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ISFED presents 2nd interim report on official pre-election monitoring of 2021 Elections



► Withing the Free Legal Aid project, the organization has 19 lawsuits filed in the courts across the country to protect the rights of public servants from state or municipal LEPLs, LEDs, the public schools who were sacked, likely on political grounds.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The local watchdog International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) has released its second interim report on the upcoming October 2 local elections, covering a period from August 31 through September 21. The document highlights several possible violations, including violence, alleged cases of political pressure and dismissals.

Throughout the country ISFED identified 2 cases of violence; 20 instances of alleged political pressure or threats; 5 cases of alleged vote-buying; 12 instances of participation of unauthorized persons in the election campaign and 1 of participation by the incumbent official; 4 possible dismissals on political grounds; 5 alleged facts of politicization of educational institutions; 3 alleged cases of the use of administrative resources and damaging of agitation materials. ISFED reported illegal interference with journalistic activities. In particular, the document discussed the case when an operator of the opposition-minded TV Pirveli channel was 'deliberately hit by a car on September 7 in Tbilisi', while 'Mtavari Arkhi TV crew was allegedly attacked at the Georgian Dream Kareli office on September 15.'

The pre-election campaign was also 'significantly shaken' by the leaking of alleged State Security Service leaked files. Document also recalled TV Pirveli's September 11 report on the SSS allegedly collecting information about the political

views of educational institutions' employees and the party activities of their family, which supposedly resulted in dismissals in several cases.

Dismissals, pressure, and threats based on political grounds, particularly against opposition candidates, are a persistent trend, according to the organization. It also noted the involvement of unregistered voters in the election campaign, which is generally favorable to the ruling party.

The watchdog also appealed to the Central Election Commission and the Audit Office to look into and respond to the September 17 distribution of banners depicting media figures and opposition politicians against a bloody backdrop. As of September 21, ISFED has filed 27 complaints to election commissions and other relevant agencies to address the alleged violations, and also lodged 19 lawsuits in courts, over the individuals who have allegedly been dismissed over political grounds.

The interim report reads that much like in previous elections, the nature of the violations observed during the pre-election period is getting worse. ISFED monitors have also observed attacks against opposition supporters, including the Dmanisi stabbings. In particular, According to the member of the United National Movement-led group Strength in Unity Kakha Okriashvili, 20 to 30 Georgian Dream supporters descended on a meeting with the UNM's local mayoral candidate Giorgi Tatuashvili in Village Gantiadi near Dmanisi town. He claimed that the son of Davit Dautashvili,

Georgian Dream's local majoritarian candidate, attacked 2 of their supporters. Mtavari Arkhi TV showed footage of a scuffle allegedly between GD and UNM activists. The Interior Ministry has yet to respond to the news. Georgian Dream chair Irakli Kobakhidze urged reporters that 'a culprit must be punished' in response to the event in Gantiadi village, Dmanisi Municipality. "There is no justification for the heinous actions seen in Dmanisi... It makes no difference who performs such a thing, whose political party they belong to..." When asked about claims that the ruling party supports violence against the opposition, MP Kobakhidze pointed fingers at the United National Movement, claiming that it is the force that is 'encouraging violence.'

Another incident happened simultaneously - Rustavi mayoral candidate Davit

Kirkitadze said that a man was fired a few days ago from a public-funded agency under Rustavi City Hall, threatened and subsequently assaulted outside his house yesterday for supporting the opposition party. "This is the handwriting of the Georgian Dream," Kirkitadze said. GD's Rustavi mayoral candidate Nino Latsabidze denied the accusation as 'absurd.' Responding to this event and pre-election developments in the country, the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi condemned the 'violent, seemingly politically motivated attacks which took place in Dmanisi and Rustavi.' The statement reads that this, along with numerous reports of pressure and intimidation against opposition candidates and their supporters throughout the country, 'raises serious doubts about the government's commitment to a safe, fair pre-election environment and a democratic election process.'

"Violence is unacceptable in an election campaign. The government bears primary responsibility for creating an environment that protects individuals' rights and ensures a free, fair, competitive election that voters can have confidence in."

The Embassy called on the Government of Georgia to redouble its efforts to ensure that candidates and their supporters can exercise their democratic rights of free speech and assembly, without threats of intimidation, harassment, or violence, and take proactive steps to hold accountable those who commit election violations.

Statement also reminded that all parties have a civic duty to promote a peaceful atmosphere in which citizens can discuss the issues, express their preferences, and choose their candidates free from the threat of violence and intimidation.



► U.S. Embassy expressed doubts on the Georgian Government's commitment to democratic election process.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

The court ordered the payment of €35 thousand to the victim on the night of June 20

Tbilisi City Court on the night of June 20 ordered the Ministry of Internal Affairs to pay €35 thousand in compensation for the victim. Luka Petriashvili was called On Gavrilov's night, an orange bullet fired from riot police hit him, breaking his jaw bone. "The police raided, wounded people

and the court once again made it clear that we were innocent," Petriashvili said. According to his lawyer Beka Basilaia, the court ruled on the issues of moral damages, physical damage and disability.

Kobakhidze: It was difficult to tolerate provocation, especially from criminals, I apologize to the society

Irakli Kobakhidze, the leader of the Georgian Dream, called the confrontation

between him and Nika Melia at the EU office today a provocation by the UNM and said that Nika Melia was an "intellectual hooligan who sees his political chance only in provocations."

"It's symbolic that Nika Melia provoked in front of the EU office, before meeting with EU ambassadors, it was a demonstrative statement that Melia completely ignores the pro-Western Stirring in front of their office.

It was also difficult for me to endure today's provocation and insults, especially from the criminal side.

"I want to apologize to the public for the words they heard from me today," Kobakhidze said. "On October 2, the Georgian Dream will convincingly win the elections, after which the criminals will finally leave politics," Kobakhidze said.

Today, on September 23, Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream, and Nika Melia, Tbilisi mayoral candidate, confronted each other verbally in front of the EU Office.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.1155 | EURO - 3.6551 | GBP - 4.2514 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.2814 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3783 |

UN Women: Sexual harassment is a widespread problem in Georgian public service

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The authors of a new research report, initiated by the UN Women and in collaboration with the Civil Service Bureau, CRRC-Georgia, introduced the findings to representatives of the legislature and the executive, international and non-governmental organizations. Importantly, this is the first specialized study on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the public service at work and so far data on the problem have been practically non-existent.

In Georgia, 34% of public servants have experienced sexual harassment while working in the public service. The most common victims of sexual harassment are young women under the age of 35. 93% of female public servants consider sexual harassment to be a serious social problem, while only 44% of men think so.

The study reveals that sexual harassment in the workplace is a common but hidden problem in Georgia. Only 10% of the victims have officially reported to the relevant person or agency.

Respondents believe that if they report sexual harassment, it will have a negative impact on their careers.

The UN Women report also reflects the attitudes of public officials towards problem response and reporting mechanisms. 98% of respondents think that leaders should take sexual harassment seriously, while 95% believe that perpetrators of sexual harassment should be punished. In addition, 94% say they have the right to report sexual harassment in the workplace, while 80% be-

lieve that such notification is an effective way to stop violence. Most of the respondents prefer to be able to inform of such violence within the agency.

It is noteworthy that the UN Women works closely with the Civil Service Bureau to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the public service. As part of this collaboration, in 2020-2021, 8 public agencies developed and implemented internal mechanisms to complain about sexual harassment. The organisation expects that important information



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

obtained from the research will play a valuable role in determining the next steps.

In accordance with the international methodologies, the study ran from December 2020 to February 2021, and integrated both quantitative and qualitative parts. The study is part of the UN Women project "Good Governance for Gender Equality in Georgia," which is funded by the Government of Norway.

A conference on the Development of the Social Code of Georgia through the support of the French Development Agency Group (AFD Group) was organized in Tbilisi

Titled "Georgian State Security française de développement group (AFD Group) and the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (MoIDPHLSP) have organized an online conference on the development of the Social Code of Georgia.

On September 16 2021, the half-day online conference took place in Tbilisi at the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (MoIDPHLSP) in cooperation with the French Development Agency group (AFD Group) on the development of the Social Code of Georgia.

The conference, which was inaugurated by Ms. Tamar Barkalaia, Deputy Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied territories, labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, and Mr. Raphael Jozan, Director of AFD Tbilisi regional office for the South Caucasus, was attended by the experts from the European Union (EU) countries: France, Germany, Lithuania and Finland who have presented the European Social charter and EU social policy.

Expertise France representatives, Mr. Audrius Bitinas and Mr. Antoine Pogorzelski have in-



introduced the Social code of France and the updates of the Inception Phases of the Social Code development process of Georgia.

In addition, several examples of the social protection codifications in the EU countries, and the Social policy approaches in the sectors of: health, social assistance and employment activation programs were introduced during the conference.

As the next step of the social code elaboration process, thematic working groups will be established to deepen the understanding of the different components covered by the future social code and to elaborate on propositions. The first thematic working groups will be activated in October 2021.

The European Union Delegation will further support the elaboration of the Social Code with a new project aiming generally to strengthen the social protection system; the project will be imple-

mented by Expertise France and the Czech Development Agency (CzDA).

"International experts are already involved in this process. We had an international conference in which German, Finnish, French and Lithuanian experts have participated. They have experience in the process of drafting and refining social codes in their countries. At the conference, they presented examples of their countries, as well as the recommendations on how the Code should be developed.

We are already working on the evaluation of the existing system in Georgia and this evaluation will be presented to the public soon. We will see the existing system challenges, as well as the recommendations that experts will give us on how the social protection and support system should look like in Georgia. This includes social benefits, as well as active

labor market and employment policies, and the methodologies for better access and quality of health care, together with the appropriate support and organizational mechanisms that will make all of this possible to implement." said Ms. Tamar Barkalaia, Deputy Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

AFD Group continues its support to the Government of Georgia, to ensure a better targeting of the social protection, and focusing on the long-term sustainable solutions in different areas of social protection in Georgia, while being part of a long-term reform program, in coordination with other players in the sector.

AFD Group
AFD Group implements France's policy in the areas of development and international solidarity. The Group includes Agence Française de Développement (AFD), which finances the public sector and NGOs, as well as research and education in sustainable development; its subsidiary Proparco, which is dedicated to private sector financing; and soon, Expertise France, a technical cooperation agency. The Group finances, supports and accelerates transitions towards a fairer, more resilient world.

With our partners, we are building shared solutions with and for the people of the Global South. Our teams are at work on more than 4,000 projects in the field, in the French Overseas Departments and Territories, in 115 countries and in regions in crisis. We strive to protect global public goods – promoting a stable climate, biodiversity and peace, as well as gender equality, education and healthcare. In this way, we contribute to the commitment of France and the French people to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Towards a world in common.

FRIDAY	SEPTEMBER 24
Day	Rain High: 17°C
Night	Rain Low: 11°C
SATURDAY	SEPTEMBER 25
Day	Mainly sunny High: 21°C
Night	Partly cloudy Low: 12°C

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