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President Zourabichvili Initiates Political Reconciliation Process

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, the President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili met with Patriarch Iliia II. According to the Presidential Administration, at a face-to-face meeting at the Georgian Patriarchate, the President of Georgia introduced her initiative to start the process of national agreement. As the president announced on December 10, she would initiate an inclusive process with a large-scale involvement of the public, to allow Georgia to 'move forward.' Former president Mikheil Saakashvili and leaders of opposition parties have also

called on the government to take steps for national reconciliation which, according to them, is in everyone's, especially in the country's interests.

The Georgian patriarchy announced following the meeting that the church would 'always support the initiatives' which will be targeted at reconciliation and peace and be based on 'the principles of Christianity and justice.'

Zourabichvili in an interview with France 24 stated that she took responsibility to start "a process of reconciliation, truth, and justice." Zourabichvili also answered a question regarding the



► The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili and the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Iliia II.



► "Political reconciliation is the path many countries have taken before and which is paramount for Georgia today," said President Zourabichvili.

ex-president Saakashvili's return to Georgia. According to her, his return was a bad message and encouraged political instability and polarization, which, according to her, is the biggest problem of the country today.

According to a member of the United National Movement party Khatia

Dekanoidze, she feels optimistic about the dialogue announced by the president about reconciliation.

"I want her to play this historic role, because we have no other task but to stop the political persecution in Georgia. It is an obstacle in terms of our membership in the European family," said Dekanoidze.

NDI Report on October Local Municipal Elections

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The NDI (National Democratic Institute of the United States) published the results of the monitoring of the local self-government elections in Georgia, which covered the period from September 1 to November 5.

The report notes that the already polarized political processes have been exacerbated by rude rhetoric and offensive statements, while the focus on national-level issues has overshadowed local-level needs. According to the NDI, the October 2021 local elections were held in the context of a long political stalemate created after the 2020 parliamentary elections.

"Developments, including the prospect of calling early parliamentary elections if the ruling party receives less than 43% of the vote, have increased political stakes for all parties. As groups of international observers noted, although the elections were competitive and generally well-administered, deep-seated shortcomings



► The Limited Long Term Election Assessment was part of NDI's multi-track program for the October 2, 2021, municipal elections.

in the electoral environment negatively affected the process. As a result, the opportunity to reduce polarization and increase broad public confidence in the political process was missed."

The NDI also speaks of the imbalance of party resources and the fact that despite increased transparency and improvements in the grievance process, the parties have expressed low confidence in the election administration.

"Georgian voters, election workers, and nonpartisan citizen election observers demonstrated their determination to ensure Georgia's continued democratic progress. There were some improvements in electoral transparency, such as broadcasting CEC sessions and most interviews for nonpartisan DEC positions online, PEC level data in a more accessible format. However, the process was marred by widespread allegations of misuse of administrative resources, vote-buying, and pressure and intimidation.

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US DOLLAR - 3.0978 | EURO - 3.5052 | GBP - 4.0999 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.2094 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3686 |

Occupation Regime in Tskhinvali: War Crimes Will be Punished Regardless of Age

By THE MESSENGER STAFF

The occupation regime in Tskhinvali stated on December 9 about people being detained along the occupation line, noting that “war crimes will be punished regardless of seniority.” The regime said in a statement that Kakhaber Natadze,

born in 1977, and Vladimer Kaniashvili, born in 1983, were detained on charges of illegally crossing the border. The regime claims that one of them was found with marijuana.

An investigation has been launched against them under Article 322 of the Russian Criminal Code, illegal border crossing, and

Article 229.1 of drug smuggling.

“The occupation regime says that the violators of the ‘border’ will be punished, including those who took part in the aggression against South Ossetia and took part in hostilities in Donetsk, Lugansk, and Syria as members of nationalist and terrorist organizations.”

Indeed, the statement does not say anything about the former soldier, Mamuka Chkhikvadze, who is also detained by the occupation regime, the record of war crimes is probably directed at him.

Mamuka Chkhikvadze served in the Shavnabada Battalion, as well as participated in interna-

tional missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to Radio Liberty, information is spread about Chkhikvadze being beaten in Tskhinvali prison. The source also tells the publication that after leaving the army, Chkhikvadze removed the logo of the Shavnabada Battalion, which increases the risk.

NDI Report on October Local Municipal Elections

From page 1

tion of voters, candidates, and journalists.”

NDI says that the inclusion of women and minorities, as well as other underrepresented groups, in elections remains a challenge.

Even though gender quotas played a significant role in the large increase in women’s representation on proportional lists, very few women ran or were elected to majoritarian seats: the number of women majoritarians elected in 2021 is 37 (0.4%) - less than in 2014 elections.

A polarized and politicized media environment restricted the electorate from making informed decisions, attacks on the media and civil society in the first and second rounds of elections, and attempts to restrict their freedom of action have adversely affected the entire process. The responsibility for public skepticism is shared across the political spectrum as partisan gains appear to have been prioritized over the needs of the Georgian public.

“It is a political imperative that, in the period between elections, elected representatives fulfill their responsibility to represent the interests of voters,” said Alan Gillam, NDI Georgia Director, “Good faith efforts to work across the political divide and internal political reflection are required to ensure public confidence in the democratic political process ahead of the next electoral cycle.”

In the spirit of international cooperation, the NDI offers recommendations to Georgian stakeholders and stands ready to assist

in their implementation:

- Political parties should carry out good faith efforts to work across the political divide and fulfill their responsibility to represent the interest of the voters to ensure public confidence in the democratic political process ahead of the next electoral cycle.

- Accountability measures should be implemented to ensure that authorities act impartially during the election

period and prevent the misuse of administrative resources.

- A state entity should be responsible for systematically verifying all possible breaches of the rules of financing political campaigns, including potential illegal incomes, undeclared expenditures, and third-party spending. Analysis of financial reporting should also be conducted and available to the public on time.

- A broad and comprehensive

review of the media regulations and practices during elections should be undertaken to address the challenges identified.

- Political parties should more actively engage the public between elections and through inclusive campaigns, structures to ensure platforms and issues are reflective of citizen concerns. They should develop their political programs around key public priorities and offer a clear position on how they

would work to implement the solutions.

- Civic activism may fulfill its role only if it remains free from undue influence and pressure from political actors in the post-election period and throughout election cycles. All NGOs and media should pursue their activities with evidence-based methodologies, politically impartial analysis, robust engagement with authorities, and communication with the public.



► As a result of the 2021 local elections, the ruling Georgian Dream party lost its one-party majority in 7 Sakrebulo and 1 mayoral post. The opposition considers the local self-government elections to be rigged, which is denied by the GD.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 16

Day Mostly sunny
High: 15°C

Night Partly cloudy
Low: 5°C

FRIDAY DECEMBER 17

Day Mostly cloudy
High: 12°C

Night Partly cloudy
Low: 3°C

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