

Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

17 July 2012



OSCE considers future of election observation.

The Irish Chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), together with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), on 12 and 13 July convened in Vienna a supplementary Human Dimensions Meeting of the organisation, to discuss democratic elections and elections observation. The OSCE Human Dimension Meetings focus primarily on issues of human rights and democratisation, and are meant to provide a space for interaction between the fifty six member states of the organisation and their civil society. NGOs are invited to participate and speak in the meetings.

The debate on election observation has been raging within the OSCE for several years. Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and sometimes other countries too, have criticised the election observation effort of ODIHR accusing it of being a western centric organisation which has two weights and two measures of dealing with election observation. In Vienna last week representatives of Kazakhstan called for ODIHR missions to be cut down to not more than fifty persons, and to be sent to observe all elections in all the member states. EU and US representatives strongly supported the work of ODIHR and its operational independence in election observation. Everybody agreed however that there was room for improvement, not least to meet the challenges that new technology has brought about.

One criticism coming from the Kazakh delegation that was received sympathetically however, was the failure of many member states to be represented either by senior officials from their home capitals or by NGOs. Indeed the number of NGOs participating in the Human Dimension meetings seems to have plummeted substantially from the early years of ODIHR's existence. Some of this has to do with the way the meetings are organised, and increasing insularity of the OSCE and its lack of transparency. NGOs however are also to blame for not using the opportunity that the Human Dimension Meetings offer to put their points of view to the OSCE participating states.

LINKS returned to the Human Dimension Meeting after an absence of some years. The representative of LINKS in his presentation made eight practical recommendations for OSCE/ODIHR election observation and raised a number of issues. (see full text of his presentation on page 7).

One criticism of the Vienna meeting was that most of the eight hours were taken by set-piece presentations from expert panels leaving very little time to hear the views of either the participating states or the NGOs. Three presentations were however particularly useful. Graham Shields, the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland gave a fascinating exposition of how his office dealt with the issue of the voters list, including the sensitive matter of dealing with a list which was inflated by more than 15%. Audrey Glover, a seasoned head of Election Observation Missions gave a very thorough presentation of what the work of a mission entailed, and Vladimir Churov, the Chairman of the Russian Central Elections Commission gave a detailed report of how his Commission had used new technology in recent Russian elections, a development that in itself raises new challenges for election observers.

Everybody seemed to agree that election monitoring is an important issue that needs to be discussed further; but there was a fear that it may take the OSCE another few years before it is ready to convene a follow up meeting. ■

Practical recommendations made by LINKS at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Meeting on democratic elections and election observation held in Vienna on 12-13 July 2012.

- Accept the principle that the best election monitoring is that done by the citizens of the country where the election is being held but ONLY if pre conditions exist, such as independent judiciary, empowered NGOs, open and active media and respect for the rule of law. In other circumstances international monitoring remains crucial.
- Recognise that OSCE/ODIHR election monitoring in itself adds legitimacy to an election process. In case of countries that have consistently ignored ODIHR recommendations and violated OSCE norms on elections, invitation to monitor elections should be refused.
- In case an invitation to monitor an election is accepted, ODIHR should be free to determine the size and nature of the mission.
- Explain more clearly the role of the ODIHR EOM to the public where the election is being held in order to manage expectations and avoid misperceptions.
- In the forthcoming elections in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia focus on the big picture rather than simply on process.
- ODIHR should stop participating in the "day after" press conferences that have become superficial events in highly charged environments and where the process is now dominated by the politicians from the delegations of the parliamentary assemblies. These press conferences are diminishing the more sophisticated and comprehensive work of the ODIHR EOM.
- Do not attempt to issue a preliminary report the day after the election. Allow one week to pass in order to be able to digest the facts.
- Do not allow more than a month to pass before issuing the final report. ■

Caucasus Elections Watch is a specialised weekly publication focusing on elections related processes in the Caucasus, with news and analysis compiled by experts with long experience of the region.

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LINKS was established in London in July 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, think tank, working on areas of conflict and conflict prevention, governance, global security and international relations. Over 15 years it has implemented a wide range of activities in support of its basic aims: the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the promotion of democracy in societies in transition, working most of the time through innovative, ground breaking projects. Around 500 events in more than 30 countries were organised.

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Baku

After two decades in exile, Ayaz Mutalibov, Azerbaijan's first president after independence from the Soviet Union has returned to his country of origin.

In June, lawmakers in Azerbaijan approved legislation that grants immunity to heads of state for acts committed while in office.

The former head of state was accused of association with pro-independence demonstrations in which dozens of people were killed in January of 1990. The protests are often referred to in the country as Black January. At the time, Mutalibov was the head of the Communist Party in Soviet Azerbaijan.

Following independence he took over as President.

In 1992, however, he was forced out of office and has been in exile in Moscow ever since.

The 74-year old ex-President has declared that he will not get involved in politics. ■

Tbilisi

Following the seizure of opposition coalition Georgian Dream leader's assets in two Tbilisi-based banks, Georgian authorities have failed to find buyers in the state-sponsored auction which ended on 10 July. The auction ended without a single bid being made.

The assets were seized following Bidzina Ivanishvili's refusal to pay the GEL 74.32 million (about \$USD 45 million) he was sentenced to in June for alleged violations of party financing rules.

The National Bureau of Enforcement (NBE) has requested the Tbilisi City Court forcefully change management. According to the NBE, the assets of Cartu Bank (100%) and Progress Bank (27%) will remain the property of the owner (Ivanishvili), however, the revenues will be used to pay the debt owed to the state and will be managed entirely by the state.

Cartu Bank is now being managed by Vladmer Uglava on behalf of the Georgian government. Late last week Uglava dismissed Cartu Bank CEO Nodar Javakhishvili as well as the board of directors and the bank's supervisory board.

Javakhishvili was replaced by the Chair of the Revision Service at the National Bank, Irakli Zarkua.

According to reports from Democracy and Freedom Watch, Cartu Bank became a target of political and economic review shortly after Ivanishvili declared his intent to run for office in October 2011. Shortly thereafter there was a police raid on the bank which resulted in the seizure of two million dollars and one million euros in cash and the arrest of six employees on suspicion of

money laundering. The employees were soon released and the cash returned and the case dropped. ■

Vienna

On his whirlwind tour of the South Caucasus last week, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Secretary General, Lamberto Zannier, stressed the commitment of his organisation to providing assistance for democratic reform in the region.



Highlighting the 20-year anniversaries of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the OSCE, he

remarked on the significant contributions of both countries while stressing the need to continue to work together to find solutions to regional conflicts, particularly with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan, noted the Secretary General, "plays an important role in the work of our Organisation, in politico-military, economic and environmental and human rights-related areas." Zannier highlighted that the OSCE office in Baku, which has operated since 2000, is there to assist Azerbaijan implement its OSCE commitments.

In addition to his meetings with the President and Foreign Minister, Zannier also held meetings with members of Azerbaijan's civil society.

Similarly, during his stop in Yerevan, Zannier commended Armenia's 20 year involvement with the OSCE as an "important milestone."

While welcoming the noteworthy steps Armenia has already taken towards democratic reform and congratulating the country on the peaceful conduct of the May 2012 parliamentary elections, the Secretary General also stressed the need for Armenia to implement in a timely fashion the recommendations made by the OSCE-ODIHR Election Observation Mission to "help enhance general confidence in the process" in advance of the presidential elections set for 2013.

"The OSCE," he said, "stands ready to fully support the country in its profound regulatory, economic, police, judicial, and democratic reforms, including through the OSCE Office in Yerevan which has been closely involved in the reform process."

In Tbilisi, the head of the OSCE met with President Saakashvili, Foreign Minister Vashadze and members of the opposition.

While discussing his hope for deeper OSCE engagement with Georgia the Secretary General also expressed his hope that the upcoming parliamentary elections in October would "be in line with the OSCE and international standards." ■

Tax inspection underway in Civilitas Foundation investigation.

Maintaining the political nature of the charges laid against the Civilitas Foundation, an Armenian think tank, and its founder, former Foreign Minister and prominent member of the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK for its initials in Armenian) Vartan Oskanian, have requested the court end the criminal investigations into the organisation's activities.

As reported previously in CEW, the National Security Service (NSS) of Armenia launched a criminal investigation into the alleged tax evasion and money laundering of an almost \$2 million gift from two American firms, Polymer Material and Huntsman International, both owned by U.S. businessman John Huntsman, to the Civilitas Foundation earlier this year.

The NSS claimed that the Civilitas Foundation had failed to alert the relevant tax authorities to the donation. It is estimated that Huntsman has spent about \$18 million since the 1988 earthquake in Armenia on reconstruction activities in the northern parts of the country which were severely devastated by the disaster.

The investigation was launched the 25 of May - the day after the Prosperous Armenia Party announced the withdrawal of its support for the ruling coalition.



Both the NSS and the government have denied a political motivation behind the investigation. Furthermore, the NSS has expressed frustration with Oskanian who has exercised his right not to testify in this case.

According to Salpi Ghazaryan, Civilitas has submitted its paperwork to Armenia's State

Revenue Committee which began a detailed tax inspection of the non-profit on 3 July. The tax inspection is expected to last until the 27 of this month.

Ghazaryan implied, at a press conference last Thursday, that the inspectors have yet to come up with any evidence that would point to tax evasion or other wrongdoing. She mentioned that Civilitas from the beginning has regarded operating within the legal framework and practicing transparency as very important to the foundation and its activities.

She continued that "it looks like things are going well in accordance with our expectations," concluding that the foundation's financial documents are in order thus proving that the allegations are baseless.

Tigran Atanesian, a lawyer for Oskanian, considers that the case should be dropped considering the NSS has made no mention of the criminal origins of the original donation from Huntsman. Additionally, the lawyer also highlighted serious violations in procedure during the initiation of the criminal investigation.

EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, Philippe Lefort, along with the Head of the European Union Delegation to Armenia, Traian Hristea, meeting Vartan Oskanian at the Civilitas Foundation in February 2012



However, Oskanian's lawyers, despite appealing the court's decision, are not particularly optimistic about the success of their appeal. Artur Grigorian, another of Oskanian's lawyers, told Radio Free Europe that, "Our chances of success are not high for the simple reason that the entire judicial system has to work to somehow substantiate that criminal case."

Civilitas, according to its website, aims to foster prosperous democracy and full civic participation for all in Armenia as well as to contribute to the peace process in the Caucasus region.

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with additional reporting from Radio Free Europe and news.am. ■

NDI polling sheds so way Georgians think

From June 4-22, the Caucasus Resource Research Centre (CRRC), conducted a nation-wide poll in Georgia for the U.S. based non-profit think tank National Democratic Institute (NDI). The NDI and CRRC conducted 6,229 face-to-face interviews over the most recent and fourth phase of this study.

The study found that jobs (58%), territorial integrity (33%) and access to affordable healthcare (33%) were the top three issues for Georgian voters. Between June 2012 and the previous poll conducted in February 2012, Georgians became less concerned about rising prices and inflation which dropped significantly over this period (from 42% to 19%).

The central concern over jobs in Georgia would appear natural as only 30% of those surveyed identified themselves as employed. Of the 69% who consider themselves unemployed, 47% responded that they were actively seeking employment opportunities.

Thus, while in general Georgians view the situation in the country as either improved or the same in comparison with January 2008 on a range of issues from education to combating corruption; with regard to the job market, poverty, territorial integrity and rising prices and inflation, the situation was generally perceived as worse. These same issues, with the notable exception of territorial integrity, were also perceived as not receiving sufficient attention from politicians.

While 44% of respondents perceived Russia as a real and existing threat to Georgia, 87% disapproved of Georgia's current relationship with its giant neighbour to the north.

Overall, only 23% of Georgians viewed their household situation as being better off since January 2008. While 46% perceived no change in their overall situation, and 28% of respondents felt they were generally worse off than before.

On a positive note, 49% of respondents agreed with the statement that "Georgia is going mainly in the right direction."

However, when it came to Georgia's democratic scorecard, respondents were less inclined to consider Georgia a democracy in June 2012 with only 38% agreeing that it was, compared with 49% just four months earlier in February.

That said, 75% said they were likely to vote in Georgia's upcoming presidential elections, compared with only 64% in February.

When asked what democracy meant to them, the top three responses included freedom of speech, media, hearing different views (59%), equality before the law and protection of the justice (36%) and protection and defence of human rights (30%).

The Voter's List Verification Commission (VLVC) received very positive responses from poll participants. Out of the 78% of respondents who were aware of the existence of the VLVC, 69%

of respondents had been visited by the VLVC and of these 86% positively assessed the work being done. A majority of respondents who knew of the VLVC, 78%, expected this body will result in an improvement to the voter's list.

However, reactions were mixed with regards to how participants felt about the conduct of the upcoming elections. Only 13% believed they will be "totally well conducted". While 42% thought they will be somewhat well conducted, and 17% expected some degree of falsification.

For Georgians the three biggest barriers to free and fair elections are vote buying or bribing of voters, inaccuracies of the voter lists (although it should be noted that in the February poll this was at the top of the list, it has moved down to second place, perhaps as a result of the activities of the VLVC), and ballot stuffing and carousel voting.

Most respondents disagreed with the statement that government or public employees should be fired if they attend an opposition event (61%) and 12% responded that they knew someone who had been fired from the civil service for their political beliefs.

Another concern raised by the polls was the overwhelming disapproval by respondents regarding the revocation of the citizenship of Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the opposition coalition, Georgian Dream. Although there is widespread disapproval over the Civil Registry Agency's refusal to reinstate Ivanishvili's citizenship, respondents were less unified in whether the constitutional amendment that would allow him to run for office is appropriate.

Interestingly, 67% of respondents disapproved of the constitutional amendment that lowers the minimum age to run for Member of Parliament from 25 to 21. Furthermore, 89% said they would approve of a proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage raised by the Christian Democratic Movement (CDM) in parliament.

When it comes to making decisions in daily life, 36% responded that religion was very important and another 48% said religion was important.

Regarding gender Georgians presented a positive picture. Almost 70% of respondents answered that they would vote for a woman and the majority believes that men and women perform equally in office and that nine female MPs is too few and support initiatives such as financial incentives to increase the number of women on party lists.

Finally, the survey revealed that the majority of Georgians, 78% in fact, receive their news from television. Of that, 86% identified Rustavi 2 and Imedi networks as their primary sources of information.

According to a report by Democracy and Freedom Watch, NDI will conduct one more survey before the elections are held this fall. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould

Some light on the ... but is it reliable?

The National Democratic Institute released separately the results of voting intentions based on its poll conducted in June 2012.

The figures indicate that the elections will be a two way race between the ruling United National Movement and the Georgian Dream Coalition.

Whilst the UNM maintained a considerable lead in the polls, as compared to an earlier NDI poll conducted in February the gap between the two parties has closed considerably. A third party, the Christian Democrats trailed far behind.

2012	June	February
United National Movement	36%	47%
Georgian Dream Coalition	18%	10%
Christian Democrats	3%	3%

The poll conducted for NDI by Caucasus Resource Research Centers (CRRC) in June surveyed 6,299 voters across the country and has a margin of error plus, minus 2%.

According to the same poll 22% were undecided, almost the same number as it was in February and 16% refused to answer, up from 10% in February and 4% said they would vote for none of the parties.

The Unpalatable Georgian dishes.

Georgian cuisine is famous for its palatable dishes. It was a different kind of dishes that were on the mind of Georgian NGOs in recent days, as concern increased regarding government action against an independent media company. Civil society watchdogs, Transparency International Georgia and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, in a joint statement called for transparency from the Tbilisi City Court in the recent seizure of thousands of satellite dishes from the independent media company Maestro TV.

The NGOs have requested the authorities make public evidence that legally justifies the most recent seizure of property. Otherwise, they argue, "Preventing the distribution of satellite dishes may be publicly perceived as a step that could limit citizens' access to media." Maestro TV, the State Audit Service (SAS) of Georgia asserts, is involved in a vote-buying scheme related to that of which Global TV was accused at the end of June when over 70,000 of its satellites were also confiscated by the authorities.

The SAS maintains that Maestro TV purchased the dishes under instructions of Elita Burji Ltd., a company affiliated with opposition coalition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili. Furthermore, the Chief Prosecutor's office claims the distribution of the dishes was intended to favour the Georgian Dream coalition. Using the same justification for the seizure of Global TV's satellites on June 21st, the Chief Prosecutor described the purpose of the satellite distribution as a vote-buying scheme.

Maestro TV for its part has called the move and allegations by the authorities "absurd."

The independent media company announced on 2 July its intention to distribute satellite dishes in the provinces at a very low, "symbolic" rate, to encourage a wider audience of its service. Maestro TV is only available via satellite outside of Tbilisi.

According to the company, the satellite distribution scheme was funded by Maka Asatiani, who owns 25% of shares in the company. Asatiani has rejected any political ties with the opposition or others asserting that the company's "Maestro in Every Family" campaign was only geared towards increasing profits.

Pointing to the fact that the satellite dishes were purchased from the same Turkish provider as those acquired by Global TV, some even bearing Global TV labels, and that it was representatives of Elita Burji Ltd. that handled the customs forms as opposed to employees of Maestro TV, the Chief Prosecutor said provided additional proof of the connection between the two incidences.

Nevertheless, Georgian civil society is demanding the authorities provide a clear explanation to the public as to how exactly the distribution of the dishes qualify as vote-buying by the opposition. The This Affects You Too campaign, which was instrumental in lobbying for the recent "must carry/must offer" initiative, released a statement on 12 July imploring the authorities to "take all possible measures in order to provide citizens' access to diverse sources of information."

The group, which brings together different civil society and media stakeholders, criticised the move as creating an "obstacle for [the] development of an independent TV company" which hinders the "creation of a pluralistic media landscape," negatively affecting the electoral environment by creating "uneven conditions for competition." They called upon the international community and elections observers "to react appropriately to the cases of restricting and hindering of media in the pre-election period." Maestro TV have announced that they will challenge the court's decision. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with additional reporting from Radio Free Europe, civil.ge and Democracy and Freedom Watch

In Karabakh voters head to the polls this week to determine 5th president of the territory.

With the campaign period wrapped up (as of midnight on 17 July), residents of the self declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic will have one day of reflection before going to the polls from 8:00am to 8:00pm on 19 July to determine the fifth president of the contested territory. Results are set to be announced on 22 July.

They will have to choose between three candidates: incumbent President Bako Sahakyan; former Deputy Defence Minister Vitali Balasanyan; and Deputy Director of Academic Affairs of the Stepanakert campus of the State Agrarian University of Armenia, Arkadi Soghomonyan.

Valeri Khachatryan, the fourth candidate, submitted a request to formally withdraw from the race to the Central Election Committee on Monday 9 July.

Following a meeting of the NKR Central Election Committee on 10 July, the electoral ballots have been printed and were distributed to Local Electoral Committees from 14 -16 July. The total number of registered voters will be announced on July 18, one day ahead of the actual vote.

The elections in the NKR remain controversial. At the OSCE meeting on Election Observation held in Vienna last week, the Armenian and Azerbaijani delegates came to a head over the upcoming elections.



The Azerbaijani representative argued that the Presidential elections in Nagorno Karabakh reflect the Armenian government's objective to legitimise its occupation of the territory. She reminded those present at the meeting that hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani citizens remain displaced as a result of this conflict and urged OSCE member states to discourage participation by their citizens in the observation of the elections.

Azerbaijan views the NKR as part of its territory and does not recognise its independence and considers the current electoral process illegitimate.

The Armenian delegate denied the accusations made by the Azerbaijani representative. He assured the meeting's participants that the elections in Nagorno-Karabakh represented the free will of the people of the region. He pressed the OSCE, its Member States, and the international community to support the democratic process in the NKR and to embrace the results. He noted that international observers will indeed be present during the polls.

According to Alexander Margarov, an Armenian political scientist, the upcoming elections are important for the territory, regardless of the outcome. Despite concerns over competitiveness, Margarov believes that participation will help Nagorno-Karabakh further consolidate its society. Others consider the elections as a way to exert moral and political pressure on Azerbaijan and the international community towards recognition of the independence of the territory.

Neither the OSCE nor the Council of Europe is observing the elections in Nagorno-Karabakh. ■



Presentation of the Director of LINKS, at the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Democratic Elections and Election Observation held in Vienna on 12-13 July 2012.

Madam Chairman,

This meeting is both important and timely and we welcome very much the decision of the Irish Chairmanship of the OSCE and ODIHR to convene it.

ODIHR has for more than twenty years done sterling work that has helped many countries in the OSCE region make a difficult transition from one party rule to pluralistic democracy.

The process is not complete in the OSCE area, and some countries are more advanced than others. The work of ODIHR should therefore continue to be supported. Members of the OSCE Permanent Council should also not forget that ODIHR is the face of the OSCE that the public in many of the member states are more familiar with. Ensuring trust in the work of ODIHR is absolutely essential if trust in the mission and work of the OSCE is to be maintained.

None of the work of the ODIHR, or indeed of the OSCE is more visible than election monitoring. It is clear, both from the discussions held here yesterday and today, but also from looking at how the process has evolved over twenty years, it is time to rethink fully some aspects of how this is done in order to make it more appropriate for the reality of today. This needs to be done without compromising on either the principles that underpin election monitoring, or indeed the objectives as were set out by a number of speakers in the opening session yesterday.

The distinguished representative of Kazakhstan yesterday and today raised a number of points, including those related to the size of ODIHR missions. In an ideal world I would not only agree with him that the size should be not more than fifty, but would go further and say it need not be more than five. This is because the best election monitoring is that done by the citizens of the country where the election is being held. They will be much more aware of the nuances and of the dangers than any foreign mission can ever be. In situations where NGOs are empowered, the rule of law is respected, the judiciary is independent, and the media is open and active, the role of ODIHR should simply be to sum up the conclusions of the different stakeholders for the international community.

In many countries however these conditions do not exist, or do not exist sufficiently, and here external election observation remains crucial. To pre-determine the size is neither practical nor desirable. Countries that are committed to proceed on the path of transition understand this. We welcome the fact that in Georgia both government and opposition have called on ODIHR to deploy as large a mission as possible, for the October Parliamentary elections, and to deploy it as early as possible.

The deployment of an OSCE ODIHR mission in itself adds legitimacy to an election process. That is why once a government extends an invitation to ODIHR to deploy an election observation mission two things need to come into play: first it should be ODIHR at that point that determines the size and nature of the mission, but secondly ODIHR needs to be more discerning in what invitations it accepts. We now have a twenty year pattern, and ODIHR has a number of reports on each country it has observed elections in. If a country has persistently failed to implement the recommendations made by ODIHR missions then the deployment of a mission should not be considered. If the distinguished representative of Kazakhstan wants to save money, this is what he should be looking at.

Finally Mr Chairman I want to make two short points on the South Caucasus, which is the area that has been the focus of the work of my organisation over two decades.

The election cycle in the South Caucasus that started with the Armenian Parliamentary elections last May and will end with the Azerbaijani Presidential elections in October 2013 will define the future of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia for the next decade or more. However the way ODIHR manages its engagement with the electoral process in these three countries will also define the future of ODIHR.

We work closely with civil society in all three countries and expectations of what ODIHR, and the international community at large is able to do in this sphere are high, even sometimes unrealistic. There are reasons for this. In none of the three countries is there a proper system of checks and balances. Redress to the courts is not a solution since the judiciary is perceived not to be independent from government. International election monitoring therefore has assumed an importance which is way beyond the norm. ODIHR therefore needs to explain fully and clearly, and way ahead of the elections the nature and objective of its mission to the population at large.

There are concerns that ODIHR observation in the three countries has focused too much on process and not enough on substance. This issue is extremely relevant in Armenia and Georgia, and to some extent Azerbaijan, where there has been much progress with process, but where there overall remain serious problems with the bigger picture.

Finally, a very practical suggestion. ODIHR's work is often considerably diminished by the superficiality of the day after press conference. ODIHR should stop participating in an event that has been taken over by the politicians in the parliamentary assemblies. It should release its preliminary report a week after the election, not a day after, and the final report should be presented not later than a month after polling day. ■

Initiative of the United National Movement assessed positively by Georgian Opposition Parties.



An initiative from the governing United National Movement ahead of next October's parliamentary elections in Georgia has been broadly welcomed by a number of opposition parties.

The initiative follows incidents in which supporters of government and opposition clashed in several areas of Georgia during activities of the Georgian Dream opposition coalition. The UNM has proposed that all parties sign a four point code of conduct, which says that despite having substantial difference on many issues signatory political parties "recognise the decisive importance of free, fair and peaceful electoral process for the country's further democratic development."

- "We reject violence in the electoral campaign process, obstructing campaign and rallies of other parties, including through mobilizing own activists and arranging parallel rallies. We reject aggression while meetings and communicating with voters. We reject calls for violence and use of hate speech in respect of minority-related issues. We are ready to conduct an electoral campaign oriented towards issue-based discussions,"
- "We reject vote-buying,"
- "We are ready to be in steadfast observance of recommendations from the Central Election Commission, non-governmental organizations and Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections in respect of restricting use of administrative resources,"
- "We take responsibility to recognize election results, summarized by the Central Election Commission and deemed legitimate by observer organizations with credible reputation."

Reporting the initiative the Georgian web portal civil.ge said that some political parties, including Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM) and New Rights have said they would join the declaration.

The Georgian Dream opposition coalition said it has yet to discuss the proposal. A coalition spokesperson Manana Kobakhidze, said that the principles outlined in the document were in overall acceptable, but a thorough consideration was required especially in respect of the fourth point of declaration.

The initiative of the UNM followed an incident in the village of Karaleti where members of the opposition Georgian Dream coalition who were campaigning in the area were attacked. In the scuffles that followed several people were injured including a number of journalists. ■



Catholicos Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia the Second, in a Sunday sermon condemned the incident in the village of Karaleti and hoped that Georgians will not throw

stones at each other. The Patriarch said that throwing mud at each other was unacceptable, but this week he heard that worse things happened and people were throwing stones at each other.

The Patriarch appealed to government and opposition, party members and common citizens not to repeat incidents.

"You can meet, talk, debate, but not beat each other, especially throw stones and threaten with weapons", the Patriarch said, underscoring that enemies of Georgia want to see tense situation between Georgians. Ilia the Second hoped that such things will not happen.