



The Committee for Open Democracy

Final Election Report on the 2012 Georgian Parliamentary Elections

Including the Pre-Election Report and Election Day Official Statement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Description</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Final Report Background</i>	3
<i>Final Report Summary</i>	4
<i>Final Report Findings</i>	4
<i>Final Report Recommendations</i>	5
<i>Final Report Conclusions</i>	6
<i>Appendix I: Pre Election Report Introduction</i>	7
<i>Pre Election Report Summary</i>	8
<i>Campaign Background and Environment</i>	8
<i>Problematic Campaign Issues</i>	10
<i>Final Comments</i>	13
<i>Appendix II: Official Statement on Election Day</i>	14

FINAL ELECTION REPORT

Republic of Georgia

For the October 1, 2012 Parliamentary Election

Background

On October 1, 2012, Georgians voted decisively for change in their government by providing the new Georgian Dream coalition a victory over the United National Movement (UNM) party which previously held a constitutional majority in Parliament. Turnout was 61 percent of eligible voters and the votes were divided between the proportional party ballot and single mandate constituencies. On the proportional ballot, Georgian Dream won 55-40 percent over the UNM based on official results from the Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC) which resulted in 44 seats being awarded to Georgian Dream and 33 to the UNM in the new parliament. In the single mandate constituencies, Georgian Dream won 41 seats to 32 for the UNM. Georgian Dream had the strongest support in the three largest cities of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi as well as the regions of Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Shida Kartli (Gori) and Guria. UNM had the best results in Samogrelo Zemi-Svaneti (Zugdidi), Kvemo Kartli (the area of the country with the largest ethnic Azeri population), and Samtskhe-Javakheti (the area of the country with the largest ethnic Armenian population). The regions of Kakheti, Imereti, Racha-Lechikhumi and Adjara were battlegrounds with mixed results for both major political movements. Due to ongoing Russian military occupation, the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not participate in this election. Thus, the new parliament consists of 85 members from the Georgian Dream coalition and 65 from the UNM. Due to recent constitutional changes following the election and certification of results, the new Parliament elected the leader of the opposition Georgian Dream coalition, Bidzina Ivanishvili, as Prime Minister of Georgia.

The Committee for Open Democracy, a United States based not-profit organization that monitors elections for their adherence to democratic norms observed the entire election process from April 2012 (prior to the start of official campaigning) through the end of October 2012 (Election day and announcement of official results). The Committee was established in 2010 by veteran international election observers and the organization has observed elections in Ukraine (2010 National Local, 2012 Special Local, 2012 Parliamentary), Moldova (2010 Parliamentary), Montenegro (2012 Parliamentary) and in Slovenia (2012 Presidential). This report and appendices are The Committee's findings for the 2012 Georgian Parliamentary election.

Summary

Despite the use of administrative resources and problems with the voters lists, the will of the Georgian voters was reflected in the final results of the 2012 Parliamentary election. The early presence of Long Term Monitors (LTMs) from the Committee for Open Democracy played an important role in preventing violence and more severe use of administrative resources.

Findings

On September 28, 2012, the Committee for Open Democracy released its' official "Pre-Election Statement" (see Appendix I below) which is available on video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kKtVyKZ24>. The report highlights major problems observed prior to Election Day including (but not limited to): Pressure on the news media, voter list and ballot fraud, administrative resource abuse, selective law enforcement, the prison abuse scandal and politically-motivated accreditation of international election monitors. It was The Committee conclusion, based on these problematic issues that, "based on the findings of our long-term monitors who have been in Georgia since April, our conclusion is that the pre-election environment has not been conducted fairly and that administrative resources have been used by the government to gain unfair advantage in the election." The Committee for Open Democracy reaffirms the findings and conclusions contained in the "Pre-Election Report" as having negatively influenced the electoral environment.

On October 2, 2012, the day following Election Day, The Committee issued a news release headlined, "Longest Serving Monitoring Group in Georgia Sees Election Day Irregularities" (see Appendix II below) which was the organization's official statement on the conduct of Election Day in Georgia. The Committee reaffirms its official statement on the conduct of Election Day as being an accurate reflection of voter intent. Concerns about "discrepancies between results in single mandate districts between the percent of votes for parties on the proportional ballot versus the votes for the same party's individual candidates" turned out not to be as problematic as initially indicated. The statement was issued while the official vote count by the CEC was still in its early stages and –at that time- the results appeared to be disproportionate and were a matter of concern. However, the final results showed just an overall one percent difference in results between proportional and single mandate ballots. While all other issues (including the slow vote count by the CEC) still exist, The Committee was gratified that in the final tally, there were no statistically significant differences between the proportional and single mandate ballots.

While it is clear that Georgia has made democratic progress since its independence in 1991, additional electoral reform is needed, especially with regard to selective law enforcement. As was demonstrated during the 2012 Parliamentary campaign, the letter of the law is the international-standard; but, enforcement was either lacking and/or selective. Georgia's electoral laws need to be enforced uniformly for all the country's citizens and not just for those in power. Expressed another way, Georgia's election laws must be enforced in both letter and spirit. Thus, a challenge for the new government and Georgian Parliament will be to improve the country's electoral laws and ensure proper enforcement.

Based on extensive monitoring of the Parliamentary election The Committee for Open Democracy offers the following recommendations to assist Georgia in reforming its electoral system:

Recommendations

- 1) **“Must Carry” legislation should be permanent law without a sunset provision.** “Must Carry” helped ensure access to voters for all political parties via the media. This positive move should be codified into Georgian law and the sunset provision (expiration after the Election Day) should be eliminated. Participants in the electoral process should enjoy permanent equality of access year round.
- 2) **Update voter lists.** The starting place for any election is having an accurate list of voters. While the actual percent of discrepancies in Georgia’s 2012 voter list will never be known, it was clear that it affected more than 60,000 voters and perhaps as many as 300,000. There is time and momentum for the new government and Parliament to upgrade the voter’s lists prior to the October 2013 Presidential election. Updated lists can ensure more accuracy and eliminate errors. Technical assistance and expertise from the United States, the European Union and other established democracies should be utilized.
- 3) **Liberalize overseas voting laws..** With up to one million Georgians living abroad, it is important to empower Georgians everywhere with the right to vote in future elections. Moldova’s legislation in this sphere from 2010 could be a model for such reform. Citizens should be allowed to vote in Georgian elections simply by presenting proper identification at any Georgian embassy or consulate. This will increase voter turnout and tie Georgians living abroad to their homeland.
- 4) **Parliament should change the election law to prevent discriminatory action against international election observers.** Georgia’s Parliament passed restrictive legislation in June 2012 to prevent selected international organizations from being accredited by the Georgian CEC. This legislation, combined with the CEC’s selected enforcement mechanisms resulted in The Committee for Open Democracy being denied accreditation to observe the election process despite a demonstrated wealth of experience and history of impartiality. If only organizations which a government calculates are “friendly” observe that country’s election, there is no possibility for an honest critique or evaluation of the electoral process and conduct.
- 5) **Disputed results must be legally adjudicated and/or a new election declared.** Following problems at polling stations in Khashuri, a second day of voting was conducted following the October 1 Election Day. It is essential for elections to be administered on the same day for all citizens so no one is voting with prior knowledge of the results from other areas of the district or country. This provides voters casting ballots on a later date an advantage and creates an uneven electoral playing field. Adoption of fair, transparent election adjudication legislation and election runoff legislation are better solutions consistent with internationally-accepted election practices.
- 6) **Change Central Election Commission composition to be more representative of the political spectrum.** The Central Election Commission of Georgia was stacked only with allies of the government and as a result was unresponsive to requests from organizations that were not consider “friends” of the government. While, the growing popularity of the Georgian Dream coalition was evident, their representatives were given no seats on the Georgian Central

Election Commission. A new mechanism is needed to make the Central Election Commission more democratic and representative of the overall population. For example, terms of commissioners should be staggered so that every year a new member can be appointed to replace a current member. Term limits of no more than one consecutive term should be enforced so power is not concentrated in the hands of just a few people. Some countries such as Ukraine divide seats on the Central Election Commission according to the size of factions in the parliament. The idea provides inclusion of minority representation for ethnic Azeri and Armenians on the Central Election Commission is also a suggestion that should be considered.

- 7) Reduce electioneering fines should to a reasonable range that is consistent with Western standards.** Georgia's Chamber of Control leveled excessive fines on candidates and political parties in order to prevent opposition candidates from competing on a level playing field. A maximum fine limit should be established in conjunction with Western election standards. Had the Obama campaign in the United States been fined \$80 million dollars like the Georgian Dream coalition it may have changed results of the United States Presidential election. Fines must be brought to within a reasonable level. For example, the largest fine ever assessed in a United States Congressional election was less than \$35,000. Thus, electoral fines should be designed to reduce bad behavior and not attempt to sway the outcome of an election.
- 8) Introduce a moratorium on political motivated arrests during the campaign.** The arrest of dozens of political activists shortly before the election demonstrates the need to introduce a campaign moratorium in the future. From the official start of the election campaign (agitation period), Parliament should pass a law preventing arrests and detentions of individuals for political reasons. Charges may be investigated and litigated after Election Day but during the campaign, there should be no such investigations or public inquiries into such matters as it unduly influences the election itself.

Conclusion

The Republic of Georgia marked its first peaceful and democratic transfer of power. Such governance transfers are an essential element to a strong, prosperous democracy. This peaceful transition will assist Georgia in achieving its Western political and economic integration. Given this historic change in Georgian politics, it is important to use this momentum to achieve lasting electoral reform to assist this transition into the West. Finally, based on thorough and careful election observation throughout the country, The Committee for Open Democracy believes that –despite difficulties – the Georgian voters' intent was accurately reflected in the 2012 Parliamentary election.

Pre-Election Report

Introduction

In April of 2012, the Republic of Georgia issued an open call for international election observers to monitor its' October Parliamentary elections. The elections are widely viewed as an opportunity for Georgia to continue its' democratic development and strengthen international objectives like joining the European Union and NATO. The Committee for Open Democracy responded to the invitation to work as international election monitors and arrived in country the same month. The Committee was pleased to have been the first and longest serving observation mission in Georgia for the 2012 elections and fielded 20 Long Term Monitors (LTMs) throughout the country. This report covers our findings starting from April 15 through September 28 (3 days before Election Day).

The early arrival of our observers and commitment to the pre-election process allowed us to devote several weeks to classroom study by our Long Term Monitors to the Georgian Election Code, and Election Day Procedures as mandated in the statutes. During this time, our LTMs have met with hundreds of participants in the electoral process including political parties, candidates, domestic and international civil society organizations, news media, election administrators, international observers, foreign diplomats and voters in every region of the country. This has allowed trained LTMs to establish and nurture relationships with all of the participants in the electoral process in order to properly document observations and complaints as well as provide recommendations. The Committee has investigated all issues at hand and conducted post incident follow-ups before regularly presenting their findings to the public.

The Committee for Open Democracy is a United States based non-partisan and not-for-profit organization based in the State of Florida. In addition to our work in the Republic of Georgia, the Committee for Open Democracy has been accredited and active in Ukraine (for the 2010 National Local Elections, the 2012 Special Local Elections and the 2012 Parliamentary Election), Moldova (for the 2010 Parliamentary Election), Slovenia(for the 2012 November Presidential Election) and in Montenegro (for the 2012 October Parliamentary Election).Our LTMs have observed numerous international elections around the world. The Committee for Open Democracy maintains an active social media presence on Facebook, and our website is located at www.committeeforopendemocracy.org

Summary

The Georgian Parliamentary Election, scheduled for October 1, 2012 is a highly polarized political contest between the ruling party, United National Movement (UNM) and the newly founded Georgian Dream Coalition, marginalizing a number of smaller parties. This election represents the most competitive electoral environment in recent Georgian history. Thus, the October 1st Parliamentary Elections will take place in a tense climate with fear unfortunately playing a large role.

Campaign Background & Environment

Even prior to the official start of the campaign on August 1, the campaign environment has been active and rigorous. Both the government and opposition have been actively contacting voters by traditional campaign methods (door-to-door, television advertising, large rallies, etc.). In addition, both sides have been making extensive use of social media such as Facebook, blogs and the internet to reach younger and more affluent voters. Both sides have demonstrated their support via large rallies in different cities around the country with some estimates putting the largest rally (held by Georgian Dream in Tbilisi in June) with a crowd at up to 110,000 persons. While there are a total of 16 registered parties and blocs competing in the election, the main contest is between the United National Movement (ruling party) and opposition bloc Georgian Dream. Smaller parties and blocs such as The Christian Democratic Union, the Political Union New Rights, Free Georgia and the Labor Party of Georgia all are competing to pass the 5% barrier for seats in the new parliament.

A total of 77 seats will be distributed to parties receiving at least 5% of the party list vote while 73 member seats will be elected by geographic districts for a total of 150 seats. There are anywhere from 2-10 candidates registered in every single mandate district and that is a positive development and indicative of the competitive nature of this election. Currently 119 of 150 seats in Parliament are held by the United National Movement, 17 mandates are held by the United Opposition (now associated with the Georgian Dream coalition), 7 by the Christian Democrats, 6 by the Labor Party of Georgia and 1 by the National Democratic Party.

The ruling party, the United National Movement (UNM) has governed since the March 2004. Led by two term President Mikhail Saakashvili the party currently holds a constitutional majority in the parliament. In recent elections, UNM was well organized and motivated which allowed it to dominate the political scene. Constitutional changes passed in recent years will shift many of the powers of the presidency to the Prime Minister and Speaker's offices. As a result, this parliamentary election is potentially even more important than next year's planned presidential election and the party is fielding candidates in every single mandate district. Many have speculated that President Saakashvili plans a switch from the President's office to the Speaker's office following the Parliamentary Election - similar to the move by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2008.

The main opposition coalition, Georgian Dream, is led by billionaire businessman, Bidzina Ivanishvili. Ivanishvili entered politics a little more than a year ago and quickly united several small opposition parties. Unlike some previous opposition movements, Georgian Dream has avoided extreme rhetoric and instead focused on real campaign activities. As a result, the opposition is energized and has made this election highly competitive due largely to Mr. Ivanishvili's charisma and

financial resources. However, critics from the ruling party have attacked the businessman as having close ties to Russian political interests even though Mr. Ivanishvili has recently divested of his holdings there. Georgian Dream coalition has candidates in all single mandate districts.

The rise of the Georgian Dream coalition has taken support from other blocs such as Christian Democrat Union, which previously had larger support as a constructive opposition party. Other opposition parties are also finding difficulty in competing due to the clash of political titans (i.e. United National Movement vs. Georgian Dream). This has complicated the efforts of smaller parties to attract public and media attention during this election. In addition, the leader of the opposition Georgian Dream bloc Bidzina Ivanishvili refused to unite with opposition parties such as the Labor Party of Georgia, the Christian Democrat Union and the Political Union New Rights on the grounds that they are not “real” opposition parties but rather projects of the ruling party. As a result, the Labor Party of Georgia has candidates in 59 single mandate districts, the Political Union New Rights is fielding 54 candidates in individual districts and the Christian Democrat Union has 58 single mandate candidates.

Civil society organizations are playing an increasing role in the election campaign and this too is a positive development for the Republic of Georgia’s democratic development. Among the more active organizations in this election are the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), the League of Voters, Transparency International and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED). There is active engagement of the various political actors from international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the United States and the European Union as well. Some domestic and international NGOs have also focused on mobilizing and engaging ethnic Azeri and Armenians voters living in the country.

However, the competitive nature of this election has resulted in a tense and politically charged environment. There have been cases of harassment and intimidation of opposition parties ranging from the relatively minor to more drastic. Some opposition parties believe that the early presence of LTMs prevented cases of violence, as Georgian political parties are relatively sensitive to Western pressure to conform to democratic electoral standards. Allegations of harassment and intimidation have to be carefully investigated to confirm their validity and separate the hearsay – especially in the current tense political environment. While voters in Tbilisi generally feel empowered to exercise their electoral rights, voters in the rural regions are more likely to be afraid to exercise their electoral rights, as many believe it will result of them losing their jobs or having problems with the local authorities. For example, at some rallies for the United National Movement, state employees such as teachers have complained about being forced to attend by threats that they will lose their jobs if they do not.

There are 3,690 polling sites which will operate on Election Day in Georgia divided by 73 District Election Commissions (DECs) for Georgia’s 3,621,256 voters. The Central Election Commission of Georgia maintains an efficient and informative website at www.cesko.ge that displays sufficient data on all participants in the electoral process. Unfortunately, the internet reach outside of Tbilisi is limited and many voters do not have access to this information. Georgia maintains working election commissions between elections and this is a positive. Unlike other countries in the region that disband the commissions between elections, there is ongoing maintenance and general experience of the regular members. While the commissions are operating according to schedule, there is a genuine

concern about the underrepresentation of opposition members on DEC's and Polling Election Commissions (PECs). In addition, there have been cited incidents of PECs failing to comply with the Electoral Code by not informing opposition PEC members of scheduled meetings in a timely manner. Knowledge is power and members of commissions cannot ensure adequate checks and balances on the work of the PECs if only one side is informed of meetings.

Georgian media is an issue of serious concern. Essential to all elections is the freedom of expression and assembly, no other branch of society is as important in this regard as that of media. Regrettably, the media in the Republic of Georgia is generally biased towards one end of the political spectrum or another. The much anticipated Must Carry Must Offer legislation which has been adopted and passed with the objective of creating a more equitable media environment in the regions has manifested in different fashions than originally designed. In addition, unlike developed democracies like Canada which have year round "Must Carry Must Offer" legislation, the Georgia law expires after the Election. In recent days there has been growing grassroots pressure to continue "Must Carry Must Offer" after the election. In addition, LTM's have noticed in the regions that the intended critical television programs are not being aired during prime time, thus limiting access to information. More troubling though, over the past few months the media has encountered physical attacks, denial of access to facilities, and intimidation. Recently there has been an escalation of physical attacks on journalists and when the attacker is apprehended they are often tried under a different statute of law than was originally intended by the various legal codes.

Problematic Campaign Issues

1) Pressure on the Media

LTM's have interviewed journalists who have been the victims of physical violence in this election. In an infamous attack in the city of Gori in July, unknown individuals attacked journalist by swinging boards with nails driven through them against their legs. Our LTM's interviewed the victims to confirm the facts of this case and others. In addition, some journalists have been complained about being stalked and harassed by partisan individuals posing as journalists. Violence against journalists and any other participant in the electoral process has no place in an electoral environment that desires to be considered "fair". In June, the Committee for Open Democracy organized a press conference with Canadian journalist (formerly with Ukraine's Channel 5 which played an important role for free speech in the 2004 Ukrainian election), and grandson of the famous Ukrainian freedom fighter, Stephan Bandera, to turn attention to this shocking development and to encourage an "esprit de corp" amongst journalist to push back against this fundamental attack against freedom of the press.

Later in June satellite dishes were being seized at a business in Tbilisi, our LTM's investigated the facts of the matter. Since the satellite dishes give viewers access to Channel 9 which is owned by the family of the opposition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili, it is believed that the government wanted to prevent the distribution of 128,000 satellite dishes to persons throughout the country. The detention at the Tbilisi airport of an American citizen and owner of one of the satellite companies is also particularly disturbing.

2) Voter List/ballot fraud

In August we held a press conference with American ballot security expert Terry Benham to draw attention to the results of our investigation of and concerns about the Georgian Voter's List. The voter list is the starting point for a clean election, and COD's press conference, highlighted issues such as eight voters registered at a vacant lot, 47 voters registered in an empty building and other similar unexplained instances. LTMs also discovered instances where the voters list included multiple voters at the offices of international organizations such as at 3 Tabukashvili street in Tbilisi where there are 5 registered voters. While the government's formation of a Voter's List Commission earlier this year was a well intentioned move, the jury is out on the effectiveness of the final product. Reliable domestic NGOs conducted sampling of the accuracy of the revised lists and discovered numerous problems including dead voters, voters registered at empty buildings, and others problems. Follow up investigations by LTMs revealed similar conclusions.

There were attempts by the Central Election Commission to improve the overseas voting laws as it is estimated that up to one million Georgians are living outside the country. However, unlike Moldova (a country of similar size population with a large population living abroad) which liberalized its overseas voting law in 2010, the Georgian law fails to empower this significant segment of the Georgian electorate to exercise their voting rights in this election. As a result, only 42,613 Georgian citizens living and working abroad will have the opportunity to exercise their vote in this election.

3) Administrative Resource Abuse.

The Georgia Dream Opposition coalition was punished with ridiculous fines for rental of party headquarters used to conduct normal operations of a political party. Additionally, the leader of the coalition had a bank affiliated with his business interests, Cartu Bank, seized by the government then later returned only after the payment of huge fines. In all, the Georgian Dream coalition was fined more than \$130 Georgian Lari (almost \$80 million US Dollars) during the campaign that is clearly unprecedented. In another case, a candidate and footballer who played for AC Milan, had money seized directly out of his own bank account on questionable pretexts. He was fined \$10 million dollars, which is larger than the three largest campaign fines in United States and United Kingdom history combined. To draw a contrast with the United States, the largest parliamentary/congressional fine ever levied was \$34,000 in 2004. These were systemic attacks on the ability of the opposition to wage a campaign, and contribute to the climate of fear. In contrast, fines levied against government-affiliated candidates were minor and almost non-existent. Finally, the fines were levied by the government's newly created, Chamber of Control. However two of the top officials at the Chamber of Control offices are on the party list for election to Parliament for the ruling United National Movement. When a ruling government fines political opponents in a competitive election, it suggests that the fines are political motivated rather than justified on the merits.

The arrest of up to 28 opposition activists just ten days before the election also appears politically motivated. Arrested under "administrative detention" rules, the activists face 40 days in prison and are essentially removed from the political process. This is another example of abuse of administrative resources.

4) Selective Law Enforcement

While Georgia has made progress in passing legislation to meet European standards, selective enforcement of these laws is hampering this election environment. For example, in the widely publicized case when the opposition leader announced plans to enter politics, the Georgian government stripped him of his citizenship on grounds that he holds passports from other countries. This move prevented him from running for Parliament in this election. Then only under international pressure, the Georgian Parliament passed a new law to allow non-Georgian citizens to serve as Prime Minister. Such moves indicate a selective enforcement of the law due to political motivations.

5) Prison Abuse Scandal

Videotapes released by Channel 9 on September 18 outraged the nation when it was revealed the wide spread abuse of prisoners in Georgian prisons. This resulted in resignations within the government of two key ministers. Students began protest demonstrations across the country, which continue through the writing of this report. While the resignation of government ministers is a positive step, the abuse of prisoners must end and more specifically regarding this election, there remains huge concern about pressure on inmates' families to vote for government-affiliated candidates. There are 38,000 persons in Georgian prisons with over 300,000 persons currently on probation. That amounts to almost 10% of the entire voting age population and leaves those individuals and their families vulnerable to pressure.

In another case relating to violations of the rights of prisoners is that of Merab Kachakhidze, of the Conservative Party, who is now on the parliamentary proportional list for the Georgian Dream coalition. Mr. Kachakhidze remains in Gldani Prison, in Tbilisi for alleged vote buying. This case is ongoing and will be resolved only after the election. Our LTMs visited the Gldani prison to follow up on his incarceration and inquire about his treatment. Mr. Kachakhidze was required by law to be released from prison to campaign, as he is a parliamentary candidate, but at the last legal proceeding on September 14th, the legal system was once again abused to keep him incarcerated.

6) Politically Motivated Accreditation of Election Monitors

The Georgian Central Election Commission denied accreditation to experienced election observers from the Committee for Open Democracy in September of 2012. The decision was made on political grounds out of fear that the Committee's monitors would continue to objectively report on their findings. However, international observers that were perceived to be friendly towards the Georgian Central Election Commission were quickly and easily accredited. For example, in August the Georgian Central Election Commission registered 2 observers from the country of Belarus, a country regularly referred to as "the last dictatorship in Europe". To worsen the matter, one of these observers is Lidia Yermoshina, the Chairwoman of the Belarus Central Election Commission since 1996. Due to her direct involvement in election fraud, Ms. Yermoshina is on a visa ban to the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union zone for a total of 28 of the world's most established democracies. Yet, the Georgian Central Election Commission denied the Committee for Open Democracy accreditation for politically motivated reasons. The accreditation and open approval of such a notorious individual who has knowingly engaged in blatant election fraud calls into question the credibility and political agenda of the Georgian Central Election Commission.

Final Comments

The Committee for Open Democracy has been monitoring the political situation in Georgia since April 2012. We share Georgia's aspirations for joining NATO and the European Union. We also support the territorial integrity of Georgia and return of the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is our hope that this election will be truly "free and fair" and that the results will reflect the will of the Georgian voters. We are concerned about the potential for violence following the election and call on all participants in the electoral process to respect the human rights of their fellow citizens. Based on the findings of our long-term monitors who have been in Georgia since April, our conclusion is that the pre-election environment has not been conducted fairly and that administrative resources have been used by the government to gain unfair advantage in the election. The Committee for Open Democracy has serious concerns that these elections will not reflect the will of the Georgian voters.



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P R E S S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Longest-Serving Election Monitoring Group in Georgia Sees Election Irregularities

Tbilisi, Georgia – After conducting long-term election monitoring in the Republic of Georgia for over five months, the Committee for Open Democracy believes results of the country’s October 1st Parliamentary elections to be flawed – primarily in the single mandate districts – due to problematic voter lists, carousel voting, and intimidation. However, in spite of these flaws, the results appear to reflect the will of the Georgian electorate. The Committee’s findings are based on Election Day observations combined with extensive monitoring of the pre-election environment since April.

The Committee for Open Democracy partnered with international and domestic observation organizations to monitor polling stations on Election Day. This was because the Georgian Central Election earlier denied accreditation to the Committee for Open Democracy on politically-motivated grounds for fear that they would report the truth about the election environment. Ironically, the Georgian Central Election approved observers from Belarus, the “last dictatorship in Europe” including the Chairperson of the Belarus Central Election Commission who is on a visa ban list to the United States, United Kingdom and the European Union for her direct involvement in widespread election fraud.

“Thanks to brave leadership by our domestic and international partners,” said Mefford. “They recognized how highly trained our veteran team is, some of whom have officially observed more than 20 international elections. Staff of the Committee for Open Democracy includes four former Country Directors for the International Republican Institute (IRI), and two Board Members who have over 10 years of research experience on three continents for IRI. These organizations appreciated the fact that that we’ve been on the ground monitoring these elections longer than any other group. In addition, our observers have unique mobile phone technology to allow us to collect data from polling sites in real time. This was an additional plus.”

“The Committee for Open Democracy had monitors every region of the country during the October 1 election. We found consistent irregularities particularly with the voter’s list,” said Tom Nolan the organizations President. For example, observers visited over 100 polling places and found deceased individuals on the voter’s list in 40% of the precincts, with 6% of the precincts having dead people

voting. Additionally, 15% of the polling sites visited contained voters registered at non-existent addresses and 6% had people who voted from those addresses. The Committee for Open Democracy first expressed doubt about the integrity of the voter lists at a press conference in late August in hopes that such discrepancies would be resolved to avoid such problems as were witnessed on Election Day. These concerns were reiterated in the pre-election report including new findings such as the administrative office of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI,) which is located at 3 Tabukashvili street in Tbilisi, having 6 registered voters at its address despite not being a residential building. Polling records indicate that at least 3 of these phantom voters were listed as having cast ballots on Election Day.

Observers also detected evidence of and received credible reports of voter carousels operating in nearly every region of the country. Numerous voters complained to observers about being intimidated to vote for the ruling party with threats of losing their state jobs. Administrative resources were abused in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe Javakheti to pressure ethnic minorities to vote for the ruling party. With 38,000 prisoners in Georgian jails and more than 300,000 citizens on probation, many relatives of prisoners complained about pressure on their families to vote for the ruling party in exchange for lesser punishment for their family members in prison. In addition, the Committee for Open Democracy is concerned about the slow reporting of results by the Central Election Commission. Despite 4 exit polls showing the opposition Georgian Dream Coalition winning by an average of more than 20 percent, the slow count by the Georgian Central Election Commission combined with results that do not correspond to the exit poll averages, calls into question the credibility and competence of the body. In addition, discrepancies between results in single mandate districts between the percent of votes for parties on the proportional ballot versus the votes for the same party's individual candidates are irregular and not corresponding to historical and statistical trends. It suggests additional irregularities in the single mandate districts. The Committee agrees with the Council of Europe that the election law for single mandate districts is problematic and needs revision. In addition, violence in polling sites in Khashuri and irregularities in Zugdidi are further evidence of the need for election reform of the single mandate district legislation.

The Committee believes that the pre-election environment was marred by the abuse of administrative resources by the government and selective enforcement of the law. In addition, problematic voter lists and Election Day irregularities have flawed the process. Thus, the Committee for Open Democracy hereby calls on the Georgian Central Election Commission to properly and efficiently report the results of the election in a timely manner. The Committee for Open Democracy also calls on participants in the election process to peacefully express their viewpoints in a democratic manner and find solutions through constructive dialog.

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The Committee for Open Democracy is an objective, non-profit organization that monitors and observes elections internationally for adherence to democratic standards of fairness, reflecting the will of the voters. More information can be found at www.committeeforopendemocracy.org, or their [Facebook](#) page.