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**ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION OF OCTOBER 2, 2021
LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

**PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT
MONITORING FOR
2021 LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT
ELECTIONS**

**INTERIM
REPORT**

(September 1 – September 30)

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**TBILISI
2021**

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Introduction

Public Movement “Multinational Georgia” (PMMG) was founded in 1999. The organization advocates the interests of minority diasporas and NGOs working in the field of protection of rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups residing in Georgia. PMMG is mostly focused on Tbilisi as well as Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, Shida Kartli and Ajara regions, densely populated with ethnic minorities.

Since 2003, PMMG has been implementing election observation programs in the Georgian regions with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities. The objective of the observation efforts is to contribute to fairness and transparency of the

elections and enhance trust among ethnic minorities vis-à-vis political and election processes.

Public Movement Multinational Georgia will carry out monitoring of the 2021 local self-government elections in Tbilisi and the following Georgian regions: Samtskhe-Javakheti, Shida Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti.

The monitoring is carried out through the support of the United States Agency for International Development.

This Interim Report covers period from 1 September 2021 to 30 September 2021.

Methodology

Given the objectives of the observation mission, since 1 June 2021, PMMG has started to carry out pre-election environment monitoring in four municipalities with **4 long-term observers (LTOs)**¹:

- **Ninotsminda** – Samtskhe-Javakheti region;
- **Akhalkalaki** – Samtskhe-Javakheti region;
- **Marneuli** – Kvemo Kartli region;
- **Dmanisi** – Kvemo Kartli region;

Whereas from 1 August 2021, PMMG expanded the monitoring area and started to carry out pre-election environment monitoring in 17 additional municipalities. Therefore, Public Movement Multinational Georgia currently has **21 long-term observers**² deployed to

¹ Each LTO is responsible for observation in one election district.

² Each LTO is responsible for observation in one election district.

monitor the pre-election campaign in Tbilisi and the following geographic areas with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities:

- **Ninotsminda, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni, Borjomi – Samtskhe-Javakheti region**
- **Marneuli, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Gardabani, Tsalka, Tetritskaro – Kvemo Kartli region**
- **Mtskheta – Mtskheta-Mtianeti region**
- **Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Kvareli, Akhmeta – Kakheti region**
- **Kaspi – Shida Kartli region**
- **Isani, Krtsanisi and Samgori – Tbilisi**

Prior to launching the pre-election environment monitoring, PMMD updated materials on election topics as well as conducted trainings based on changes in electoral legislation to raise qualifications of the long-term observers. At these trainings LTOs were informed both about the amendments enacted in the election legislation and pre-election environment and campaign monitoring rules.

In order to carry out election monitoring, PMMG LTOs' receive information about the possible violations from the following sources: media (TV, radio, digital media); requesting public information; local self-government organs and their websites; social networks; parties, candidates, party activists, NGOs, citizens and public meetings.

In order to carry out pre-election environment monitoring, LTOs observed and studied:

- Political and electoral activities of the political parties / aspiring candidates;
- Use of hate speech in the pre-election campaign;
- Abuse of administrative resources;
- Facts of oppression/intimidation/threats/physical assault;
- Vote buying and violations of political party financing rules;
- Statements and complaints;
- Statements and complaints about election violations;
- Voter lists;
- Activities of the election administration;
- Voter education, including awareness of the minorities;
- Pandemic-related impediments which hinder carrying out political/electoral activities or preparations/holding of the elections.

As a result of the monitoring, election problems, needs and challenges will be identified as well as specific recommendations will be elaborated to improve election environment.

PMMG will regularly communicate information to public about results of monitoring of election processes.

Main findings

Some trends, which may affect holding elections in fair and transparent environment as well election results, have been identified during the reporting period.

- Facts of intimidation and physical assaults have increased during the reporting period. One of the important topics in September was alleged use of violent means to force political party candidates to quit the race. The facts of physical assault were reported during the conduct of the political campaign, when United National Movement's two supporters were wounded in the head by the supporters of the Georgian Dream. As a result, the political subjects participating in the elections were restricted the right to conduct the campaign in a free and secure environment. In the second case, activists of the United National Movement physically assaulted the majoritarian candidate of Georgian Dream.
- Potential cases of abuse of administrative resources in favor of the ruling party candidates have been identified during the reporting period. It was also detected that individuals employed in public services on state budget payroll were involved in agitation through Facebook social network using material and technical resources of their workplace.
- On 17 September 2021, in the night hours, political banners exhibiting hate speech as well as violence and aggressive rhetoric were installed in central streets of Tbilisi. These banners are a propaganda of violence and persecution of people with different opinions which is clearly incompatible with election campaign. Of note is that media managers are depicted next to incumbent politicians at those banners.
- CEC Advisory group, created on the ground of 19 April agreement brokered by the European Council President Charles Michele with the aim to produce recommendations about election dispute resolution and submit them to CEC,³ was dissolved in the reporting period. In addition, Advisory Group chairperson or a member selected by him/her was authorized to attend vote recount process in the District Election Commissions at his/her own initiative.⁴ Given the refusal of Advisory Group members to take part in the activities of the Advisory Group, from 17 September 2021 the number of group members dropped below the minimal allowed threshold and as a result it got dissolved.
- After political parties submitted proportional election lists in their respective election districts, some of the candidates appealed to the District Election Commissions to withdraw their candidacies on the ground of alleged pressure and intimidation in the reporting period. As stated by the opposition parties, given the fact that party list or candidate for municipal council nominated by an electoral subject would not be registered if the number of candidates in the party lists were

³ Article 161 of the Election Code of Georgia.

⁴ Article 2.2 of the CEC N44 decision of 29 July 2021.

below the legally established minimum,⁵ parties started to face the risk of annulment of registration of their proportional election lists. According to the 7 September 2021 decision⁶ of the Central Election Commission, if the number of candidates in the registered party list is less than minimum established by the Election Code, election registration of the party list will be revoked only in exceptional cases.⁷ This decision of the Central Election Commission effectively eradicated threats of revoking registration of the opposition parties' proportional lists which is a significant step forward.

- Equal opportunities for use of agitation materials to allow everyone has an access to space to place their agitation materials is important to conduct effective election campaign. There has been a visible dominance of the Georgian Dream in the banners and agitation materials across the districts monitored by PMMG in the reporting period. At the majority of the large banners installed in the municipalities Georgian Dream's campaign images were displayed. As stated by the opposition parties, the ruling party had put its own agitation materials on banners in advance and therefore, the opposition were unable to find empty banners. However, it was also identified during the monitoring that in some cases the opposition parties refused to use banners.⁸
- Election administration has put valuable effort to promote inclusive election environment in districts with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities. Election authorities made election-related services available in languages spoken by the ethnic minority voters. In addition, there have been robust voter education campaigns and successful trainings of precinct election commission members which were tailored to the linguistic needs of the ethnic minorities.

Political context

In the reporting period, the United National Movement joined 19 April political agreement, brokered by the European Council President, Charles Michele, and annulled by the Georgian Dream on 28 July 2021.⁹ US Ambassador to Georgia, Kely Degnan, positively assessed the United National Movement's decision.¹⁰ According to the ranking member

⁵ According to the Section 3 of the Article 143 of the Election Code of Georgia, the number of municipal council (Sakrebulo) candidates in the presented party list shall not be less than the number of members to be elected under the proportional system and shall not exceed triple that number

⁶ https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5253113?publication=0&fbclid=IwAR0NNaNUmFHOOfCk3q4pH7M_tF6BJkKHEUIOW3IC499OEpGLSJ8zmXN537Bg

⁷ Party proportional list will be revoked only: If a registered candidate relinquished Georgian citizenship and the relevant document was officially submitted to the election commission; If a registered candidate's right to be elected was suspended and relevant document was officially submitted to the election commission; If a registered candidate, not later than 12 days before the Election Day, was withdrawn by the nominating party in line with legally prescribed procedures.

⁸ <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/673704-zaal-udumashvili-mteli-archevnebi-sus-ma-gadaibara>

⁹ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31381194.html>

¹⁰ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/561536/>

of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Jim Risch, the United National Movement's signature on 19 April agreement is good, albeit overdue.¹¹

Outstanding efforts and engagement from the friends and international partners of Georgia in the process of mediating the political crisis in the country is an invaluable contribution to overcome political crisis and polarization. Disregarding these efforts harms our country's interests and international image as well as puts its reputation as being a reliable partner under risk. Therefore, PMMG believes that the United National Movement's decision to join 19 April agreement is a step forward for democratic development and meeting current foreign challenges. However, it is also long overdue, since the United National Movement's refusal to join the agreement contributed to the Georgian Dream's decision to declare annulment of the document and withdraw from 19 April agreement. This called the implementation of very important for our country's democratic development constitutional amendments into question.

On 13 September 2020, information which was allegedly leaked from the State Security Service as concluded by the politicians, NGO and media, was publicized through a special web portal. There are nearly 300 leaked documents which were allegedly obtained as a result of clandestine surveillance and eavesdropping organized by the State Security Service. The information in the leaked files pertains to phone conversations, meetings and interests of the Church's top hierarchy. These files are exclusively in text format and none of them contain video or audio recordings.¹² The conspiratorial website was soon blocked. According to the media reports, on top of clergymen, State Security Service's archives also contain information about private lives of journalists, NGO workers and foreign diplomats, obtained by clandestine eavesdropping. Disclosure of these facts sparked a great deal of controversy. Political opponents started to voice counter-allegations which contributed to shaping a hostile environment and further deepened political tensions.

EU Ambassador to Georgia, Carl Hartzell, speaking about making alleged clandestine eavesdropping public, stated: "Georgia's alleged surveillance on diplomats, is questionable from the point of view of Vienna Convention and we would not see it as natural that a close friend and partner like Georgia would be engaged in the activity like that against us." Ambassador Hartzell also stated that Georgian Ambassador to Brussels, Vakhtang Makharoblishvili, was summoned in the EU headquarters on 21 September 2021 for clearing up the positions.¹³

German Ambassador to Georgia, Hubert Knirsch, while commenting on leak of files allegedly from the State Security Service, stated in his interview with Netgazeti that

¹¹ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/561671/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=392471552445587>

¹³ <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/441848>

“secret interception of conversations of diplomatic missions, even if it is not directed directly against them, is a violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.”¹⁴

On 14 September 2021, State Security Service released a statement and signaled its readiness to have cooperation with the Prosecutor’s Office within the scope of ongoing investigation about clandestine surveillance. The statement reads: “Given the high public interest, we would like to respond to the information spread by the media in recent days. As you are aware, the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia has launched an investigation into the violation of the secrecy of private communications under Article 158, Parts 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code of Georgia. The State Security Service of Georgia is ready to closely cooperate with the Prosecutor’s Office at any stage of investigation. It is in the Service’s objective interest to conduct a complex and thorough investigation and answer all questions.”¹⁵

Strong guarantees of non-infringement of private life is vitally important for the establishment of free and democratic society. Unfortunately, Georgia has a practice of using illegally obtained secret footage as weapon for political fight and smearing the opponent. Most particularly in the pre-election period, which unjustifiable, any of such facts warrants proper response from relevant authorities to make sure they are not used for political manipulation and stirring a political crisis. In addition, it is also key that the country’s international image is not harmed and disclosing information about alleged clandestine eavesdropping really put that image under risk.

On 23 September 2020, United National Movement’s candidate for Mayor of Tbilisi, Nika Melia and chairperson of the Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, exchanged verbal insults outside the office of the EU representation. The reason behind scuffle between Melia and Kobakhidze was a recent incident that took place in Dmanisi.¹⁶ The scale of confrontation between the opponents soon became larger, as their supporters started to appear at the scene. EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell expressed his concerns over this incident and security situation during the brawl.¹⁷

Any such action of the opposing party leaders, on the one hand is to some extent provoking and encouraging of their supporters to engage in politically-motivated violence which further deepens tensions between the opposing parties. On the other hand, this harms the country’s image in the eyes of its strategic partners. It is vitally important for our country that opposing parties have their positions

¹⁴ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/563816/?fbclid=IwAR0dy3N-b4BKq1fcDBa0geCbKz2vmeqa8qZyuXnswKMIpmsb3sTqFbDg1eU>

¹⁵ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/563241/?fbclid=IwAR348KSluEBR6b6iNZhWTRfdv0RN4xRiVi3I0p4Drr2TvUn09DjfHidAI ZA>

¹⁶ On 21 September 2020, incumbent Mayor of Dmanisi and the United National Movement’s candidate for Mayor, Giorgi Tatuashvili, together with Progress and Freedom party, Kakha Okriashvili, was meeting voters as part of election campaign when the Georgian Dream majoritarian candidate Mikheil Dautashvili with his son Davit Dautashvili and other followers verbally insulted the assembled people which soon turned into brawl. As a result, two activists of the United National Movement were wounded.

¹⁷ <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/442635>

consolidated and closer to each other's and to persuade our international partners that Georgia remains loyal to the values of democracy and pluralism.

On 27 September 2021, the third President of Georgia, who currently holds Ukrainian citizenship, on his Facebook page posted a flight ticket from Kyiv to Georgia on 2 October 2021 - day of the local self-government elections. The former Georgian President has announced his return to the country multiple times in the past, including one before the 2020 parliamentary elections. Of note is that on 10 September 2020, Tako Charkviani, founder of the “Law and Justice” party, established a joint public movement for Mikheil Saakashvili's return to Georgia.¹⁸

Mikheil Saakashvili faces arrest upon his return to Georgia, since he has been found guilty in several cases. At the same time, supporters of the ex-president are getting ready to meet him at Tbilisi International Airport.¹⁹

The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, blamed the former President in attempting to bring “instability” and “chaos” in the country and stated that “everyone will be held strictly accountable to any provocation” and “once Saakashvili enters our land, he will be immediately arrested and sent to prison.”

The former President, Mikheil Saakashvili, has been convicted on several cases in Georgia. Therefore, upon his return, it is inevitable that law-enforcement bodies will arrest him. This scenario during the Election Day creates risks of confrontation which may lead to escalation of the situation.

Activities of the Election Administration

Pilot Test of Election Technologies in Krtsanisi District

According to the decision of the Central Election Commission, for 2 October 2021 local self-government elections, number of electoral procedures will be implemented electronically in N4 Krtsanisi election district within the scope of pilot project. The rules and conditions of electronic implementation of election procedures in N4 Krtsanisi election district was stipulated by the 3 September 2021 decision²⁰ of the CEC.

On 22 September 2021, election simulation by electronic technologies was conducted at one of Krtsanisi's precinct election commission. Advance selected 823 voters were

¹⁸ <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/673373-tako-charkvianma-mixeil-saakashvilis-sakartveloshi-dasabruneblad-saerto-saxalxo-mozraoba-daapuzna/>

¹⁹ <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/443106>

²⁰ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5252172?publication=0>

registered in the election list to vote. NGOs, political parties and media observed mock voting process. PMMG representative also took part in the abovementioned simulation. Only one ballot paper, which contains information about majoritarian candidates, Mayor candidates and party lists, is used within the scope of the pilot project. Such type of ballot paper excludes any manipulation of ballot paper by voter. The simulation also featured remodeled voting booth, which is an initiative of Giorgi Sioridze, quota-appointed Deputy CEC Chairperson from the opposition parties. The front space of the booth is cut in such manner to allow seeing the silhouette of the voter which will make visible whether or not he/she is making photo or video recording of the ballot paper.

On 2 October 2021, electronic election procedures will be implemented across all 31 polling stations in N4 Krtsanisi election district. In addition to electronic tabulation of votes, traditional counting method will also be used for risk insurance. PMMG observer took interest whether or not the election administration took relevant measures for duly informing both precinct election commission members and voters in Krtsanisi about electronic election procedures. According to the information provided by the chairperson of N4 Krtsanisi election district, all precinct election commission members in Krtsanisi election district have received special trainings and instructions. With respect to informing the voters about implementing electronic election procedures, election administration employs several components in this regard. Together with election invitation cards, all voters registered in Krtsanisi also received information leaflet about voting procedures using electronic technologies and relevant notices will be posted in the communal hallways. Election administration workers conduct meetings as part of “Talking with the Voters” information campaign to raise awareness among the voters.

CEC Decision to Regulate Annulment of Registration of Proportional Lists

According to the 7 September 2021 decision²¹ of the Central Election Commission, in case the number of municipal council candidates in the registered party list is less as compared to allowed minimum established by the Election Code, election registration of such party list will be revoked in exceptional cases:

- If a registered candidate relinquished Georgian citizenship and the relevant document was officially submitted to the election commission;
- If a registered candidate’s right to be elected was suspended and relevant document was officially submitted to the election commission;
- If a registered candidate, not later than 12 days before the Election Day, was withdrawn by the nominating party in line with legally prescribed procedures.

This instruction of the law rules out revocation of party lists on the grounds of candidate withdrawing from the party list because of personal or family reasons.

²¹https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5253113?publication=0&fbclid=IwARONNaNUmFHOfCk3g4pH7M_tF6BJkKHEUI0W3IC4990EpGLSJ8zmXN537Bg

The previous version of the law denied registration to the party list or municipal council membership candidate nominated by electoral subject, if the number of candidates in the party list was less than legally established minimum.²² There have been multiple cases in the pre-election process when the candidates refused to run in the election for different reasons and withdrew their candidacies. As a result, political parties started to face a serious risk that they would be unable to register their party lists. The abovementioned decision of the Central Election Commission effectively eradicated this danger which is a significant step forward.

Flawed Arrangement of the Precinct Election Commissions

In the reporting period, PMMG long-term observer identified problems related to size of the precinct election commissions in N5 Isani election district. Given the limited space of N35 and N38 polling stations, authorized individuals will be unable to carry out their activities freely and without unhindered during the Election Day. In addition, COVID-19 pandemic regulation, such as keeping two-meters social distancing cannot be observed. None of those polling stations have been adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. In addition, N80 polling station is located at the second floor of a private house which is connected to the road with multistep staircase which poses a significant obstacle for elderly people to reach the polling station, let alone people with disabilities.

Activities of Election Administration to Raise Awareness Among Ethnic Minority Voters

Election administration has put valuable effort to promote inclusive election environment in districts with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities.

The following activities have been carried out as part of voter information campaign:

- All election-related videos, including suggested services, produced by the election administration have been translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages and broadcasted through TV and radio stations of the relevant regions.
- It is available to receive information in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages from the CEC's phone/information center.
- If people living in the regions with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities check themselves in the unified voters' list, they will get information in Georgian-Armenian and Georgian-Azerbaijani languages.
- There is an ongoing awareness campaign "Talking with the Voters" and as part of this campaign, voters are informed at public venues. As part of this campaign, election administration workers, joined by the volunteers, hold meetings with the citizens and provide them information about voting process, available communication channels between election administration and citizens as well as about services offered to the voters. Information leaflets in both Armenian and Azerbaijani languages are being distributed during these meetings.

²² See subsection F of Section 6 of Article 145 of the Election Code of Georgia.

- The following documents, needed to help voters cast their votes, have been translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages: ballot paper, ballot paper fill out rule, unified voters' list (wall list and desk list) and poster which depicts voting process.
- CEC chairperson, Giorgi Kalandarishvili and one of his deputies, Giorgi Sioridze, met with local youth on 24 September in Marneuli and on 25 September in Akhalkalaki. At those meetings, CEC officials presented reforms implemented in the Central Election Commission and spoke about new rules of staffing of election administration, including district and precinct election commissions. The youth were allowed an opportunity to give questions to the CEC chairperson on issues of their interest and raise other problematic and important issues.²³

Dissolution of the CEC Advisory Group

CEC Advisory group, created on the ground of 19 April agreement brokered by the European Council President Charles Michele with the aim to produce recommendations about election dispute resolution and submit them to CEC,²⁴ was dissolved in the reporting period. In addition, Advisory Group chairperson or a member selected by him/her was authorized to attend vote recount process in the District Election Commissions at his/her own initiative.²⁵ The CEC Advisory Group conducted nine sessions in total and produced three recommendations. Two of those recommendations were drafted in regard to complaint submitted by the International Society for Free Elections and Democracy and one pertained the complaint submitted by the United National Movement. Given the refusal of Advisory Group members to take part in the activities of the Advisory Group, from 17 September 2021 the number of group members dropped below the minimal allowed threshold and as a result it got dissolved.

Given its mandate which includes facilitation of ethnic minorities in Georgia to get involved in the election and political processes, participation in the CEC Advisory Group was important was PMMG since it allowed the organization to voice its views with respect to issues for discussion. PMMG views participation in the CEC Advisory Group as an opportunity to be informed on election disputes in the CEC and DEC's on the one hand and contribute to the transparency of election dispute resolution process within the election administration system on the other hand, including by communication competent and unbiased information to the public. All these goals could not be reached within the Commission and as result, PMMG made a decision to leave the CEC Advisory Group²⁶ and later it was dissolved.

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXcAfOrQXGw>

²⁴ Article 16¹ of the Election Code of Georgia.

²⁵ Article 2.2. of the CEC decision N44 on 29 July 2021.

²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/PMMG.ORG/photos/a.134180553299201/4722000557850488/>

Trainings of the Precinct Election Commission Members

Through its long-term observers, PMMG carried out monitoring of trainings for precinct election commission members in the reporting period. The trainings were conducted in six stages and under a new concept. At the first stage, attendance of commission members was lower, although it improved gradually. Of note is that COVID-19 pandemic regulations were observed during the trainings. The Central Election Commission organized free rapid tests for all participants of the trainings, including representatives of the observer organizations. In those district with settlements of ethnic minorities where language barrier is not a hindrance for the ethnic minorities, trainings for precinct elections members were delivered in Georgia whereas in those districts where language barrier remains a problem, trainings were delivered in Georgian as well as in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages.

Memorandum on the Use of Administrative Resources

On 8 September 2021, Central Election Commission and organizations involved in the election process signed a memorandum on use of administrative resources for 2 October 2021 local self-government elections.²⁷ The signatory parties agreed that they share the idea and spirit of the OSCE Copenhagen Conference document that there should be a “clear separation between the State and political parties.”²⁸ Therefore, during administrative and court proceedings, signatory parties will interpret articles 45, 48 and 49 of the Election Code of Georgia in line with the opinions reflected in the memorandum. This memorandum provides a straightforward explanation on what should be considered as use of administrative resources, who has no right to take part in pre-election agitation and other important issues related to the regulation of use of administrative resources.

The memorandum on use of administrative resources, given its nature, provides certain guiding principles which will allow election stakeholders to ensure homogenous interpretation of the law. The PMMG representative also signed this memorandum.

²⁷ <https://cesko.ge/res/docs/20210910152847.pdf>

²⁸ OSCE, Copehagen Conference Document, Article 5.4

Interagency Commission for “Free and Fair Elections”

On 29 June 2021, pursuant to N728 decree of the Minister of Justice, Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections was established.²⁹ The aim of the Commission is to prevent use of administrative resources and public servants violating election legislation during the pre-election agitation and campaign as well as responding to the identified violations and contributing to free and fair election environment in this manner. The first session of the Interagency Commission was held on 8 August 2021. In the reporting period, the Interagency Commission held four sessions in total. Given the difficult epidemiological situation, three of those sessions were conducted via ZOOM online platform. PMMG representative attended all four sessions of the Commission.

One of the hot topic in the process of monitoring the pre-election environment were alleged facts of politically-motivated dismissals and pressure/intimidation against the opposition party candidates and supporters. After these individuals were summoned and interviewed by the investigation bodies, relevant agencies presented results of inquiry where interviewed individuals did not confirm any type of politically-motivated pressure or intimidation. The PMMG believes that for healthier election environment it would have been better if in-depth investigation of all instances of pressure/intimidation had taken place.

On 8 September 2021, Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections joined memorandum signed between the CEC and organizations involved in the elections on use of administrative resources for 2 October 2021 local self-government elections.³⁰

The Georgian Dream representative, which had a right of a consultative vote, attended the sessions of the Commission. Some of the local observe organizations and the opposition parties did not attend the sessions.

Election Campaign

Political parties and electoral subjects have been busy campaigning during the reporting period. Campaign promises of the ruling party’s candidates were related to solving infrastructural and social problems. These candidates, accompanied by majoritarian MPs as well as municipal council members and local high-ranking officials were meeting with

²⁹ <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5203076?publication=0>

³⁰ <https://cesko.ge/res/docs/20210910152847.pdf>

the voters and, talking about the past and ongoing projects implemented by the Georgian Dream, giving promises and conducting door-to-door information campaign.

In regard to the opposition parties and candidates, part of the opposition reached an agreement to cooperate with each other and either nominate joint candidates in some of the districts or back strong candidates nominated by the other opposition parties. Therefore, their representatives were meeting voters together, getting familiar with their needs and concerns and conducting robust door-to-door information campaign. The election pledges of the opposition parties were largely about addressing social problems and creating such environment in the regions which would discourage flow of youth to either larger cities or abroad and help to keep them at their place of origin.

. There has been a visible dominance of the Georgian Dream in the banners and agitation materials across the districts monitored by PMMG in the reporting period. At the majority of the large banners installed in the municipalities Georgian Dream's campaign images were displayed. As stated by the opposition parties, the ruling party had put its own agitation materials on banners in advance and therefore, the opposition were unable to find empty banners. However, it was also identified during the monitoring that in some cases the opposition parties refused to use banners³¹ Equal opportunities for use of agitation materials to make sure everyone has an access to space to place their agitation materials is important to conduct effective election campaign. This, however, has not been ensured.

It was identified during the reporting period that a majoritarian candidate nominated by the Reformers party in Borjomi, Valeri Grigalashvili, used old agitation material while campaigning. This contradicts the requirements prescribed in the Section 6 and 7 of Article 147 of the Election Code of Georgia. During the 2017 local self-government elections Valeri Grigalashvili was the United National Movement's candidate and used previously unused posters to put the Reformers' election number (49) over the United National Movement's election number (5). Giorgi Giuashvili, N1 in the proportional list of the Third Power party, submitted a complaint to N36 Borjomi District Election Commission and requested response over the use of old agitation materials by the Reformers' majoritarian candidate. Valeri Grigalashvili does not deny that he used agitation materials of the previous years and does not think that he breached the law.³²

Ethnic Composition of Party Lists and Majoritarian Candidates of the Electoral Subjects Taking Part in the Elections

In the reporting period, PMMG surveyed ethnic composition of the 12 most active political parties taking part in the elections in the districts with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities. It has been found out that the highest representation of the ethnic minorities in

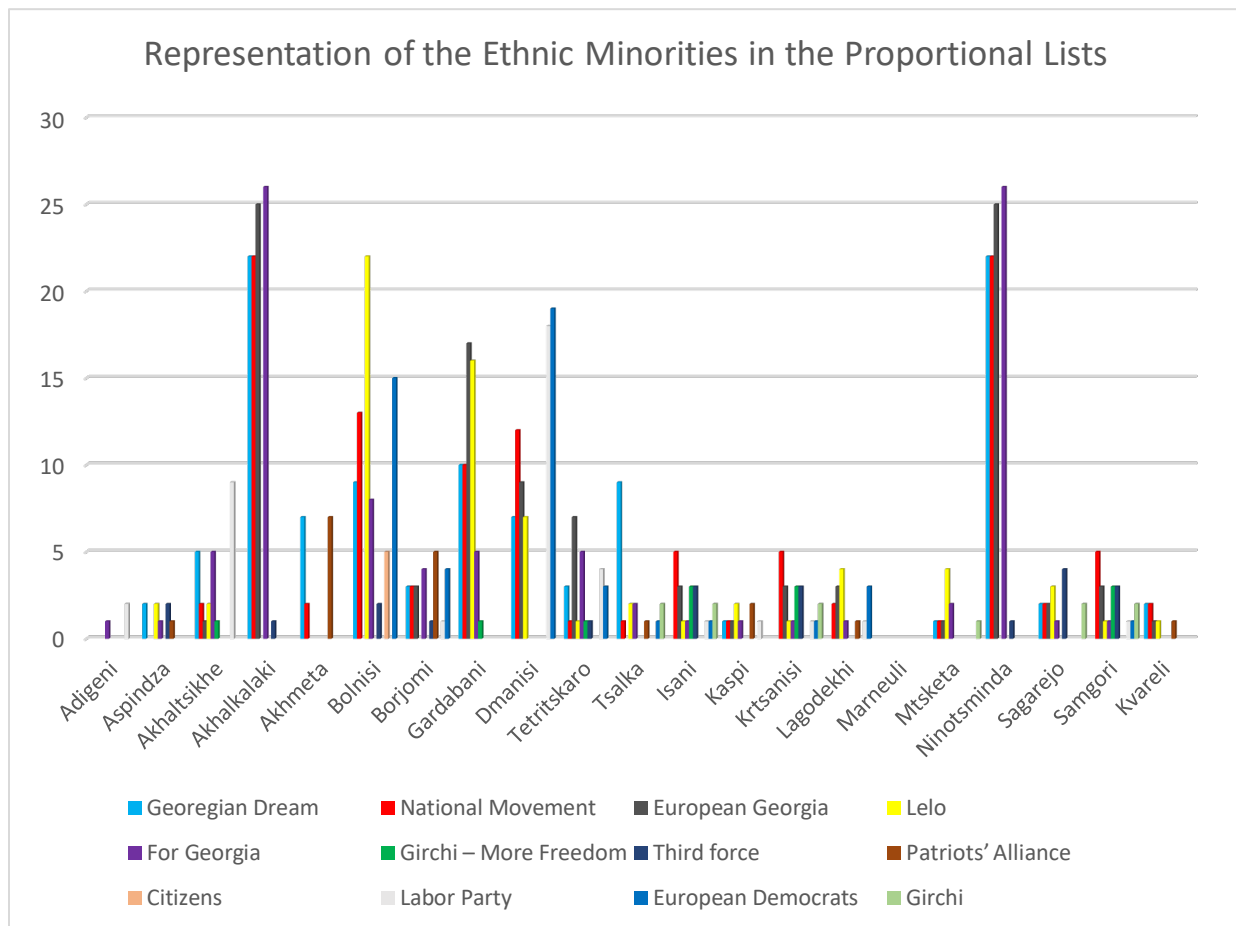
³¹ <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/673704-zaal-udumashvili-mteli-archevnebi-sus-ma-gadaibara>

³² https://sknews.ge/ka/news/33826?fbclid=IwAR12RgyJNPDQ8tg7OtqHIWIN78gaci-CokbOybbPMdyQc7r_m0-8JyVQiCo

the proportional lists for 2 October 2021 local self-government elections are traditionally in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda.

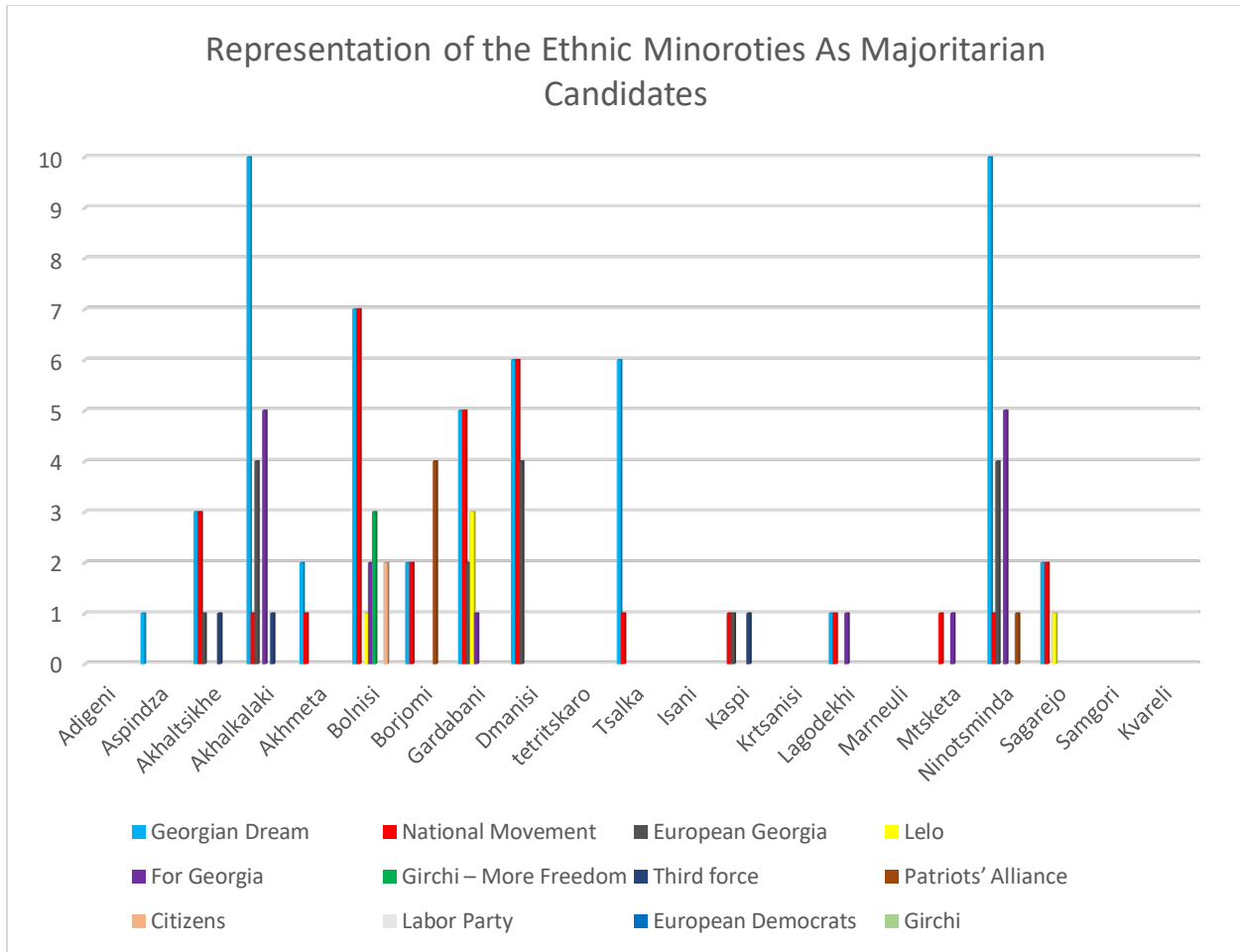
Of 12 surveyed parties in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, ethnic minority candidates are nominated in the proportional lists of only 5 parties.

1. For Georgia – 26 candidates
2. European Georgia – 25 candidates
3. Georgian Dream – 22 candidates
4. United National Movement – 22 candidates
5. Third Power – 1 candidate



Of ethnic minority majoritarian candidates in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, the picture is as follows:

1. Georgian Dream – 10 majoritarian candidates
2. For Georgia – 5 majoritarian candidates
3. European Georgia – 4 majoritarian candidates
4. United National Movement – 1 majoritarian candidate
5. Third Power – 1 majoritarian candidate



Use of Administrative Resources

On 31 August 2021, the European Georgia lodged a complaint to N5 Isani District Election Commission, claiming that employees of Isani municipality, Inga Vardosanidze and Khvicha Chalagashvili as well as teacher at 139th public school, Lia Gegia, published agitation materials in favor of Kakha Labuchidze and the Georgian Dream on their personal Facebook pages. The party demanded that appropriate response be given to the actions of these individuals. Isani District Election Commission rejected the complaint lodged by the European Georgia and clarified that documentation needed for registration of Kakha Labuchidze as a candidate of an electoral subject was not submitted in line with the Election Code to the Isani District Election Commission at the time when submitted evidence was being collected. Therefore, at that time, Kakha Labuchidze was not registered as a candidate of an electoral subject and therefore it is excluded that the individuals mentioned in the complaint had violated the agitation rules.

According to the information obtained by the PMMG long-term observer, the Georgian Dream's majoritarian candidate for Isani, Kakha Labuchidze, on 1 September 2021

appealed to the N5 Isani District Election Commission with the request of registration as a candidate. However, based on Kakha Labuchidze's official Facebook page, he started election campaign on 11 August 2021.³³ In addition, the Georgian Dream held official presentation of its majoritarian candidates on 2 August 2021.³⁴ Therefore, the evidence submitted by the European Georgia to N5 Isani District Election Commission involves facts of public servants agitating in favor of majoritarian candidate Kakha Labuchidze using material-technical resources of Isani municipality and 139th public school which contain signs of public servants abusing administrative resources.

Akhaltsikhe

There were two facts of use of administrative resources identified in Akhaltsikhe during the reporting period:

Director of NNLE “Akhaltsikhe Fortress”, Davit Tabatadze, misused administrative resources. In particular, Davit Tabatadze, using hardware owned by NNLE “Akhaltsikhe Fortress”, published information containing signs of campaigning (agitation) in favor of the Georgian Dream on his personal Facebook account.

Director of NNLE “Akhaltsikhe Municipality Union of Cultural Institutions”, Giorgi Zhuzhunadze, misused administrative resources. In particular, Giorgi Zhuzhunadze, using hardware owned by NNLE “Akhaltsikhe Municipality Union of Cultural Institutions”, published information containing signs of campaigning (agitation) in favor of the Georgian Dream on his personal Facebook account.

NNLE “Akhaltsikhe Fortress” and NNLE “Akhaltsikhe Municipality Union of Cultural Institutions” are legal entities under subordination of Akhaltsikhe municipality³⁵ which receive funding from the state budget and the subsection “B” of Section one of Article 48 of the Election Code of Georgia prohibits “to use means of communication, information services, and other kinds of equipment designated for state authorities and municipality bodies, also for organisations funded from the State Budget of Georgia (except for political parties).”

On 9 September 2021, PMMG lodged complaints to N37 Akhaltsikhe District Election Commission concerning these facts and based on Article 88 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, requested to fill out protocols on administrative offence for Davit Tabatadze and Giorgi Zhuzhunashvili.³⁶

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/GDKakhaLabuchidze/photos/a.103199632072628/103199598739298/>

³⁴ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31390151.html?fbclid=IwAR1vGJQYy1cJP79p9TMgZx2-lclzdHWP6qAkAzxc6Y7vxdzaT8kzR81UGew>

³⁵ <https://www.akhaltsikhe.gov.ge/ge/municipalitetistvis-dakvemdebarebuli-iuridiuli-pirebi>

³⁶See here

<https://sknews.ge/ka/news/33778?fbclid=IwAR1Mj8XusEwAl6B1P1mnwEwHBHxwimlhfitIWCvdTLOUADO4CQ08DGHeBE>

Akhaltsikhe District Election Commission rejected complaints lodged by the PMMG on the ground that the Commission was unable to verify IP addresses of the individuals mentioned in the complaints. This, according to the District Election Commission would have allowed them to discuss whether or not Davit Tabatadze and Giorgi Zhuzhunashvili really misused administrative resources.

PMMG appealed the decision of the N37 Akhaltsikhe District Election Commission in a legally allowed timeframe on 21 September 2021 in the Administrative College of Akhaltsikhe District Court. The latter, referring to the same motives, did not find facts of using administrative resources and the PMMG complaints were rejected.

Gardabani

On 8 September 2021, Gardabani Municipality City Hall published information on its own Facebook page on launching a construction of new massive project – market and economic zone.³⁷ Total investment value of the project is GEL 70 million. It is estimated that 500 jobs will be created during the construction process and more than 2,000 people will be employed after trade space starts functioning at full capacity. Members of the executive and legislative branches of the Government of Georgia as well as business representatives attended the ceremony dedicated to the launch of construction. The Georgian Dream's candidate for Mayor of Marneuli, Davit Kargareteli, also attended the event.

Marneuli

PMMG long-term observer identified fact of violation of agitation rules and alleged misuse of administrative resources by Irma Zarkua, employee of Marneuli City Hall's Supervision Service. Irma Zarkua, during her official officer hours and using material-technical means of her service, actively published agitation materials in favor of the Georgian Dream on her Facebook account. On 3 September 2021, N22 Marneuli District Election Commission registered Irma Zarkua as a candidate for Marneuli municipal council from the Georgian Dream.

Ninotsminda

On 6 September 2021, TV Pharvana reported information about the Georgian Dream meeting with the voters which contains signs of misuse of administrative resources. The TV footage shows that Melania Vartanyan, director of Patara Arakali village public school

³⁷<https://www.facebook.com/%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%93%E1%83%90%E1%83%91%E1%83%9C%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%9B%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9C%E1%83%98%E1%83%AA%E1%83%98%E1%83%9E%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%E1%83%A2%E1%83%94%E1%83%A2%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%90-Gardabani-Municipality-City-Hall-1568976006660514/photos/pcb.2985871434970957/2985859238305510/>

and Nairu Chobanian, director of Orojolari village kindergarten are giving speeches to the voters. They call for the voters to support the Georgian Dream.³⁸

On 22 September 2021, the Georgian Dream's candidate for Mayor of Dmanisi, Koba Muradashvili, as part of his election campaign met with Oruzmani village's public school students and teachers at the premises of that school during the office hours.

Use of Budget-funded Projects for Election Campaign

On 8 September 2021, Kakha Kaladze made a publication on his official Facebook page, saying that 55 families in Samgori district were given property ownership documents as part of legalization of flats program. The Facebook publication reads: "We started legalization of flats program in 2017 and the program has been successfully implementing. This program continues and we will stand next to the people who wish to legalize their housing plots. As of today, total value of property that has been legalized is over 100 million. These are government-owned housing plots where people have been living for decades. I am happy that they were given this opportunity to acquire ownership of these plots."³⁹

Pressure, Intimidation and Physical Assault

Dmanisi

On 21 September 2020, incumbent Mayor of Dmanisi and the United National Movement's candidate for Mayor, Giorgi Tatuashvili, together with Progress and Freedom party, Kakha Okriashvili, were meeting voters as part of election campaign when the Georgian Dream majoritarian candidate Mikheil Dautashvili with his son Davit Dautashvili and other followers verbally insulted the assembled people which soon turned into a brawl. As a result, two activists of the United National Movement were wounded. Different media workers happened to be at the venue and based on the footage, Davit Dautashvili, son of the Georgian Dream's Dmanisi majoritarian candidate, Mikheil Dautashvili, attacked and wounded the United National Movement's activists in the face

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=358214829286425>

³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/kakhakaladzeofficial/photos/pcb.3619500804819996/3619493164820760/>

with knife. The footage also shows that Mikheil Dautashvili came armed at the venue and at the journalist's question why he came with a firearm, Mikheil Dautashvili answered that did not have firearm but only a pneumatic rifle.⁴⁰ As stated by the leaders of the United National Movement, who specially arrived from Tbilisi to the incident area, former deputy head of the municipality and military curator, Zurab Okmelashvili, took active part in the confrontation. They also added that Zurab Okmelashvili frequently featured in various cases of violence⁴¹ in the run-up of 2020 parliamentary elections too, and the Georgian Dream uses him for mobilizing votes for the election.

Given the persisting risks of further aggravation of situation and repeated clashes between the parties which would deny actors involved in the elections to conduct election campaign in peaceful and healthy environment, on 21 September 2021 PMMG released a statement with respect to Dmanisi incident and called for timely and effective response from the relevant authorities.⁴²

On 22 September 2021, the Embassy of the United States also responded to Dmanisi incident. The Embassy condemned violence and urged the Government of Georgia to create an environment that protects individuals' rights and ensures a free, fair, competitive election that voters can have confidence in.⁴³

On 22 September 2021, as a result of operative-search and investigative activities, the officers of Kvemo Kartli Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs detained Davit Dautashvili, son of majoritarian candidate for Dmanisi, Mikheil Dautashvili.⁴⁴ The charges pressed against Davit Dautashvili were intentionally inflicting severe health injuries. On 24 September 2021, the court ruled to apply detention to Davit Dautashvili as a preventive measure.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=445778113444714>

⁴¹ See PMMG's 2020 Election Monitoring Report, Page 55

<http://www.pmmg.org.ge/res/uploads/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%90%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%A9%E1%83%95%E1%83%9C%E1%83%9D%20%E1%83%9B%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%98%E1%83%A2%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%9C%E1%83%92%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%20%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%A8%E1%83%98%202020.pdf>

⁴² <https://www.facebook.com/PMMG.ORG/photos/a.134180553299201/4732950840088793/>

⁴³ <https://ge.usembassy.gov/ka/u-s-embassy-statement-on-attacks-in-rustavi-and-dmanisi-ka/?fbclid=IwAR1fCnLhTmclZn6zXYY9ps-JQiehh--5SonBFklhVYvwKL14bZkFNElzt0l>

⁴⁴ <https://police.ge/ge/shinagan-saqmeta-saministrom-dmanisis-munitsipalitetsi%C2%A0momkhdari-dachris-faqti-tskhel-kvalze-gakhsna-dakavebulia-1-piri/14924>

⁴⁵ <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/675628-dmanisshi-nacmozraobis-mxardamcherebis-dachris-paktze-ocnebis-mazhoritarobis-kandidatis-shvils-patimroba-sheeparda>

Marneuli

On 30 September, in the village of Kirovka, Marneuli municipality, Lasha Kvlividze assigned to the second seat in the list of the United National Movement wounded by knife in the chest Rovshan Iskanderov, majoritarian candidate of the Georgian Dream.⁴⁶

According to the information provided by PMMG observer, as Georgian Dream office claims, the incident was preceded by the fact of making post on the wall of public school by the activist of the United National Movement “Misha Come” and “Vote for United National Movement”. The incident led to the verbal and then physical assault between Rovshan Iskanderov and Lasha Kvelidze.

Rovshan Iskanderov was taken to “Geohospital” after the incident. According to the doctor, the condition of the patient is stable and undergoing examination. Lasha Kvelidze was taken to the police office for interrogation.

Giorgi Mumladze, one of the leaders of the United National Movement in Marneuli shared the information with PMMG observer, according to which they were assaulted by the members of the Georgian Dream. Therefore, Lasha Kvelidze has wounded Rovshan Iskanderov as an unavoidable protective measure.

Facts of Alleged Pressure and Intimidation Against the Opposition Party Candidates and Supporters

The opposition parties were outspoken about facts of massive pressure and intimidation⁴⁷ against their candidates and supporters which they claimed were orchestrated from the ruling party and carried out by the law-enforcement officers. PMMG long-term observers sought to verify each and every of such facts.

Samtskhe-Javakheti

Akhalkalaki-Ninotsminda

On 7 September 2020, the United National Movement’s candidate for Mayor, Melik Raisyan issued a statement on facts of pressure against his supporters committed by Ninotsminda-Akhalkalaki majoritarian MP, Samvel Manukyan and law-enforcement bodies, particularly by head of police, Shalva Lomsadze. Melik Raisyan claimed that a result of pressure, Valodia Zopunyan, Valiko Kochoyan and Tsisana Mikeladze left the

⁴⁶ <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/676567-zaur-dargalis-inpormaciit-marneulshi-kartuli-ocnebis-mazhoritarobis-kandidati-scemes>

⁴⁷ https://civil.ge/ka/archives/439108?fbclid=IwAR1CXN5VQ2QSFvVQ_QxdSh2UV_5jLtvkIKyqHsOdHY1f9M6mH2APEbLrRU

party and submitted statements on withdrawal of their candidacies to the District Election Commission.⁴⁸

Tsina Mikeladze, in her interview with local internet newspaper Jnews, confirmed facts of pressure against her. Ms Mikeladze stated: “I do not know what to do. I am afraid for my husband and son. I said that God forbid that I am fired from my job. I work at the café owned by the MP’s (MP of the Parliament of Georgia, Samvel Manukyan) nephew and therefore, I have received threats on firing from my job.” On 5 September 2021, Tsisana Mikeladze appealed to the District Election Commission to withdraw her candidacy.⁴⁹ PMMG long-term observer had multiple attempts to reach Valodia Zopunyan by phone to verify this information, but to no avail.

On 8 September 2021, one of the leader of the United National Movement, Gia Baramidze, made the following statement at the briefing: “An unprecedented thing has happened – the Georgian Dream intended to remove the United National Movement from the elections in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. Mr Baramidze also stated that the authorities, within the involvement of law-enforcement bodies, forced their seven candidates to leave the ranks of party and thereby revoke registration of the United National Movement’s party lists on the grounds of insufficient candidates.⁵⁰ Four candidates withdraw their statements on revocation of their registration. The United National Movement’s leader clarified that they had addressed to every international and local NGOs as well as contacted friendly countries and as a result, on 7 September 2021 the CEC adopted a new decision⁵¹ which would not allow revocation of the United National Movement’s party lists in Akhalkalakli and Ninotsminda.⁵²

PMMG long-terms observer obtained copies of the statements from the District Election Commission which confirm that the United National Movement’s members – Knkushis Arzumanyan, Valiko Kochoyan, Valodia Zopunyan and Tsisana Melikidze, appealed to the Central Election Commission on 6 September 2021 asking to leave without review their previous statement on revocation of registration.

Arkadi Tsarukyan, N22 in the party lists of the For Georgia, submitted a statement of withdrawal of his candidacy. The For Georgia party explains that chairperson of the N41 District Election Commission, Seyran Kyureghyan and his son, the Georgian Dream MP, Sumbat Kyureghyan (these individuals are from the same village) contacted him and Arkadi Tsarukyan withdrew his candidacy because of pressure. On 17 September 2021, PMMG long-term observer contacted Seyran Kyureghyan and asked about alleged pressure on Arkadi Tsarukyan. Seyran Kyureghyan denied any type of pressure or

⁴⁸See here: <https://sknews.ge/ka/news/33674?fbclid=IwAR0cS-8hv1TubNh7eGlaNjBPxPA8fjR4AcPWevpM-0KqurCYP0fB4ZcLJo>

⁴⁹ <https://ka.jnews.ge/?p=18324>

⁵⁰ See “F” subsection of Section 6 of Article 145 of the Election Code of Georgia.

⁵¹ See here: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5253113?publication=0>

⁵² See here: <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/673045-giorgi-baramize-moxda-uprecedento-ram-kartulma-ocnebam-ganizraxa-rom-axalkalaksa-da-ninocmindashi-nacionaluri-mozraoba-saertod-moxsnas-archevnebidan>

intimidation against Arkadi Tsarukyan and expressed his readiness to repeat the same in the presence of the latter. PMMG long-term observer has also contacted Sumbat Kyureghyan who stated that allegations that he as an MP had visited Arkadi Tsarukyan's home to pressure him should not be taken seriously. On 19 September 2021, PMMG long-term observer visited Arkadi Tsarukyan in his close relative's house where Tsarukyan denied any facts of pressure against him and stated he is not going to withdraw his candidacy.

On 4 September 2021, N3 of the For Georgia party list for Akhalkalaki municipal council, Lorand Ezoyan, submitted a statement on withdrawing his candidacy. The party believes this happened as a result of pressure against Ezoyan.⁵³ On 7 September 2021, local internet media JNEWS took an extensive interview from Lorand Ezoyan where the latter discussed the reasons behind leaving the For Georgia party. As stated by Lorand Ezoyan he believed that the former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia was in alliance with the Georgian Dream and wished to help the latter, although later he learned about possible ties between Gakharia and the United National Movement which was unacceptable for him.⁵⁴ JNEWS' article reads: "Of note is that the former candidate of the For Georgia party, admitted of the record that he was pressured by the special services. Of additional note is that Lorand Ezoyan's son-in-law is a businessman who owns a ceremonial hall and who was the only one who got fined for breaching the COVID-19 regulations. The restaurant was closed, although banquet halls in neighboring Ninotsminda continued hosting weddings and funeral repasts."⁵⁵ According to the information of PMMG long-term observer, ceremonial hall owned by Lorand Ezoyan's son-in-law was closed on the grounds of breaching the COVID-19 regulations much earlier than Lorand Ezoyan was nominated as candidate for municipal council from the For Georgia party. Lorand Ezoyan, speaking with PMMG long-term observer, stated that after closure of the hall he approached "Aleko Elisashvili – Citizens" party, since he thought that party was allied with the Georgian Dream and wished to help them. However, "Citizens" rejected the request of cooperation from Ezoyan and as a result the latter became candidate for municipal council from the For Georgia party, since he thought this party was also in alliance with the Georgian Dream. In regard to reason why he withdrew his candidacy, Ezoyan stated that his son was contacted and passed on to a request on withdrawing candidacy and he decided to comply.

On 4 September 2021, N4 of the For Georgia party lists for Akhalkalaki municipal council, Ararat (Vrezh) Kazaryan, submitted a statement on withdrawing his candidacy. For Georgia's local office stated that he is unwilling to speak about the reasons behind withdrawal of his candidacy.⁵⁶ PMMG long-term observer contacted Ararat Kazaryan by

⁵³ <https://sknews.ge/ka/news/33654?fbclid=IwAR0eAqJH1qikoaa2rosFsXgWOF0bM54QeJfpRjww04nWn8Y-XHQol7DT9Zl>

⁵⁴ <https://ka.inews.ge/?p=18302>

⁵⁵ <https://ka.inews.ge/?p=18302>

⁵⁶ <https://sknews.ge/ka/news/33654?fbclid=IwAR0eAqJH1qikoaa2rosFsXgWOF0bM54QeJfpRjww04nWn8Y-XHQol7DT9Zl>

phone and asked him why he withdrew his candidacy. Ararat (Vrezh) Kazaryan responded dryly “I ended up in misunderstanding” and hang up the phone.

United National Movement’s representative Teimuraz Mikeladze, in his conversation with the PMMG long-term observer in Adigeni, stated that his relative (Mikeladze did not disclose the relative’s identity) who has a truck and transports firewood from forest, recently had his car taken away and denied rights to drive it until they will be confident that he and his family members will vote for the ruling party at the elections. Those, who took the truck, also demanded him to convince Teimuraz Mikeladze to leave the United National Movement and join the ruling party.

On 5 September 2021, N6 of the For Georgia party list for Akhaltsikhe municipal council, Paata Manchkhashvili, submitted a statement on withdrawing his candidacy. The party stated that he is unwilling to speak the reasons behind withdrawing his candidacy and has ceased all communication with the party as well. PMMG long-term observer attempted to contact Paata Manchkhashvili, although the For Georgia office refused to disclose Manchkhashvili’s contact information and the verification of information could not be done.

On 4 September 2021, N2 of the For Georgia’s party list for Aspindza municipal council, Nugzar Kavelidze, submitted a statement on withdrawing his candidacy. The For Georgia’s local office stated that candidate was pressured and he does not speak about reasons behind the decision to withdraw his candidacy. On 24 August 2021, PMMG long-term observer contacted with abovementioned individual by phone. In the beginning of conversation, he confirmed his identity, although when he was informed that he was talking with the observation mission representative, denied his identity and hang up the phone.

Borjomi

On 9 September 2021, two members of the European Georgia’s proportional lists left the party. The head of the European Georgia’s Borjomi office, Bakar Shiradze, confirmed this information in his interview with TV Borjomi. Bakar Shiradze assumes that his teammates left the party because of threats and intimidation.⁵⁷ PMMG long-term observer attempted to verify this information, although the abovementioned individuals could not be reached. The European Georgia’s office stated that they are unwilling to speak on this issue and the party will not disclose their contact information for their best interests.

Kvemo Kartli

The N3 and N5 of the For Georgia proportional list for Marneuli municipal council, Gunay Etermishli and Qulari Kurtlyar, submitted their statements on withdrawing their

⁵⁷ https://borjomi.tv/arcevnebi/archevnebi-2021/article/14348--evropuli-saqarthvelo-borjomshi-orma-tsvrma-datova?fbclid=IwAR0V7Sw8eHvz9x6assZH2oAb7N6gz2th2DPp8uQJf_KLOGRaGG726WDvdCEhttps://sknews.ge/ka/news/33714?fbclid=IwAR1Qub6wLctQFZ6KHa78BJt839yJRF5z0jxiS-aJtdPNOY0uLwBzoEYO_RI

candidacies. The party clarified that their family members were pressured/intimidated and as a result, Gunay Etirmishli and Qulari Kurtlyar withdraw their candidacies and ceased all communication with the party. PMMG long-term representative contacted them by phone and they denied any fact of pressure/intimidation, although refrained from stating reasons why they withdraw their candidacies.

On 5 September 2021, N14, N17 and N20 of the For Georgia proportional list for Tetristskaro municipal council, Nikoloz Samkharadze, Otar Tsitlauri and Giorgi Samkharadze submitted statements on withdrawing their candidacies. The party assumes that all three received threats on firing their parents from jobs, although the candidates themselves do not speak about reasons why they left the party. PMMG long-term observer in Tetristskaro attempted to contact the abovementioned individuals and asked local office of the For Georgia party for their phone numbers. The party denied to disclose this information and therefore it was impossible to speak with those individuals and verify information at the first hand.

Kakheti

Tsezar Mosakhlshvili, who is N17 in the For Georgia's proportional list for Akhmeta municipal council and works as auto mechanic (father of four underage children) and has family listed in the database of socially vulnerable people, submitted statement on withdrawing his candidacy. The party's local office stated that Tsezar Mosakhlshvili is unwilling to speak about the reasons why he withdrew his candidacy. They also stated that Tsezar Mosakhlshvili did not want to withdraw candidacy but was threatened that his social assistance would be revoked. PMMG long-term observer had multiple attempts to reach Tsezar Mosakhlshvili by phone in the reporting period, although the latter did not answer the calls.

Mariam Berikishvili left the ranks of supporters of the For Georgia in Akhmeta. Ms Berikishvili stated that she was added to the list of supporters by the For Georgia party representatives by deception. Later, they threatened her that if she left the party, social assistance would be revoked. Mariam Berikishvili visited Akhmeta District Election Commission and removed the data about her family members from the list. She stated that Giorgi Gakharia and his team carries out United National Movement's policy and therefore she distrusts the party. At the same time, Mariam Berikishvili said that she was deceived because of lack of information, since she thought that Giorgi Gakharia was still the Georgian Dream member.⁵⁸

On 7 September 2021, Akaki Lobzhanidze, majoritarian candidate for village Matsimi, nominated by the For Georgia, submitted statement on withdrawing his candidacy. The party's office believes this fact was a result of him being pressured. PMMG long-term observer visited this individual at his residence where Akaki Lobzhanidze denied any

⁵⁸ See here: https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/216824/giorgi-gakharis-partias-mkhardamcherebi-kakhetshits-toveben?fbclid=IwAR3_gpaamZ-V_BxEKs7NIKjQKLhIM-p3QdwiEAQtsYEkbRI14vAZ8YrSYY

pressure against him, although refrained from naming reasons why he withdrew his candidacy.

Mtskheta-Mtianeti

On 8 September 2021, N8 of the For Georgia proportional list for Kaspi municipal council and majoritarian candidate for Okami, Rapshan Isabaloghlu, submitted a statement to the District Election Commission revoking his registration. The party stated that Rapshan Isabaloghlu campaigned until 8 September 2021. Therefore, they assume that he was pressured. On 24 September 2021, PMMG long-term observer contacted with Rapshan Isabaloghlu by phone and in phone conversation he denied any threats against him and stated that he maintains good relations with the party members, although he added that works in butcher shop and is involved in meat supply and this activity is more profitable. Therefore, he made a decision to distance himself from politics.

Alleged Vote Buying

Marneuli

On 2 September 2021, candidate for Mayor of Marneuli from the European Georgia, Akhmed Imamkuliev, organized briefing and blamed the Georgian Dream's majoritarian candidate, Vasil Khakhulashvili in vote buying. As stated by Akhmed Imamkuliev, the majoritarian candidate promised voters to build road at his own expense in exchange for giving votes for him. Akhmad Imamkuliev released video footage which shows the Georgian Dream agitator addressing to the gathered people that Vasil Khakhulashvili kept his promise before the elections and therefore deserves their support in the elections.⁵⁹

In regard to this fact, Vasil Khakhulashvili himself stated that road in Jandari village was built by one of the businessman whereas he simply took interest in who had built the road and showed up and thanked the businessman.⁶⁰

On 8 September 2021, at the session of the Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections, representative of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, Ioseb Rosebashvili, clarified that based on their inquiry, road rehabilitation project in Jandari village was not envisaged by the local self-government budget. Therefore, it was confirmed that the road was not built by the local self-government. Mr Rosebashvili

⁵⁹ See here: <https://mtavari.tv/news/55170-otsnebis-mazhoritarobis-kandidatma-adgilobrivebs>

⁶⁰ See here: <https://www.marneulifm.ge/az/xeberler/article/47135-imamkulievi-ocnebis--mazhoritars-amomrchevlis-mosyidvashi-adanashaulebs-khakhulashvili-braldebass-uaryofs>

additionally explained that the road which is being paved with asphalt in the footage is not an important section and is in fact a small so called dead-end.

Lagodekhi

On 10 September 2021, majoritarian candidate⁶¹ from the For Georgia party, Nika Gogoladze, made a publication on his Facebook account, saying he purchased and personally delivered food and medication for a 92-year-old woman. The publication, which also includes photos of Nika Gogoladze and the 92-year-old woman as well as photographs of foods and medications, says: “I purchased medication and food for her. With the help of kind people, our 92-year old grandma Valia is still smiling and believes that everything will be fine. I count on you and believe that we will accomplish more kind deeds together.” This photograph was soon deleted from his Facebook account which proves alleged vote buying by Nika Gogoladze.



⁶¹Shroma, Kavshiri, Khiza, Gurgeniani, Ninigori.

Adigeni

Opposition parties are talking about alleged vote buying from the Georgian Dream in Mokhe village of Adigeni municipality. As stated by the opposition, people are allowed to illegally cut firewood in exchange for the votes whereas the government will turn a blind eye to the violations. Gocha Kimadze, the Georgian Dream candidate for the Mayor of Adigeni, dismisses the opposition's allegations as lies. According to inhabitants of Mokhe village, facts of illegal transportation of firewood from the forest became more frequent recently. In his interview with "Samkhretis Karibche" newspaper, Teimuraz Mikeladze, United National Movement's representative stated: "There are dozens of trucks loaded with firewood coming out from forest which have totally false documents. Firewood is cut on government-owned territory whereas documents are registered on private property owned by a private individual."⁶²

Comparative Analysis of Pre-Election Environments of 2020 Parliamentary and 2021 Local Self-Government Elections

In the aftermath of 2020 parliamentary elections, Georgia was mired in political crisis. In order to ease tensions and restore trust in the elections, several months before the 2021 local self-government elections, the Parliament of Georgia adopted changes in election legislation with broad public involvement. Most of the amendments contribute to enhanced trust vis-à-vis election process and outcomes. However, there are number of issues which have not been addressed and still pose a significant challenge. One of such issues is staffing of election administration. Given the experience of 2020 elections, one of the goals of the election reform to elect highly trusted CEC professional members could not be reached at this stage, because for the 2021 elections the Parliament of Georgia elected CEC chairperson and two professional members temporarily for six months, since the candidates failed to get two thirds of the votes from total number of MPs of the Parliament. In addition, within scope of enacted amendments, involvement of the political parties in the activities of election commissions has increased as compared to 2020 elections. However, challenges related to the election of CEC professional members remain unchanged.⁶³ The selection process for professional members in the district and

⁶²<https://sknews.ge/ka/news/33784?fbclid=IwAR1wOTToYG4pNVQSUaalEPfBKun05bw6INB5TjXqMFWOony0hUnNdzP7GtGU>

⁶³ Election of the CEC professional members need higher support in the Parliament of Georgia (two thirds two thirds of the votes from total number of MPs of the Parliament). However, there is an alternative mechanism too, which envisages election of the CEC professional members with simple majority of the total members of the Parliament of Georgia, albeit only temporarily for the duration of six months. This mechanism provides possibility to elect persons acceptable to the ruling party as CEC professional members. In this light, the number of professional commission

precinct election commissions was carried out in line with the law and sessions to elect members were held transparently. However, there was a recurrence of trends characteristic to 2020 elections. For instance, many of the professional members are employed in budget organizations, there is still a lack of specific criteria based on which the professional members of the election commissions are selected, turnout of the applicants is still very low and the trend to staff precinct election commissions with political party activists and agitators is still visible.

In contrast to the 2020 elections, initiative of the CEC on live broadcast of the CEC sessions is a step forward and contributed to transparency of the CEC activities amid the pandemic. Interviewing of the District Election Commission membership candidates by the CEC officials as well as overall transparency of the process also warrants positive appraisal.

Time for reviewing and appealing of the election disputes increased to a certain extent. The possibility to submit complaints electronically as well as creation of electronic registrar is a novelty. This amendment improves the situation of the authors of complaints and enables them to prepare substantiated and backed up complaints. However, PMMG believes this is still not a reasonable timeframe. In regard to introduction of possibility to submit complaints electronically this is indeed a step forward which will allow authorized subjects (parties, observer organizations) to save their already limited time while submitting complaints to the election commissions.

Malign practice of politically-motivated dismissals identified during the 2020 elections still remains controversial for 2021 elections. Notably, this trend is visible in the same municipalities as during the 2020 parliamentary elections. However, a different element was also identified. For instance, as part of 2021 monitoring, it was identified that two supporters of the ruling party were allegedly fired for their political views.

Incumbent Mayors and municipal council members who are simultaneously nominated as candidates, still continued to campaign from their positions. The practice of increasing local budgets prior to the launch of election campaign, continued for 2021 elections as well. As during the pre-election period of 2020, the Government of Georgia again voiced number of initiatives in the reporting period, aimed to influence election processes before the official launch of the campaign.

Pre-election environment of 2020 elections was characterized by abundance of violence, particularly physical assaults. Thus far, only one fact of physical violence has been identified for 2021 election campaign. However, there has been 21 alleged facts of politically-motivated intimidation. Nearly 20 candidates have withdrawn their candidacies on the ground of alleged pressure/intimidation and as a result the opposition parties started to face risks of having registration of their proportional lists revoked, which was not an issue during the previous elections.

members increased (from six to eight) in any level of election commission which aimed to counter-balance the proportion of members appointed by the political parties in the election commissions.

Despite the legislative changes which expanded the circle of employees in the budget organizations who are not allowed to agitate or be involved in the election agitation while performing their official duties or during office hours, the trend of use of administrative resources in favor of the ruling party has continued. In addition, certain restrictions have been imposed with respect to gathering of public servants as well as individuals employed in pre-school and educational facilities on the ground of their employment affiliation.

Election administration put greater effort this year to contribute more inclusive election environment in districts with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities. Services, related to election process, became more accessible to the minority voters in languages they speak. The voter information campaigns have been robust. In addition, successful trainings have been delivered for precinct election commission members which were tailored to the linguistic needs of the ethnic minorities.

Given all the above mentioned, it can be concluded that efforts have been made in 2021 to overcome political crisis unfolding in the aftermath of 2020 parliamentary elections as well as to improve election environment which gave rise to some optimism. A number of trends can be reviewed within this context:

- Parliament of Georgia adopting changes in election legislation, most of which contribute to enhanced trust in the election process.
- In contrast to 2020 elections, increased involvement of the political parties in the activities of election commissions.
- CEC introducing live broadcasts of its sessions and which contributes to increased transparency of the election administration's activities.
- Extending time for election dispute review and appeal to a certain extent, introducing practice of electronic submission of complaints and setting up of electronic registrar which somehow simplified complaint submission procedures.
- Increased efforts from the election administration to facilitate inclusive environment for the ethnic minority voters.

Despite some positive shifts for the 2021 election cycle, a number of challenges still remain, including: selection of the CEC professional members, insufficient public trust vis-à-vis the CEC professional members, staffing precinct election commissions with individuals employed in budget organizations, The deficit of high standards of justification of the decisions made by the election administration while conducting administrative proceedings, political party activists and agitators, politically-motivated dismissals, alleged use of administrative resources by the ruling party, malpractice of threats, intimidation and physical assault against the representatives of the political subjects in the pre-election period.

Certainly, steps made in 2021 in response to challenges in 2020 election cycle, aimed to improve the election system and restore public trust in the election process failed to fully reach intended goals. Therefore, timely and effective response vis-à-vis above mentioned problems, both from the political spectrum and the government remains is urgently needed to raise public trust in the elections for the next election cycle, ensure inclusive,

transparent, fair and free election environment and help Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.