



მრავალეროვანი
საქართველო
Multinational Georgia

Public Movement Multinational Georgia

Final Report of the Monitoring Program of 2 October 2021 Local Self-Government Elections

Summary and Recommendations

I. Summary

- 2 October 2021 local self-government elections were held in a politically tense and polarized environment. To discharge the political crisis that evolved after the 2020 Parliamentary Elections, an agreement was reached on April 19 between the ruling and opposition political parties with the effort of international partners¹. The agreement created the opportunity for snap Parliamentary Elections if the ruling party obtained less than 43% of the votes. As a result, political actors perceived the victory as a significant national political event, which has further polarized the political environment and made the discourse aggressive and confrontational.
- In June 2021, Parliament of Georgia adopted electoral amendments with wider public participation. The main part of the amendments was quite adequate for the conduct of democratic elections and could lead to enhanced public confidence towards the elections². However, enhanced public confidence was not secured due to the following reasons including alleged political influence while composing the election administration especially on a lower level, improper addressing concrete violations, formal and superficial attitudes as demonstrated by the election administration while considering electoral disputes.
- Political actors enjoyed the opportunity to freely conduct political campaign. However, mobilization of administrative as well as other resources has placed the ruling party in a favorable situation against other political parties participating in the elections to gain the victory. Before the official announcement of the pre-election campaign, the increase of local budget was reported from few municipalities.³ Initiation of infrastructural and social projects by the prime minister as well as other high public officials, implementation of which coincided with pre-election period, has blurred the line between the ruling party and the state. These programs and initiatives can be considered as an attempt to influence the election process. As a result, the ruling party was placed in a favorable situation against other political subjects participating in the elections.
- The incidents of alleged threat and physical retaliation on a political ground has increased with the approaching of the elections. The incidents of removal of the candidates of the political parties from election process with the application of alleged violent methods have become highly actual. Some facts of physical tension were also reported. Therefore, the opportunity for the conduct of pre-election campaign in a free and secure environment was not realized which is not in compliance with the taken obligations towards the OSCE and other international standards.
- Pre-election campaign was carried out on the ground of tension between the political parties as well as mutual accusations and discreditation. There was no discussion regarding the issues related to local self-government. Making focus on the issues related to whole national challenges has in fact shadowed the local needs and

¹ The agreement “Future Road for Georgia” was reached on 19 April, 2021 to be considered by international community as one of the mechanisms to mitigate 6 months political crisis. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/mediacia_samomavlo_gza_sakartvelostvis.pdf

² Improved standards for electoral disputes, prevention of vote buying, timely and objective investigation of pressure and intimidation, improved standards of composition of election commissions by professional members, prevention of administrative resources.

³ The financing of NCJPs has increased twice in July in Akhaltsikhe: according to 30 July amendments, the budget has increased by 1 058 400 GEL out of which 70 000 GEL was distributed among NCJP including on the salaries of employees. In July, the budget of Marneuli municipality was increased by 622 000 GEL out of which 400 000 GEL was considered to be spent for social needs.

constraints. Less attention was devoted to the discussion of those measures to mitigate Covid-19 created social and economic challenges. The proposed election programs were vague. More focus was made on genuine needs and interests of local communities before the second round of elections. The concrete political promises have emerged in the election materials of the political candidates which can be considered as a positive trend in a political campaign despite the fact that these political promises were not entirely rested on a complex political judgment. One week before the elections, the prime minister has expressed his view according to which elected opposition mayor could not have any perspective without the central government⁴. On the one hand such a statement was an attempt to undermine the campaign promises of the opposition as well as campaign itself. On the other hand, the statement clearly demonstrated the formality of state decentralization strategy.

- In most cases the voting process on Election Day inside the polling stations was conducted in a calm environment in electoral districts monitored by PMMG. However, some violent incidents were identified during the first round of elections taken place in Marneuli. Some signs of overcrowding were reported from the polling stations thus creating problems regarding the spread of Covid-19 pandemic as well as threatening the secrecy of voting. On the second round of elections, the tendency was identified in Rustavi ED according to which the persons having the authority to be present at the polling station were tracking the voters and processing their data. Such a practice is a multi-year challenge and is considered as a control of voters' free will.
- The practice of treatment of complaints regarding election violations by the District Elections Commissions does not comply with the respective standards. Not all the respective factual conditions were being fully examined in a course of complaints adjudication. There was a general attempt to categorize a wide range of violations as minor technical mistakes. Thus, in a course of complaints adjudication, District Elections Commissions could not fulfil the positive obligation to take justified decisions.
- The standard for taking justified decisions by the courts on the electoral disputes was also lower. Such a superficial discussion of the disputes as well as improper decisions made by the courts diminishes the effectiveness of the complaints and appeals mechanism such that violations cannot be eradicated and prevented and the electoral environment improved.
- The extent of public nihilism and distrust towards the whole political spectra including the ruling and opposition parties has deepened as a result of focusing on a whole national issue instead of deliberation over the local communities' genuine needs and constraints. It is of utmost importance that all the parties involved into the process display sincere effort to bridge the difference between the society and the political actors to secure greater public confidence towards the electoral and political process for the upcoming electoral cycles, promote inclusive, transparent, fair and free electoral environment as well as assist in the realization of Georgia's European and North Atlantic aspirations.

II. Recommendations

- Political parties should take effort to discharge the prolonged political polarization and bridge their differences in order to restore the public confidence towards the political and electoral process. Moreover, the parties involved in the electoral process should secure the conduct of inclusive political campaign in line with better reflection of societal including ethnic minorities' genuine needs, constraints and problem-solving mechanisms into the political programs.
- Representatives of the ruling party should refrain from usage of projects for political purposes as financed from state and local budgets. The clear line should be established between the duties and responsibilities of those public officials and the political campaign events who were nominated as the candidates and conducted political campaign from their offices.
- The robust mechanism should be established based on wider public consensus which would protect the state organs, representatives of the organizations financed by state and local self-government budgets and the individuals closely affiliated with them, from exposure under the political pressure during the election period. This negatively affects the level of electoral and political activities of ethnic minorities.
- Law enforcement organs should timely and effectively investigate the incidents as revealed during election period including alleged facts of pressure, threat and forcible dismissal from the job. This would secure

⁴ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/571076/>

enhanced trust among ethnic minorities towards the state institutions as well as allow uninterrupted engagement in the electoral and political process.

- It is important that political actors involved in the election campaign refrain from usage of hate speech and disinformation in the pre-election campaign, especially on ethnic and religious grounds because this worsens political polarization. This factors also contains the risks of encouragement of confrontation and violence between supporters of different political parties.
- Political parties should conduct political campaign based on high moral and ethical standards, and refrain from manipulating ethno-patriotic emotions. Political parties and candidates should refrain from making such statements provoking interethnic hatred.
- Political parties and their supporters should refrain from making obstacles to the conduct of pre-election meetings as well as from counter actions. Political parties should put more emphasis on the political programs as well as meetings with the voters instead of damaging the images of the opponents.
- The state should promote better engagement of ethnic minorities in a political process as well as representation in local self-governments.
- Political parties should display more activity the areas with compact settlements of ethnic minorities in order to promote better engagement of ethnic minorities in the local organizations.
- Introduction of legislative stimulating measures to increase the representation of ethnic minorities in party politics. The respective amendment should be introduced into the Law on Political Union of Citizens, according to which the political parties will obtain financial incentives in case they include more representatives of ethnic minorities in the party lists.
- Election administration should strengthen its informational campaign effort to promote better participation of ethnic minorities in the electoral process especially in the regions of their compact settlement. Moreover, the informational campaign should be conducted in minority languages.



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