

ISFED Publishes Pre-election Monitoring Report for 2024 Georgian Parliamentary Elections



BY MESSENGER STAFF

On September 4, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) released its Pre-election

Monitoring Report for Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections. The report covers the unofficial campaign period from June 1 to August 26 and highlights key issues, such as political polarisation, controver-

sial election rule changes, and political donations.

ISFED notes that the pre-election environment is marked by "intense polarisation," fueled by the ruling party's

threat to ban opposition groups if it wins a constitutional majority and the adoption of the Foreign Agents Law. The watchdog criticises this law, citing increased anti-Western rhetoric and strained relations with Western partners.

ISFED also raised concerns over changes to the Central Election Commission (CEC) rules, which it says diminish consensus-based decision-making. The watchdog pointed out issues with CEC certification processes for electoral authorities, including cases of supervisors assisting test-takers.

ISFED also criticised CEC awareness campaigns, highlighting that its observers were sometimes barred from election technology simulations. It flagged concerns over the involvement of public servants in these simulations, with some participants reportedly unaware of their role.

Additionally, the report discusses alleged interference in opposition campaigns, including office attacks and difficulties renting spaces. ISFED also documented five cases of suspected vote-buying, with most linked to the ruling Georgian Dream party.

The report noted that political donations during this period amounted to GEL 7.4 million, with over 84% going to the ruling party. It also criticised a new CEC rule on election commission duties, arguing that it threatens the independence of commission members.

Finally, the report highlighted that seven media organisations were fined or warned for violating political advertising rules.

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On September 3, Sergei Shamba, the de-facto foreign minister of Russia-occupied Abkhazia, announced that Russia had suspended its funding for the region as of September 1. "On September 1, social funding was stopped, which affects doctors, teachers, law enforcement, and so on. These are the first steps", Shamba stated during a press conference, noting that Abkhazia will now have to pay for electricity at commercial rates.

This suspension follows widespread public discontent in Abkhazia over the now-withdrawn "Apartment Law", which would have allowed non-residents, primarily Russians, to purchase thousands of apartments in the eastern part of the occupied region. The law had sparked significant opposition among the local population, who saw it as benefiting Russians at the expense of Abkhaz interests.

Shamba expressed concern over the deteriorating relationship between Abkhazia and Russia. "It is absolutely clear that a lot of discontent has accumu-

lated in our allies [Russia] recently. The relationships have changed significantly. It's not what it used to be at the beginning," he said, reflecting on the early days of Russia's recognition of Abkhazia. He urged for collective efforts to improve relations with Russia, calling for cooperation through media and social networks to address the negative perceptions that have developed. "Let's all work together to address this—through the media, social networks, and everywhere—to correct this attitude," Shamba emphasized.

This development comes on the heels of a leaked document titled "Protocol of the meeting between Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Head of the Russian Presidential Administration, and Aslan Bzhanias, President of Abkhazia," which recently surfaced on Abkhazian social media. The

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Russia Suspends Funding for Occupied Abkhazia Amid Growing Tensions



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6956; Euro - 2.9792; GBP - 3.5350; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0089; Swiss Franc - 3.1713

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document reportedly directs Russian government agencies to take measures to compel Abkhazia to “fulfill its obligations” to Moscow. It also threatens cuts in funding and the revocation of Russian citizenship for Abkhaz MPs and opposition

members who opposed the “Apartment Law” and acted “to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation and the development of Russian-Abkhaz relations.”

Shamba did not confirm the authenticity of the document but acknowledged that the issues it raised had been discussed in meetings between Abkhaz and Russian officials. “We cannot

verify it as an authentic document, although the issues raised in it were repeatedly discussed at various meetings, including at the meeting between the President of Abkhazia and the

Administration of the President of Russia,” Shamba stated. He warned that failure to meet obligations could lead to sanctions from Russia.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Police Arrest Tbilisi City Council Member Irakli Edzgvradze



The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs has confirmed the administrative arrest of Irakli Edzgvradze, a member of the Tbilisi City Council representing the National Movement party. According to the ministry, Edzgvradze was obstructing an investigation related to drug of-

fences, despite not being directly involved in the investigation itself.

Video footage from the scene shows a confrontation outside Edzgvradze’s home in the Gldani district. He has been de-

tained under Articles 166 and 173 of the Administrative Offences Code, which relate to disorderly conduct and disobeying law enforcement.

Prior to the arrest, Levan Khabeishvili, chairman of the National Movement’s political council, claimed on social media

EU Condemns Georgia’s Rush to Pass Homophobic Bill

The European Union has strongly condemned the hasty approval of a controversial homophobic bill during its second reading in Georgia’s parliament. According to a statement from the spokesperson of the EU High Representative, the bill undermines fundamental rights and increases the risk of stigmatisation and discrimination against certain segments of Georgia’s population.

The statement highlights concerns that the legislation, which was passed without proper public consultation or alignment with European and international standards, threatens Georgia’s democratic development. The EU emphasised that protecting human rights is a cornerstone

of its enlargement process, which is evaluated annually in the European Commission’s reports.

The EU has urged the Georgian government to reconsider the bill entirely, warning that

the government to return to the path of European integration.

The Georgian parliament passed the bill with 81 votes in favour during the second reading, without opposition members present. The ruling Georgian



such legislation, along with other restrictions like the “Foreign influence transparency” law, could further strain relations between Georgia and the EU. The EU also reminded that Georgia’s accession process has effectively stalled and called on

Dream party claims the bill is meant to protect “family values”, but critics argue it restricts LGBT+ rights and imposes censorship. The opinion has been issued by the Venice Commission.

Parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan took place in ‘restrictive political and legal environment’, says EU



The early parliamentary elections, which took place in the Republic of Azerbaijan on 1 September, were held within a restrictive political and legal envi-

ronment, devoid of competition, EU Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Peter Stano said yesterday, citing the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

“Despite a voting process that was orderly and assessed to be overall efficiently run, serious irregularities and omissions of important safeguards were observed, particularly in the vote count, raising questions about the integrity of the process,” Stano said. “The OSCE/ODIHR mission further noted that the elections took place against the background of continued repression of dissenting voices.”

The European Union called on the Azerbaijani authorities to take on board and implement the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations in relation to these and previous elections. “The EU stands ready to assist in this process,” Stano added.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Thursday, September 5

Day Clear
High: 33°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 20°C

Friday, September 6

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 27°C

Night Showers
Low: 18°C

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21 AUGUST

BORJOMI | Borjomi Likani Hotel

ლიანის სერენადები
NIGHT SERENADES

23, 25 AUGUST

BATUMI | Batumi Drama Theater

15, 17, 18, 20

SEPTEMBER

TBILISI | Tbilisi State Conservatoire

არტ ალმანახი

Founder of the Festival
LIANA ISSAKADZE

Artistic Director
GIORGI ISSAKADZE