



First Interim Report on Pre Election Monitoring in the regions with compact settlements of ethnic minorities

By the decree N 254 issued on 30 March 2010 the President of Georgia called municipal elections as well as the elections of Tbilisi Mayor for 30 May. Voters will elect members of 63 councils of local self government units, the Tbilisi city council and for the first time the Mayor of Tbilisi. Municipal councils will be elected according to a mixed system: proportional and majoritarian.

Union “Public Movement Multinational Georgia” (PMMG) expressed its readiness to conduct the monitoring of the local self-government elections and consequently observe pre-election and election-day in the regions compactly resided by the ethnic minority communities: Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions.

To this end PMMG has carried out pre election observation campaign in the regions and is having pleasure to submit the finding of the pre-election monitoring in the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli.

The monitoring has been primarily focused on the clarification of such issues as the political environment formed in the regions; the legal base and electoral system; the local election administration; the local means of mass media and gender and ethnic dimension of the elections.

The pre-election monitoring in the regions has been carried out by the long-term observers deployed by PMMG traditionally engaged in the regions and having the access to the appropriate information.

Samtskhe – Javakheti regio, (Akhaltzikhe, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda and Bordjomi Districts)

The political context

List of Political Parties/Blocs registered at the CEC for local-self governmental elections 2010:

1. Tortladze – Democratic Party
2. Political Party - Future Georgia
3. National Democratic Party

4. Political Movement – Solidarity
5. Political Union - Our Georgia – Free Democrats
6. Political Party – “Chveni Kvekana”
7. Political Union of Citizens “Kartuli Dasi”
8. Political Union of Citizens - Public Alliance of Whole Georgia
9. The National Party of Radical Democrats of Georgia
10. Political Union – Tavisupleba
11. United National Movement
12. Political Union of Citizens - Momavlis Partia
13. Political Movement of Veterans, Patriots and pensioners – Mamulishvili
14. Political Union – Georgian Sportsmen Union
15. Topadze - Industrialists
16. Movement for United Georgia
17. Alliance for Georgia - (I. Alasania, S.Subari, D. Usupashvili, D. Gamkrelidze, S. Zurabishvili)
18. National Council
19. “Giorgi Targamadze, Inga Grigolia –Christian Democratic Union”

The political environment in general in the region is quite calm, balanced and stable free from emotions and violence (comparing the one developed in the past presidential and parliamentary elections of 2008); all the political subjects are exposed to the equal conditions in order to carry out pre election campaign. However, the level of electoral activities is considerably low; the political parties have not yet started the intensive meetings with the voters and consequently the frequency of dissemination of campaign materials such as party programs and political concepts is not high.

All the political parties and subjects enjoy the equal access to agitation boards. There are also limited facts of pressure and intimidation exposed on the political activists described in the following part of this report. Moreover, no single fact of intentional hindrance has not been identified yet to the political subjects intending the arrangement or holding the meeting with the voters. Given facts and available evidence it appears that most of political parties and election blocks are not yet deeply indulged into the political campaign and therefore the need for the appropriation of the gathering venue is not high.

Interestingly, this fact can be explained by the standing tendencies on the part of the ruling politic force not to gain 90 percent victory in the region. Moreover, aspiring the attainment of democratic and fair credentials of the local elections the governing party prefers to see some portion (even modest) of opposition in the locally elected body. Eventually, this would outright the central government's assertion that the elections have been conducted in a fair, transparent and democratic stance.

However, the environment is considerable different in Akhalkalaki district where some serious facts of intimidations imposed on the political activities have been revealed. More precisely, according to the information provided by David Rastakian (ranking first in the Party list of "Movement – For Fair Georgia" in Akhalkalaki DEC) the following facts of intimidation imposed on the members of his party have been identified:

1. Deputy Head of the local Agency of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Akhalkalaki Distric Kakha Khutsishvili, Acting Head of the mentioned entity Vitaliy Torosian and member of the City Council (Sakrebulo) Robinzon Kartvelishvili have been approaching candidates of the "The Movement – For Fair Georgia" with the request to withdraw their candidatures, in particular targeting ethnic Georgians included in the party list. They explained that ethnic Georgians should not be included in the party list of "The Movement – For Fair Georgia" as far as it is "party of betrayers of the nation". In particular in the village Chunchkha (PEC 40.19) they approached Robinzon Topadze with such request. Mr. Topadze is ready to confirm that fact. The same happened in relation to Tengiz Margebadze, who was threatened that his wife will be fired from work.
2. Candidate of the same political party Nazeli Demurchian was threatened that her brother will be fired from work.
3. Candidate of the same political party Robert Stamboltsyan became victim of the falsification. Unknown persons prepared an appeal to the Akhalkalaki DEC on his behalf with requesting the withdrawal of his candidature from the lists. Given appeal was submitted to Samvel Stamboltsyan (nephew of the Robert) who works in the DEC for further proceedings. Samvel recognized that this appeal was not drafted by his uncle and refused to make administrative proceedings on it. However Robert Stamboltsyan was dismissed from the lists by other member of the DEC. Samvel Stamboltsyan was threatened that he will be expelled from DEC. Robert Stamboltsyan still claims that he was dismissed from the lists on the basis of the false appeal.
4. Director of school in the village Kurtkha approached Nana Avatesian and threatened that she will be fired from work if proceeds her political activity.

Regarding the presence of political subjects / blocks in the region the picture is a follows: "United National Movement"; "Alliance for Georgia"; "Topadze – Entrepreneurs";

“Tortladze – Democratic Party”; “Targamadze, Grigolia, Christian – Democratic Movement”; “National Council”.

Finally, it has to be noted that the meetings and debates are mostly organized by non governmental organizations financed by various donors rather than by political parties and subjects.

The Legal base and electoral system

No significant fact of abuse of administrative resources has been revealed in the region so far and no precedent securing a priority treatment of and conditions to the ruling political force – “National Movement” has not been identified in line with the recent changes and amendments made to the election legislation. No fact has been revealed regarding the legal discrimination carried out against any political subjects.

Moreover, no fact of valance or physical abuse among the rival political subjects has been identified so far. It should also be taken into account that in the region there is a strong clan system which informally regulates any kind of relations and possible confrontations among the local residents.

However, one fact has been identified by the local election observes causing the dissatisfaction among some local community representatives such as university students and public school pupils. Notably, for ensuring the wider attendance of the voters as well as creation of the cheerful atmosphere while presenting the party nominees as well as the majority candidates of the ruling political force “National Movement” the administrations of some public schools and universities have been strongly requested to ensure the attendance of school pupils as well as students in the meeting envisaged to be held in the Queen Tamar Monument located right in the center of Akhaltsikhe, the administrative center of Samtskhe-Javakheti region.

Finally it has to be noted that there is no doubt that the existing elections law is more favorable to the ruling political party than those representing other opposed political forces. Notably, the existing elections law is enshrined in a way not allowing the independent candidate to run for the election – according to the law the person willing to participate in the elections (including both parliamentary and local) should be nominated by the political party. This fact represents the clear quintessence of the existing legal discrimination exercised towards the independent minded politicians willing not to be affiliated to any political entities.

No improvement on the misuse of administrative resources has been revealed in the region so far and no precedent securing a priority treatment of and conditions to the ruling political force – “National Movement” has not been identified in line with the recent changes and amendments made to the election legislation

The election administration

All the information held by the election administrations of the region is open and publicly accessible. The necessary legally defined procedures regarding the correction of the

voters list are under way; the died persons are taken out from the voters list in the precinct election commissions; moreover, the commissions ensure the correction of the mistakes in the list as well as putting the omitted persons in the elections database.

The voters' lists have been posted in the premises of the polling stations on appropriated places and pre determined dates as defined by the law. The necessary works have been commenced in all precinct elections commissions; the envisaged informational meetings of the representatives of election administrations with the voters have not yet been started and consequently no election related printed products have not been disseminated yet.

The specificities characteristic to the ethnic minority communities are adequately reflected in the works of elections administration: the methodological guidelines for precinct elections commissions are being published in Armenian and Russian languages, the bulletins are being published in Georgian and Armenian languages.

The local means of mass media

The following media outlets exist in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti:

Akhaltisikhe district:

- TV company "Channel 9"
- Newspaper "The Southern Gate" which is also disseminated in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts.

Bordjomi district: TV Company "Bordjomi"

Aspindza district: no outlet

Adigeni district: no outlet

Ninotsminda district: no outlet

Akhalkalaki district: ATV 12 – TV Company

The local media sources are open to highlight all the events regarding the political struggle among the political subjects and as well as cover the major events of their political campaign and display of view points of different political entities. The equal air time is appropriated for all political subjects – the correctness of this fact and attitude is approved by the political parties themselves.

Political parties / subjects are satisfied with the appropriated air time as well as the prices for the placement of advertisement. However, the intensive coverage of the pre election processes has not been started yet by the local media sources taken into account the fact that the political parties have not yet submitted the appropriated information to them.

The political parties, majority candidates and election administration have not yet worked out the social video spots to be disseminated. The local TV is airing only that social video spot which was prepared by the Central Election Commission.

The gender and ethnic dimension of the elections

The picture depicting the participation of women and the groups representing ethnic minority communities are as follow:

Akhalsikhe district:

There are 38 women and 91 men in the party election lists of Akhalsikhe district (total 129 persons)

There are 22 women and 52 men among the majority candidates in Akhalsikhe district (total 74)

There are only 23 persons representing the ethnic minority communities among the contestants.

Ninotsminda district:

There are 2 women and 58 men in the party election lists of Ninotsminda district (total 60 persons).

There is only one woman and 42 men among the majority candidates in Ninotsminda district (total 43).

There are only 4 ethnic Georgians and the rest (99 persons) representing the ethnic minority communities among the contestants.

Akhalkalaki district:

There are 2 women and 64 men in the party election list of Akhalkalaki district (total 66).

There are 3 women and 79 men among the majority candidates of Akhalkalaki district (total 82 persons)

There are 18 ethnic Georgians and the rest (64 persons) representing the ethnic minority communities among the contestants.

The only factor which might hinder the participation of ethnic minorities is directly related to the nihilism as well as emotional passivity on the part of minority groups residing in the regions which is brought in by low level of legal and civil literacy. The general perception like “nobody cares about us and the necessary decisions will be adopted without our participation or acknowledgement” still persists and needs to be coped with. Therefore, there is a greater need to carry out additional informational

campaigns specially designed for minority groups explaining the importance of their participation as well as the fact that their choice matter and their voice should be heard.

Unfortunately, as the regional observers point out almost all political entities including those heavily indulged in the local level do not adequately (if not at all) reflect minorities' needs, interest, their perceptions and ideas for change in the respective party (or individual majority candidate) political programs and concepts. No political entity has been identified so far discussing the problems of minority communities in the party program and consequently proposing the concrete mechanisms for their addressing and solution. Strikingly, the practice of ignorance of minorities' needs on the part of political subjects continues and will not be halted unless the appropriate civil campaigns are launched and implemented. Political parties need to understand first the needs and problems of the local communities and then try find the ways for their solutions and properly incorporate them into their policy documents. Moreover, parties need to arrange meeting with the local voters in a more frequent manner in order to get them acquainted with the current trend and developments and enhance their understanding towards many related issues.

Kvemo Kartli region (Marneuli, Gardabani, Rustavi, Tetrtskaro, Tsalka, Bolnisi)

The political environment developed in the region is closer to stagnation and cannot be viewed as competitive. The ruling political party “National Movement” can be identified as the only political subject which is the most active in the region in terms of organizing meeting with the voters and disseminating elections related printed products. The rest of the political forces are inactive in the region.

Interestingly, the level of electoral engagement of the local communities in pre election process is considerable low and unsatisfied. This is partly because of their nihilism as well as distrust forged towards the elections administration as well as the local authorities.

Given facts and available evidence it appears that local population do not consider elections as the decisive and changing event in their immediate lives – the general perception among the local community representatives are formed in a way not encouraging their participation in the elections. People do deeply believe that their concerns and immediate needs are not really taken into account and upon the completion of the elections all the promises issued by the political parties will fade away. Therefore, local communities view the election as the waist of time, finance and energy – as they complain “our genuine voices will not be heard and taken into account!”.

According to the information obtained by the local observers of PMMG political parties as well as election subjects are not really eager to incorporate the problems and concern of ethnic minority communities into their appropriate political platforms or programs. This might be explained by the ignorance on the part of the political subject of the true problems ethnic minority communities are facing in the regions or the inadequate will to highlight minorities' problems as far as politicians consider them unnecessary and time consuming.

Strikingly, no agitation stands have been placed in the villages which might corroborate with the peoples' assertions that political parties do not consider the local dwellers to be primary recipient of their political messages. Only the small number of advertising boards is place in the administrative centers of the districts and majority of them belong to the ruling party "National Movement".

Particular attention has been devoted to the equality of access to the resources necessary for the arrangement of meetings with the voters. As was disclosed by the observers of PMMG the only political subject enjoying the uninterrupted access to the municipally owned venues for meeting with the voters is the ruling political party "National Movement". They are gathering in the culture houses belonging to the Gamgeoba (local executive branch of the authority) for the conduction of meetings with the voters. As for other political subjects they are denied with that chance.

Moreover, as has been pointed out by the local community representatives the misuse of administrative resources is mostly tangible with the utilization of the campaigning potential of local teaches, deputies as well as local authority representatives primarily engaged in the agitation in favor of the ruling political party "National Movement".

Observers of PMMG deployed in the region have paid a closer attention to the facts of violence, pressure and intimidation imposed on the opposition political entities. With the approaching of the Election Day the opposition political parties are becoming more active in Kvemo Kartli region. New offices have been opened in Rustavi and in other parts of the region.

As the political pressure is getting mounted the members and activists of political entities' regional offices talk about pre-electoral disturbing factors and pressure. Some political forces are quite satisfied with the pre election environment and do not see any obstacles hindering the proper conduction of the pre election campaign. Others are complaining about the pressure as well as intimidation imposed on the opposition parties engaged in the region. Though there still are some differences in opinions.

According to the assertion of the representatives of the "Party of Future" Rustavi organization there is no one interferes in their pre-electoral campaign and they are able to work in stable environment.

However, the representatives of other political subjects have drawn the different picture to the regional representatives of PMMG.

On 7th of May, the leader of "Alliance for Georgia" in Marneuli, Qamil Aliev charged the "United National Movement" members in using of administrative recourses and authority.

According to Mr. Aliev the deputy Governor, Gusein Iusubov visits villages and conducts pre-electoral agitation. Moreover, as the members of the "Alliance for Georgia" complained administrative recourses are not lawfully used by the head of Sakrebulo, Aivaz Ismailov, his deputy Mamuka Doreuli and former Gamgebeli Zaza Dekanoidze, who still use public vehicles and offices.

Later on the explanations have been issued by Zaza Dekanoidze who denied accusations brought against him. According to Mr. Dekanoidze the deputy Governor left his position and consequently has right to carry out the pre election political campaign.

On 10th of May the advertisement banners belonging to Giorgi Melikidze, the majority candidate of the “Christian – Democratic Movement” has been removed and severally damaged in the election district N10 of Rustavi.

Moreover, some other posters belonging to the same party have been illegally removed in the 7th and 8th micro districts of Rustavi.

With regard to the proceedings of the election administration in the region is has to be noted that in general all the information held by the election administrations of the region is open and publicly accessible. The necessary legally defined procedures regarding the correction of the voters list are under way.

The voters’ lists have been posted in the premises of the polling stations on appropriated places and pre determined dates as defined by the law. The necessary works have been commenced in all precinct elections commissions; the envisaged informational meetings of the representatives of election administrations with the voters have not yet been started and consequently no election related printed products have not been disseminated yet. The bulletins have already been translated into Azerbaijanian language.

As is widely perceived informational coverage of pre election campaign is utterly important in order to enable the voters make a conscious choice. However, given facts and available evidence it appears that there is no means of communication in the regions ensuring the adequate informing of the local population about the forthcoming event – local elections. Strikingly the only mean of getting information is the satellite dishes widely used in the region which understandingly does not portray the programs aired by the national based TV channels. Therefore, it can be asserted that local population are absolutely removed and kept in complete informational isolation which will have a negative effect on the final outcome of the election – population will only vote for the ruling party aggressively engaged in face to face meetings with the local voters as well as using administrative resources while the opposition parties are left without any informational means to disseminate their political views and promises.