stations while counting votes. At 99.3% of the polling stations, the process of vote counting and result announcement was carried out transparently.

According to ISFED's report, based on the analysis of information obtained through Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT), which is a methodology used by the organization during Election Day observation of the Parliamentary Elections, the tendency of mismatches in the summary protocols has been observed. In particular, such violations when the number of ballot papers cast exceeded the number of signatures in the voters' list. According to ISFED, such violations were reported at 8% of polling stations. The organization believes that to increase credibility towards the electoral process, the CEC should recount the results of these polling stations (8%) in the presence of all parties interested.

Along with the tendency of

vote mismatch, ISFED has detected the following violations: Pressuring observers and restriction of their rights; failure to hand out summary protocols; correction of summary protocols; insufficient validation information on summary protocols; inaccurate filling in of summary protocols; unreasonable annulment of ballots; violations related to voters list; improper validation of electoral documentation.

According to the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association's (GYLA) assessment report, GYLA observed the 2020 Parliamentary Elections with more than 800 observers countrywide. The mission covered a total of 2250 polling stations (out of 3847).

GYLA pays attention to the negative tendencies revealed on election day, which are a related

violation of the principle of secrecy, violation of inking, and voting rules (double voting). GYLA's observers also revealed violations, which are related to mobile ballot boxes and movement of unauthorized persons on the polling station territory.

According to GYLA, there were facts of aggression and physical abuse towards their observers. As the report reads, in some cases, observers were not allowed to make notes in the record book and register a complaint and two observers were even forced to leave the precinct. There were also cases of insulting journalists and obstruction of their activities.

Another report was published by Transparency International Georgia (TI) who monitored the elections with about 600 local observers. According to TI, the analysis of 170 violations that

they had recorded and 46 complaints that had been filed, "makes it clear that the 31 October elections were a step back compared with the 2016 parliamentary elections."

As TI reports, the fact that CEC published preliminary election results 7.5 hours after the closing of the polling stations, is a deterioration of the practice established during the elections over the last eight years, which "gave the opposition parties a reason to suspect that manipulation had occurred in the announcement of the results."

According to TI, in one of the precincts in Marneuli, an individual has been detected who cast his vote at least ten times. The organization has requested invalidation of the voting results in this precinct.

Similar to ISFED's report, TI mentions the tendency of mismatching in the summary protocol, as well. TI also reports about facts of alleged voter bribing, physical confrontation, and obstruction of journalists' work and assault on journalists, obstruction of observers' work and registration of complaints, Violation of vote secrecy, presence of unauthorized individuals in polling stations, Violation of Covid-19-related safety rules, etc.

According to the results of Georgia's 10th parliamentary elections, nine parties have managed to cross the one percent threshold. The ruling Georgian Dream party has received 61 mandates, United National Movement - 34 mandates, European Georgia - 4 mandates + one undistributed mandate, Strategy Agmashenebeli - 4 mandates, Lelo - 4 mandates, Alliance of Patriots - 4 mandates, Girchi - 3 mandates + one undistributed mandate, Aleko Elisashvili Citizens - 1 mandate + 1 undistributed mandate, Shalva Natelashvili - 1 mandate.



According to the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), organization observers filed 94 complaints at Precinct Election Commissions, 106 complaints at District Election Commissions, and 37 entries in the record book.

Opposition refuses to enter Parliament

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

In a press conference held on November 2 with other opposition parties, Strength in Unity, an election bloc led by the United National Movement, announced that it is refusing the mandates for the Supreme Council of Autonomous Republic of Adjara, the region's 21-member legislative assembly. The Supreme Council elections were held on October 31, parallel to the general

parliamentary elections in Georgia. The UNM and other opposition parties announced a rally outside the Adjara government building on November 3 to defend their votes.

Only the ruling Georgian Dream party (45.86%) and the UNM-led bloc Strength in Unity (33.95%) – were able to cross the 5% threshold in the proportional part of the Supreme Council elections. GD has also managed to secure a first-round victory in 1 of the 3 single-mandate majoritarian constituencies of the Adjara Supreme Council; run-offs are expected in the remaining 2.

The opposition has planned a rally this Sunday to protest the

results of the elections and demand snap elections.

According to Irakli Kobakhidze, executive secretary of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia, the opposition's statements about boycotting parliamentary activities mean capitulating to the second round of elections:

"They are losing all the elections in the second round and they are avoiding the second defeat from the very beginning," Kobakhidze said at a briefing. According to him, GD and its election headquarters will start preparing for the second round of elections on November 3rd.

MEPs David McAllister, Marina Kaljurand, Sven Mikser,

and Viola von Cramon-Taubadel released a joint statement on the first round of the parliamentary elections. MEPs congratulate Georgia, "a key ally of the EU, on successfully organizing the first round of the parliamentary elections despite a difficult epidemiological context."

They noted that these elections were found to be competitive and freedoms were respected overall, despite deplorable cases of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the State throughout the campaign and on election day.

Members of the European Parliament pointed out that candidates were able to campaign freely, giving voters a genuine choice between a variety of platforms. "The level of interest and

engagement on the part of civil society actors also constitutes a positive feature of these elections." Note that the European Parliament wasn't able to send an observing delegation, but they based their assessment on the ODIHR's position, that was released the previous day.

Tamar Chugoshvili, an independent MP and former Vice-Speaker of the parliament announced that "these elections have international legitimacy. Under these conditions, neither voters nor international partners will understand the opposition's refusal to participate in the election runoff." According to Chugoshvili, not entering the parliament was the biggest mistake made by the opposition in the past, and "this mistake can not be repeated."

Weather

Tuesday, November 3

Day Overcast

High: 20°C

Night Showers

Low: 13°C

Wednesday, November 4

Day Showers

High: 19°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 11°C

published by

The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi,
0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze

Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000

E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge

http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli

Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze

Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili

Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.2438; Euro - 3.7761; GBP - 4.1900; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.0307; Swiss Franc - 3.5336

Georgia records 1852 new Coronavirus cases as PM tests positive for Coronavirus



The number of active cases of infection stands at 15,411.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

As of November 2nd, Georgia reported 1852 new Coronavirus cases, 7 deaths, and 1696 recoveries. According to Berdia Sichinava, Deputy Head of the Task Force operating under the Inter-agency Coordination Council, the country maintains a positive dynamic in terms of increased numbers of recovered people.

According to Sichinava, out of 1852 coronavirus cases confirmed on November 2nd, 650 were reported in Tbilisi, 389 in Adjara, 411 in Imereti, 68 in Kvemo Kartli, 51 in Shida Kartli, 28 in Guria, 114 in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, 20 in Kakheti, 51 in Mtskheta-

Mtianeti, 27 in Samtskhe-Javakheti, and 13 in Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia has published a statement, according to which 1844 senior medical students have been already trained to be involved in the process of managing coronavirus if necessary. The key purpose of the training program is to create a reserve base for medical staff. Trained students are now ready to assist doctors in the process of managing COVID-19. As the ministry stated, the training program will continue systematically.

The ministry also noted that considering the epidemiological

situation and decision made by the Inter-Agency coordination council, the date of opening cinemas and theaters, which was set for November 1st, has been postponed.

As it became known on November 2nd, the Prime-Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia has tested positive for Coronavirus. Gakharia had been self-isolating after one of his bodyguards contracted coronavirus. The head of the government's administration Natia Mezvrishvili has tested positive as well.

In total, there have been 42 579 confirmed Coronavirus cases in Georgia since February, the number of recovered patients has reached 26 800 and 342 patients have passed away.

NDI Report: Allegations of Irregularities, Intimidation and Abuses Detract from Legal and Administrative Improvements for Georgia's Parliamentary Elections

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) issued an analysis yesterday, according to which alleged irregularities in results protocols, widespread reports of potentially intimidating behavior in or around polling stations, delays in the publication of results and persistent perceptions of pre-election abuses of power detracted from notable improvements in the legal framework and administrative procedures for Georgia's October 31, 2020 parliamentary elections.

Christine Todd Whitman, former governor of New Jersey and administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency in the U.S., who served as a member of the NDI analysis team congratulated citizens of Georgia for turning out to vote, despite the challenges of a global pandemic. "As the the country heads to run-off elections on November 21, government leaders and election authorities will need to take extraordinary steps to address the concerns that have been raised and ensure public confidence in the overall process and final results."

On election day, credible observer groups highlighted irregularities related to results protocols and vote secrecy, among other issues. They reported instances of physical confrontations outside of polling stations, obstruction of the work of journalists and observers, and allegations of vote buying and vote rigging, and the intimidating presence of party coordinators and activists outside most polling stations. Following election day, opposition activists held large protest rallies, many calling for recounts or even invalidation of the results and repeat elections.

The legal framework provided a sound basis for the conduct of the elections, and July 2020 constitutional and legislative reforms contributed to a more diverse field of contestants. Opposition parties and CSOs raised complaints about excessive partisanship among election commissions and expressed mistrust in the complaints and appeals process. Longstanding concerns about the campaign financing framework remained relevant.

The campaign was open and pluralistic. However, multiple incidents of violence and intimidation were reported. Allegations of abuses of state resources were widespread. There were also significant numbers of reports of voter bribery. Parties had uneven access to television, due to media polarization, and campaign messaging focused more on criticizing opponents than presenting constructive policy solutions.

Georgia has taken significant steps toward promoting greater inclusion and diversity in politics, most notably a new gender quota. Despite this progress, women, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities and members of the LGBTI+ community remain underrepresented in the new parliament.

The highly polarized election news coverage impeded voters' ability to make informed choices. There were multiple reports of violence or threats of violence targeting journalists. Due to limited participation, televised debates did not live up to their potential for informing voters. Information manipulation was widespread, particularly on online platforms such as Facebook.

"Without demonstrable improvements to the electoral process, a pattern of declining public confidence in key democratic institutions will continue," said Ambassador Derek Mitchell, President of NDI. "What is needed is the political will to place the integrity of the process over partisan interests."

The NDI report makes 35 recommendations to improve Georgia's electoral process. In advance of the runoff elections on November 21, it will be critical for Georgia's electoral stakeholders to focus on the following:

- Authorities should make extra efforts to swiftly and properly adjudicate submitted complaints and conduct recounts or reruns, where appropriate. They should investigate allegations of violence or intimidation, as appropriate, prosecute them to the full extent of the law and take all measures necessary to prevent such practices in the future.

- Parties and candidates should make every effort to provide adequate evidence to substantiate claims of electoral violations, abuse of state resources, or pressure and intimidation, and follow available procedures for seeking redress.

- All stakeholders should respect and uphold the rights of non-partisan independent observers to continue their oversight work without interference or intimidation.

- The CEC should reinforce the need for PECs to rigorously and consistently apply all prescribed procedures, including allocating responsibilities among commission members, ensuring vote secrecy, following inking procedures, and filling out protocols.

- All stakeholders should make efforts to de-escalate tensions and facilitate a peaceful environment. Party leaders and candidates should renew their campaigns' commitments to the code of conduct.

- To safeguard voters' access to balanced and reliable information, political parties and candidates should participate in a spectrum of debates and political programs to present their policies and plans to the public.

- Before the run-off elections, campaigns should make every effort to safeguard public health as they conduct outreach to voters.



As the PM Giorgi Gakharia wrote on his Facebook page, he will continue working remotely.