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Elections in Adjara & Tbilisi Underscore Georgia’s Electoral Progress; Council of Europe Hails “orderly polling day” and elections “conducted in a positive atmosphere”

Ruling National Movement Party prevails in Adjara, despite subdued campaign, while two opposition parties take single-mandate constituencies in Tbilisi

Elections for the local Parliament in the Adjara Autonomous Republic were held on Monday, 3 November. “Polling day was calm and several recommendations by the Congress following the 2001 and 2004 Adjara elections have now been followed” according to observers from the Council of Europe’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

“In comparison with previous years, the election system was really improved,” said Gunter Krug, the head of the CoE delegation and a member of the Berlin house of representatives.

The Council’s positive judgment was echoed by almost all other local and international observers, numbering over 1,500 in total. There were 21 international and 9 local observer missions in Adjara, and slightly fewer in Tbilisi for the by-elections. They noted numerous advances made in several aspects of the electoral process, including fair access to the airwaves and to administrative resources for all accredited parties.

The extensive efforts to level the media playing field appeared to work. An independent consulting firm, Primetime, that monitored the quality and quantity of media exposure for political candidates said they generally received even-handed coverage. (The firm’s reports can be found at <http://cec.gov.ge/?que=eng/press-center/media-monitoring>.)

The Central Election Commission also made extensive efforts to ensure that voters could easily register for the election and correct errors in the voter lists; imposed strict rules on the use of administrative resources; and undertook extensive public campaigns to encourage voter turnout, including by the physically impaired.

The Council of Europe delegation did note some electoral irregularities. “Generally, the elections were conducted positively, but the delegation concludes that further revision of electoral procedures is needed,” said Krug during his Tuesday press conference.

The United National Movement party of President Saakashvili won an easy victory in Adjara, despite not having mounted a major campaign. Meanwhile, the UNM did not contest the Parliamentary by-elections in Tbilisi, in a gesture aimed at increasing pluralism in a legislative body that UNM dominates. The two, single-mandate constituencies were won by Guram Chakhvadze of the National-Democratic Party and Tamaz Kvachantiradze of the Christian-Democratic Party.

“Although Adjara is a very important region for me and the results of elections there are important for Georgia, neither I nor the central authorities participated in the election campaign,” said President Saakashvili after the vote. “I asked the National Movement not to put ads on the central TV channels and we have not spent significant funds on advertising.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Central Election Commission Website

<http://www.cec.gov.ge/>

Press release of the Council of Europe Delegation

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1365241&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE>