

Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

26 June 2012

Georgian Government accepts the “must carry” initiative.

The Georgian government has decided to accept a proposal of numerous Georgian civil society organisations, aimed at widening access to information available to the Georgian public ahead of Parliamentary elections in October. Parliament is expected to legislate soon so that all cable operators will have to carry all news channels during the election period.

The Chairman of the Georgian Parliament, David Bakradze, said on 22 June that the new legislation would create additional “guarantees to allow television stations to reach out to a larger audience and to expand the area of their coverage.”

Bakradze added that “In particular, the initiative envisages the carrying of all television channels by all the cable operators during the electoral period; I want to stress that it will apply to all the television stations and it will be a huge step that will help the population to receive more information.” Details of the new legislation have not yet been made public, but the announcement was welcomed by both NGOs and opposition parties.

In May the campaign group, This Affects You Too, uniting organisation involved in election monitoring, legal advocacy organizations, as well as several media outlets, submitted to the Parliament a package of legislative amendments, which, among other issues, also envisages amending the law on broadcasting to prevent arbitrary treatment of TV channels by cable networks. The proposals of the campaign group oblige cable operators to carry TV channels with news programming. TV channels on their part will be obliged to make their content available to all the cable operators.

There have been concerns that the ruling United National Movement was entering next October’s election campaign with a distinct advantage since the government controls or influences all TV channels that have a country-wide reach. The government had initially rejected the “must carry” initiative citing commercial reasons. A few days before the government’s change of heart, eleven opposition parties threw their support behind the “must carry” campaign, significantly adding pressure on the government.

Announcing the new legislation, David Bakradze reiterated that arrangements between the cable network providers and the television stations were of “a purely” commercial character. But he then went on to add that the election period was “a special” situation, and the



David Bakradze, Chairman of the Georgian Parliament announced on 22 June that the parliament will legislate within days to adopt the “must carry/must offer” initiative, but this will apply only during the election period.

government decided “to oblige” companies “to reach an agreement between each other that would eventually benefit voters through receiving more information,” but the rules will only apply during the election period. In a further statement the following day David Bakradze clarified that this provision will operate only during the weeks of the official election campaign as defined by law.

Bakradze’s statement was warmly welcomed by the initiators of the campaign This affects you. “The implementation of this initiative will contribute positively to the creation of a level playing field and robust political competition ahead of elections,” they said in a statement. “We welcome the readiness of the authorities to take concrete steps to provide access to information and equal media environment during the pre-election period. We hope that initiatives voiced [by the Parliamentary Chairman] will be adequately reflected in a bill initiated by the Parliament,” the statement said. ■

Source: CEO with civil.ge

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Baku

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree pardoning 66 prisoners, including nine men regarded by rights activists as political prisoners. Those freed include the Deputy Chairman of the opposition Musavat Party, Arif Hajili.

All nine were convicted of participating in opposition rallies in April 2011 and received prison sentences ranging from two to three years at a trial in October. The other released opposition figures are: Tural Abbasli, Zulfugar Eyvazli, Rufat Hajibeyli, Babak Hasanov, Sahib Kerimov, Ulvi Guliyev, Majid Mammadli, and Ahad Mammadli.

Two other people detained and jailed on the same charges remain in jail. ■

Zugdidi

Sergo Charchibaia, an activist of the Free Democrats one of the partners in the *Georgian Dream* coalition was sentenced to four years and six months imprisonment by a court in Zugdidi after having been found guilty of hooliganism and assault. The leader of the Free Democrats, Irakli Alasania attended the court hearings and afterwards condemned the imprisonment of the activist. Alasania said the court was an appendage of the police and the prosecutor's office. Alasania accused President Saakashvili of continuing to persecute his opponents. "This unfairness will end in October, and those who put their personal interest above the law will take the place of Sergio Chachibaia, Irakli Alasania stated. ■

Tbilisi

Representatives of the Armenian community in the Georgian capital Tbilisi met on 22 June to discuss their position ahead of parliamentary elections in October. The meeting was overshadowed by the accidental discovery of wire-tapping and video surveillance equipment in the room where the meeting was taking place. Armenian media have linked the outrage to the fact that the conference organiser, and president of the Association for the Protection of Armenians in Georgia, Karine Barseghyan, has joined the opposition Georgian Dream coalition. ■

Yerevan

As the Armenian Parliament settles in after the 6 May parliamentary elections, observers are noting a new dynamic within the legislature as a much larger and more vocal group of opposition parties assert their role. The government faced its first major test when it presented its programme for the coming five years. A higher quality of debate was noted and the Prime Minister, Tigran Sargsyan was intensively questioned during the debate.



Eventually the parliament approved the five-year program of the government by a vote of 75 to 47, with one abstention. MPs representing the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) and its junior coalition partner, OrinatsYerkir, voted for the programme. All the other factions, including ARF Dashnaksutyun, Heritage, the Armenian National Congress (ANC) as well as the Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) which refused to form a coalition with the RPA following the May 6 parliamentary elections voted against. ■

Azerbaijani opposition considers election code. “If no amendments are made to the Code, there are calls to boycott the 2013 elections.”

The Azerbaijan Public Chamber on June 21st held a round table discussion on the proposed amendments to the Electoral Code of Azerbaijan.

About 60 participants attended the public debate which was moderated by Mr. Vidadi Mirkamal, the chairman-in-office for the Coordination Council of the Public Chamber. There was one keynote speaker, Mr. Hafiz Hasanov, an elections expert, who presented his views on the general electoral environment in the country as well as his suggestions for potential amendments, generating further discussion.

After the panelists spoke, several party leaders, NGO heads and experts were involved in an interactive discussion that brought forward a wide range of electoral concerns. This included the seven priority recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission following the 2010 Parliamentary Elections that left all major opposition parties without a single seat in the parliament.

Asked to comment about the results of the meeting, Razi Narullayev, Deputy Chairperson for Foreign Affairs of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan said ‘We were able to agree on the establishment of a Working Group with representatives of political parties, civil society and independent experts in order to develop specific proposals on the priorities and potential amendments to be made to the Electoral Code of Azerbaijan. The participants of the roundtable decided that the Working Group should have the amendments prepared by mid-September of this year so that they can be finalized and submitted to Parliament for the October session.’

During the round table, participants noted the importance of cooperation with the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. Participants decided to also send the potential amendments to the above-mentioned agencies as well as to conduct consultations with them during the preparations.

Ali Karimli, member of the Coordination Council of the Public Chamber and chairman of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, stated his support for the establishment of the Working Group. He said, “Frankly speaking, I’m eager to criticize the positions of international organizations on this issue. As per usual, international organizations observing elections in Azerbaijan, in particular OSCE prepares a set of clear and objective recommendations. The recommendations expose the drawbacks and suggest what to do. But there are no binding mechanisms to put the recommendations into practice and they do not take any steps to follow-up on the implementation of their recommendations.”



Isa Gambar, Chairman of Musavat Party told the meeting of the public Chamber on 21 June “We accept only one way for a transition of power and that is through elections.”

Member of the Coordination Council of the Public Chamber, and chairman of the “Musavat” Party, Isa Gambar, also expressed support for the establishment of the Working Group, stating that “We have been in a paradoxical situation for 19 years and it seems to be clear that without a change of power in Azerbaijan no free and just elections are possible.

We accept only one way for a transition of power and that is through elections. This is why all our efforts have been directed to the elections. The political democratic forces and civil society in Azerbaijan are quite strong. We must be able to realize this potential.”

Panelists and participants agreed that the current electoral code does not provide grounds for holding fair, free and democratic elections. Therefore, a lot of suggestions were generated about how to improve electoral legislation to ensure democratic presidential elections in Azerbaijan in October 2013. Consensus was achieved on most of the proposed amendments. The participants were unified in the assertion that if the current Electoral Code remains in place, the opposition should not go to elections. For this reason, all were strongly united in the push for amendments and the preparation of a single set of priority recommendations.

Three main problems were highlighted by the speakers during the discussions: the need for equal representation of political parties in the composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC), the Constituency Election Commissions (ConECs), and the Precinct Election Commissions (PECs); the need to lift the barriers for the candidate registration process; focusing primarily on the biased investigations into the irregularities of registration and verification procedures made by the expert groups of the CEC, ConECs and PECs. Participants argued that the expert groups are composed of the members and employees of the commissions and are under full control of the ruling party. The expert group often disqualifies the signatures of undesirable candidates and even uses small discrepancies in the documentation as an excuse to reject the registration of candidates. The suggested solution made by the round table is to outsource the verification procedures for candidate registration to a group from outside the commission to ensure neutrality; and the complaints mechanism and the rights of plaintiffs to a fair hearing as well as to ensure timely and fair consideration of complaints.

Many of the participants insisted that apart from the establishment of a legal framework for free and just elections, the practical implementation of the law is also very important. Until there are fair elections, the issues surrounding democracy in Azerbaijan will not be resolved. Moreover, the current political and pre-election environment is not conducive to legitimate elections; there are problems with freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and media freedom – all conditions that contribute to just elections.

CEW asked Nurullaev if the Public Chamber is optimistic about the adoption of the proposed amendments by the Azerbaijani Parliament? He replied that the Public Chamber is aware of the fact that it is not going to be an easy process. “But we shall use all means possible to make the adoption of the amendments a reality. The PC believes the amendments can pass and therefore will work closely with the OSCE and the Venice Commission to persuade the Azerbaijani authorities to adopt the amendments made by OSCE/ODIHR and supported by the Azerbaijani opposition. If no amendments are made to the Code, there are calls to boycott the 2013 elections. This call for a boycott by the opposition should also motivate as well as stimulate the international organizations to which Azerbaijan has obligations to intensify the talks with the relevant bodies of Azerbaijan to achieve the proposed amendments.” ■

Report prepared by Karina Gould for CEW

Georgian authorities seize 60,000 satellite dish antennas that were to be distributed free of charge by Global TV, opposition watchdogs say the move is illegal

On 21 June, Georgian police raided warehouses across the country, seizing an estimated 60,000 satellite dish antennas that were to be distributed free of charge by Global TV.

Georgian authorities have claimed that the seizure is part of an on-going criminal investigation into alleged vote-buying by Global TV, in favour of Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the opposition coalition Georgian Dream.

Ivanishvili has been sentenced to a multimillion dollar fine for a loan he made to Global TV to import the satellite dishes. The government has accused Global TV of campaigning for Georgian Dream by portraying the dishes as gifts from the coalition's leader.

The dishes, which were to be distributed free of charge for one year across the country and then paid for at GEL 4 per month thereafter, were part of a scheme through which Global TV aimed to increase access to all media outlets throughout the country. Currently, Global TV is the only cable provider that offers access to Tbilisi based Channel 9 and Maestro TV, which are considered to be pro-opposition media sources. At the moment, only the major TV networks, Imedi and Rustavi 2 – portrayed as pro-government, are available on all major cable providers throughout the country. Both of these channels have requested their signal be discontinued on Global TV.

Channel 9, which has been vocally critical of the current government, does not possess a license for ground-based transmission. Apart from Global TV, it is only available via satellite or on the internet, making it difficult to reach much of the population outside of Tbilisi. Ivanishvili's brother is the principal shareholder in Global TV, and Ivanishvili's wife is co-owner of Channel 9.

Georgian Dream leader, Ivanishvili, lashed back that the only motivation for the recent seizure of property by Georgian authorities is "to maintain [an] informational vacuum, which is created through television channels controlled by [the government]." He accused the government of crossing the line and acting outside of the legal framework in Georgia, asserting that the government is "resorting [to] terror against democracy and free speech."

Responding to allegations regarding restriction of the media, Deputy Minister of the Interior, Eka Zghuladze in defense of



Bidzina Ivanishvili, Leader of the Georgian Dream coalition accused the Georgian government of terror against democracy and free speech."

Thursday's police action, explained that "This is about a certain person having certain political ambitions transferring certain material property to voters for free as part of election agitation for a certain party, and accordingly about possible bribery of voters, which is a crime and is punishable by law."

Zghuladze, a member of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF), an agency tasked with prevention and prosecution of elections-related infractions, emphasized Georgia's zero tolerance policy towards violations of electoral rules. She stated that no "particular political party is or will become a subject of special interest," continuing that "there will be no compromises while enforcing the law."

Concerns have been raised with regard to both motivation and procedure in the seizure of the dishes. According to Global TV's lawyer, police at first did not present a court order, and once one was presented it was done so without the required seal and signature, as established by legislation in 2011.

70,000 satellite dishes alleging election coalition. Legal.

Transparency International Georgia, a political watchdog based in Tbilisi, recognizing the importance of investigating vote-buying, corruption and bribery in the run up to the October elections questioned whether property seizure was appropriate in this instance.

In a statement they noted that “According to Article 151(2) of the Criminal Procedural Code, seizing property for preventing it to be used in a crime is only allowed if the property could be used to commit a very severe crime. Vote-buying, however, is punished with a maximum of three years in prison.”

They cautioned that, “Steps should be taken to ensure that actions are not perceived by the public as attacks against the media.”

The influential Georgian legal watchdog, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association in a statement on June 24th stated that the Court order authorizing the impounding of satellite dishes owned by Global TV was made in violation of the criminal procedures code.

In the detailed statement GYLA said that article 151 of criminal procedures code was violated, because it stipulates that a property of an accused or of a person related to an accused can be seized. The chief prosecutor’s office initiated criminal case into possible vote-buying, but no one has been charged so far into the case. For that reason, GYLA said, the court order on seizure of property was not in line with the law. The same argument was cited by Global TV’s lawyers when protesting against this decision of the court.

The criminal procedures code also envisages applying seizure of property as a preventive measure if there is enough evidence that a property is be used for committing of “especially grave crimes”; but this provision, GYLA said, cannot apply to Global TV’s case because, according to the Georgian legislation, vote-buying does not fall under the category of “especially grave crime.”

On June 21 the chief prosecutor’s office requested the court to impound Global TV’s satellite dishes stored in warehouses. The court approved the request and police forces arrived at several enterprises affiliated to Bidzina Ivanishvili, where Global TV’s satellite antennas were stored, to execute the court’s order.

Global TV’s marketing director, Zurab Bazlidze, told Civil.ge on Saturday that apart from the stored dishes, the authorities also seized 11,700 satellite dishes, which were imported into Georgia



Eka Zguladze, Deputy Minister of Interior of Georgia, said “It is very regretful that, Bidzina Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream party, as it seems, think they are above the law and are constantly and purposefully trying to weaken the law and, consequently, democracy in this country.”

on June 22. With this recent seizure, he said, total number of seized dishes reached roughly up to 70,000.

GYLA said that while the state should take efficient measures to combat crime, “the process should be conducted in observance of principle of justice and law.” It also said that the state should treat with “special caution” media-related cases.

Civil.ge on 24 June also reported that Public Defender (Ombudsman), Giorgi Tugushi, told Tbilisi-based Maestro TV, that investigation into distribution of satellite dishes was at least “indirectly” a media-related case. “Of course I need specific evidence to [judge] whether or not handing out of dishes served the purpose of voter bribery. Burden of providing proof lies with investigators; they should provide convincing evidence to prove that seized property could have really be used for vote-buying,” he said. ■

Prepared for CEO by Karina Gould with reporting from civil.ge and Democracy and Freedom Watch

European Human Rights organisations concerned after arrest of opposition activists in Georgia.

There is concern amongst European human rights activists in Europe following the arrest of a number of activists of Georgian opposition parties. On 24 June Inter Press News reported the arrest of activists from the Georgian Dream coalition in Akmeta and Akhalkalaki districts. These arrests followed a number of other detentions in other parts of Georgia earlier. Several human rights organisations have increased their monitoring of the situation in Georgia over recent months amid concerns that the human rights situation is deteriorating ahead of the elections there in October.

Earlier this year, a working group from the United Nations Human Rights Council presented its report on Arbitrary Detention in Georgia. The report draws a number of conclusions and makes specific recommendations to the Georgian authorities. Human rights organisations are urging the Georgian government to move quickly to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Council Working Group. ■

Conclusions and Recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Council Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, following its visit to Georgia.



The Working Group notes the significant developments in institutional and legislative reforms since Georgia declared its independence in 1991. It reiterates the importance of such reforms in dealing with laws relating to deprivation of liberty that were obsolete and contrary to international law. It notes various reforms and developments, including the recent initiation of review of the Administrative Offences Code being carried out by the Criminal Justice Reform Coordination Council with a view to improve procedural and fundamental safeguards for arrested persons. It commends the Government in this regard and encourages it to continue its judicial reforms in order to bring its legislation into line with its obligations under international human rights law.

The Working Group notes that the problems of deprivation of liberty in Georgia are linked to the lack of independence of the judiciary and the highly influential role of the prosecution over that of the defence.

Violations of the right to a fair trial seem to be systematic and have distorted the role of judges and magistrates as impartial arbiters. Given the extremely low acquittal rate in court cases, public confidence in the administration of justice is very low.

The Working Group reiterates the importance of the fundamental entitlements of people who are deprived of their liberty, including ensuring the adversarial nature of trials, the principle of equality of arms, respect for the presumption of innocence, the right to defence and the right to be free from torture and ill-treatment. The right not to be compelled to testify against oneself is also a fundamental safeguard enshrined in international human rights instruments and therefore needs to be respected and protected. Laws and practices should ensure that these rights are safeguarded.

The Working Group recalls that detainees have the right to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial judicial authority, as provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and principles of international customary law.

The Working Group found cases of overcrowding in prisons, a situation that could adversely affect the health of detainees. The Government should guarantee the right to safety of all prisoners and ensure the elimination of practices of ill-treatment of prison inmates.

The judiciary in Georgia is capable of making fundamental progress by means of its various positive reforms, but should

demonstrate its independence and impartiality by ensuring that the right to a fair trial is granted without bias, especially in relation to problematic practices such as the plea bargain. The Working Group received a considerable amount of information that seemed to suggest that the rights of the accused are often minimal in relation to those of the prosecution.

The Working Group notes that the Government is well aware of the remaining areas in which there is room for improvement to the system governing deprivation of liberty, and calls on the Government to intensify efforts to address them. It extends its support to the Government in this regard.

Recommendations

On the basis of its findings, the Working Group recommends that the Government of Georgia:

- (a) Consider that the law and practice with regard to remand have resulted in lengthy detention that is disproportionate to the crimes of which a person is accused or convicted; arrest warrants should be shown at the moment of the arrest and detainees should be immediately informed of all their rights;
- (b) Ensure the use of alternative measures that do not involve deprivation of liberty in cases where it is justifiable to do so, taking into account the principle of proportionality;
- (c) Ensure systematic civil society participation in the monitoring and investigation of police stations and prison facilities; in this regard, it should ensure access to civil society organizations (other than those represented in the national preventive mechanism) to all premises and facilities where people are detained;
- (d) Implement training and capacity-building of all State law enforcement agencies on international human rights standards, particularly with regard to the means and mechanisms of crowd control;
- (e) Ensure that instances of ill-treatment of prisoners and detainees are eliminated, and that proper and thorough investigation in are conducted in such situations in order to hold perpetrators accountable. Investigations should be conducted on allegations and reports of ill-treatment to ensure adherence to State obligations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and article 17 of the Constitution of Georgia;
- (f) Establish a programme to provide all border guards with initial and ongoing training on the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the national Law on Refugees and all other international and internal legal norms concerning asylum-seekers and refugees;
- (g) Ensure protection of all persons at risk of extradition who have expressed a clear intention of claiming political asylum and have not been able to do so in accordance with the established formal procedures in place;
- (h) Ensure full implementation of national and international fair trial standards, such as ensuring adequate access of lawyers to their detained clients and that confidentiality of communications between lawyers and clients is protected;
- (i) Ensure full enforcement and protection of the right to habeas corpus in accordance with the State party's obligations under article 2 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the view of the Commission on Human Rights that habeas corpus is a personal right not subject to derogation, including during states of emergency;³
- (j) Ensure full protection of the right to the freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association, as provided by articles 19 and 22 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and under articles 19 and 26 of the Constitution;
- (k) Ensure full respect for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular article 14 thereof, and in particular to guarantee the impartiality of the judicial system and strengthen the rule of law to build confidence in the independence of the judiciary;
- (l) Ensure the adversarial nature of trials and the principle of equality of arms, and ensure respect for the presumption of innocence and the right to defence;
- (m) Consider reducing the maximum sentence for administrative detention of 90 days and provide full due process protections for administrative detainees. Persons taken into custody for administrative offences should be informed without delay of the reasons for detention and of all their rights; be able to notify a third party about their detention; have access to a lawyer of their choosing from the moment of detention; and enjoy access to an independent mechanism to submit complaints about treatment while in police custody;
- (n) Ensure the right to a fair trial of administrative detainees by providing adequate time for preparation of an effective defence;
- (o) Provide judges with further training on human rights norms and international jurisprudence with regard to international standards of human rights on deprivation of liberty;
- (p) Ensure the free and unhampered enjoyment of the right to assembly and to demonstrate, and consider the implications of the amendment made in 2009 to the Law on Assembly and Demonstrations. The Government should consider changing this amendment in the light of the unconstitutional restrictions placed on the right to peaceful assembly;
- (q) Implement changes that improve the independence of the judiciary, particularly the process of appointment, discipline and removal of judges.

Presidential Election Campaign underway in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Campaigning began on June 20th in the run-up to presidential elections in the self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) scheduled for July 19th, 2012.

The Head of the Central Election Commission, R. Petrosyan, convened a meeting on June 15th in which he announced the candidates and procedures for the upcoming presidential elections.



In accordance with the electoral code of the territory, 274 electoral districts have been established as well as one polling station in Yerevan, Armenia, to enable Karabakh residents, living there temporarily, to vote. According to the Armenian press, there are in total 97,664 eligible voters.

Petrosyan announced that training courses for the heads of the Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) were also organised. These courses provided training for the managers on how to recruit the necessary and appropriate staff for the TECs. All of the elections material, including posters, fliers and campaign handouts have been ordered to ensure that both those running and participating in the elections are well informed.

On 20 June, the CEC met again to discuss and allot the TV and radio spots, both free and paid, candidates would receive during the campaign period.

Local and international observers are currently being registered with the CEC.

The campaign will end at midnight on 17 July and no campaigning will be allowed on 18 July. Polls will open on the morning of 19 July.

Four candidates are running in the presidential elections: incumbent president Bako Sahakyan; current MP and former Deputy Defence Minister General Vitaly Balasanyan; Arkady Soghomonyan, the rector of the public university in Stepanakerk and Valery Khachatryan.

In an open letter to the current President, Balasanyan has accused Sahakyan of misusing public funds and resources for the election campaign.

"Since 2005," he writes, "our authorities have accumulated a vast experience of fraud, illegal involvement of law enforcement and national security agencies in the electoral processes, an inflation of the number of voters on voters' lists, different kinds of pressure on voters, etc. This has led to apathy in society, distrust of people in the electoral process in the country and a decline of the image of the state."

The upcoming elections will be the fifth presidential elections held in the NKR. Neither Azerbaijan nor the international community recognizes the independence of the region.

Mubariz Gurbanili, an Azerbaijani Member of Parliament has criticized the elections in the NKR and stated that "no one will recognize the elections" since they are taking place in occupied territories. Many foreign governments have also criticized the elections, claiming that the results are illegitimate so long as the conflict remains unresolved, and since the Azerbaijani population of Karabakh that was displaced by the conflict two decades ago will not be able to participate.

Regardless of the difficulties, the NKR authorities are determined to make the elections a success. Speaking in the United Kingdom last week, NKR Parliamentary Chairperson, Ashot Ghouljian, declared that the upcoming NKR elections will be the "best held in the South Caucasus."

The campaign kicks off on the heels of recent talks in Paris under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group between the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, Russia, France and the United States as well as the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan on June 18 in the continued effort for a peaceful settlement of the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh.

In a joint statement released by the OSCE, the co-chairs announced that the meeting was positive and constructive. The Minsk Group reiterated their concerns over violent conflict in the region and pressed the Foreign Ministers of both Armenia and Azerbaijan to work together to develop humanitarian contacts and to create a joint mechanism under which to investigate ceasefire violations and to preserve important historic and cultural sites.

On June 19, within the framework of the G-20 meeting in Los Cabos, Mexico, Presidents Hollande, Obama, and Putin issued a joint statement promising to work together to resolve the conflict.

The leaders of the Minsk Group co-Chair countries called upon Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities "to fulfil the commitment in their January 23, 2012 joint statement at Sochi to 'accelerate' reaching agreement on the Basic Principles for a Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict."

"As evidence of their political will," they continued, "they should refrain from maximalist positions in the negotiations, respect the 1994 ceasefire agreement, and abstain from hostile rhetoric that increases tension." ■

Report prepared by Karina Gould for CEW with additional reporting from the OSCE Press Service, Radio Free Europe, the Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh press