



Election Update

Georgia Election Update Is a Service of the Government of Georgia

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Welcome to the "Georgia Election Update," which will feature key election-related news. This inaugural edition offers an overview of major development in recent weeks and months:

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PARLIAMENT: A Year of Intense Electoral Reforms

Over the past 12 months-and following inclusive discussions with political parties, civil society, and international experts-Parliament implemented a series of measures to ensure a pluralistic, competitive, and transparent electoral environment. These steps, together with the election-related activities of the Central Electoral Commission and other agencies, are summarized in the attached background briefing. Among the highlights:

- **Greater Financing Established for Political Parties:** New legislation ensures that political parties that win 5% of the vote will enjoy guaranteed state funding, receiving 1 million GEL from the state budget to cover campaign costs. In addition, all qualified political parties have access to substantial free political advertising air-time on all TV channels during the election campaign.
- **Transparency in Political Party Financing:** Both GRECO and the Venice Commission Guidelines for Financing of Political Parties recommended the establishment of an independent body to monitor funding of political parties and

election campaigns. The State Audit Agency of Georgia, an independent agency, was mandated to play this role. (See story below.)

- Georgian Dream Leader Cleared for Electoral Participation: On May 30, a constitutional amendment went into effect that automatically grants Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili (and any other EU citizen who has resided permanently in Georgia for the past five years) the ability to run for any elected office, including President and Prime Minister.
- Increasing women's participation in politics. The new election code offers political parties significant financial incentives to encourage them to include women as candidates for the parliamentary elections.

MEDIA FREEDOM: New Legislation Requires All Carriers to Broadcast All TV News Stations

On June 29, Parliament passed legislation that creates unprecedented access to news broadcasts for Georgians. The new rules compel all cable operators to carry all news-based TV channels in Georgia during election periods, while requiring all news-based TV channels to offer their signal to all cable operators. The amendment was hailed by election watchdog and legal advocacy groups. "The implementation of the initiative proposed by the Speaker of Parliament will contribute positively to the creation of a fair electoral environment and healthy political competition," declared "This Affects You Too," an umbrella civil society campaign uniting election watchdog and legal advocacy organizations, including Transparency International Georgia, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy.

IATF: Rapid Response to Campaign Challenges

In May, the Government launched a new inter-agency task force to ensure a "transparent and fair electoral environment," ahead of October's parliamentary election. Headed by National Security Advisor Giga Bokeria, the new Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) includes representatives from Georgia's interior, justice, regional development, finance, and foreign affairs ministries. "The IATF will foster coordination among various government agencies and promote dialogue between the government and all stakeholders in the electoral process," the National Security Council said in statement. "The IATF will cooperate with political parties, domestic non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and election observers." The group is mandated to prevent and respond to electoral violations.

- Since its launch, the IATF has met regularly with political parties, NGOs, and international organizations to monitor potential problems in the campaign environment.
- It has issued 5 recommendations and 2 statements, addressing issues ranging from the potential abuse of administrative resources to efforts to reduce tensions at campaign events.
- The IATF-in addition to its statements and recommendations-will be issuing monthly reports. Details of its activities can be found on its website (see below).

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS: Positive Initial Assessments

The government invited international election observers early to underscore Georgia's deep commitment to a free, fair, and transparent electoral environment. The OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted assessments of the pre-election environment. Highlights of their initial reports include:

- ODIHR and NDI commended the government for adopting a new election code that addressed many previous recommendations. NDI further noted improvements to the electoral system.
- ODIHR expressed trust in the Central Election Commission and their ability to manage elections in a professional and impartial manner.
- ODIHR and NDI noted that the Voter List Verification Commission had sufficient skills, trust, resources, and time to verify voters lists in advance of the election.
- Both ODIHR and NDI welcomed the early establishment of the IATF and noted that IATF recommendations had helped improve the electoral environment.
- NDI noted that improvements to the media environment, including the "must carry" law and plans for televised debates, would help ensure that a range of views was available to voters.

The full versions of the reports are available at the OSCE and NDI websites (see below)

STATE AUDIT OFFICE: Campaign Finance Monitoring Yields Enforcement, Transparency

In late 2011, in accordance with recommendations from the Venice Commission and GRECO, Parliament reformed Georgia's political financing laws to ensure greater transparency and accountability in Georgia's democratic system. The supreme audit institution of Georgia, the State Audit Office (SAO), was mandated to monitor political finances. In its first six months, the SAO has engaged intensely with political parties and other stakeholders to brief them on the new regulations and to receive their feedback. It has also established clear-cut guidelines to ensure that potential violations are quickly investigated and corrective actions take. The SAO has pursued a series of investigations that have led to court actions against campaign-finance violators. A full overview of these investigations as well as of the SAO's other activities can be seen at the website listed below.

Among the key provisions of the political financing legislation were:

- Political parties must provide the SAO all donations within five working days of receipt, and, during campaigns, they are obliged to publish information every three weeks on these donations. Bank transfers are determined to be the only legal means of receiving donations.
- Corporate funding of parties is banned in order to avoid the risk of abuse, a move applauded by the Venice Commission. However, while banning corporate donations, the law increased maximum donations from individuals from 30,000 GEL to 60,000 GEL.
- To safeguard the independence of political parties, and in line with recommendations by the Venice Commission and GRECO, an annual cap was established on political party expenses (no more than 0.2% of Georgia's GDP) and on party membership fees (1,200 GEL annually).

CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION: Working Groups, Training Sessions, Minority Outreach

The CEC, with the support of international partners and funders, has been conducting training programs to ensure the effectiveness and professionalism of the election administration. Additionally, administrative judges for regional, city, and appeals courts were trained on how to evaluate election complaints, and lawyers from political parties were trained on electoral disputes and other issues. Among its many other activities, the CEC has:

- Established a working group composed of political parties that has held eight meetings under the auspices of the International Republican Institute (it is financed by USAID). The group addresses issues ranging from how election observers will be registered, to guidelines for campaign advertisements, to rules for voting in prisons.
- Been working to improve the participation of ethnic minorities in the elections by producing election materials in all minority languages and opening resource centers across the country.
- Formed a special media working group, and recently signed an MoU with regional media broadcasters in Georgia to agree to a code of conduct for their coverage of the parliamentary elections (2012), presidential election (2013), and local self-government elections (2014).
- Signed a memorandum of understanding in April with the US Embassy and USAID outlining US support for the CEC's four-year project on "Increased Trust in the Electoral Process." USAID will provide a grant to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to help strengthen the institution of the CEC.
- Signed memorandum of understanding with 14 universities to cooperate on promoting civic awareness among students and training legal professionals in the field of election legislation.

VOTER LISTS: Opposition-Led Effort to Verify Accuracy of Voters List Nears Completion

Commission to Verify Accuracy of Voters List Nears Completion of Mandate: A 21-member Commission, chaired by a member of an opposition party and with opposition and civil society representatives in the majority, conducted a door-to-door campaign from April 20-June 10 to verify the accuracy of current voter registration lists. Georgia's Commission to Ensure Voter List Accuracy deployed 11,000 registrars to check over 100,000 residents in Tbilisi and another 200,000 in various districts across Georgia. A final verified list is expected will be completed this summer. In June, Parliament extended the Commission's mandate so that it can check the voters list at polling stations on election day to verify whether they match with those compiled by the commission.

WEBLINKS: Georgia's Electoral Institutions; Election Observers

- IATF: <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/eng/elections2012.php>
- Central Election Commission: <http://www.cec.gov.ge>
- State Audit Office: <http://sao.georgia.gov/>

- OSCE-Observers report on Georgia: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/91891>
- NDI-Observers report on Georgia: <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-PEAM-062912.pdf>

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