

# Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

03 July 2012

## EU increasingly concerned about growing political tension and polarisation in Georgia.

**The European Union Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, expressed his concerns regarding the increased political tensions in Georgia after meeting with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili in Brussels on 28 June.**

Füle noted that “the parliamentary election in October and presidential elections in 2013 will be important test cases for Georgian democracy and we encourage all political forces to respect the electoral process and make sure that the voting is free and fair.”

Acknowledging that Georgia has made important progress, he also cautioned that “it is also clear that Georgia needs to take further steps and continue this path of modernization and to consolidate democracy.”

The concerns come on the heels of mounting legal problems facing the opposition in Georgia as well as a violent skirmish during a Georgian Dream rally in Mereti, a village in the Shida Kartli region near the territory of South Ossetia.

A fistfight broke out during a pre-election campaign meeting with Bidzina Ivanishvili and fellow Georgian Dream member Irakli Alassania, leader of the Our Georgia-Free Democrats party. The politicians were involved in a discussion with local residents when the meeting was interrupted by a woman accusing the businessman of being a traitor to Georgia and a puppet of Putin, in reference to Ivanishvili’s remarks that Georgia started the 2008 war with Russia. A little while later fighting erupted and the meeting was disrupted. According to Georgian media reports, several people were injured, including two women who were taken to hospital for treatment, and some vehicles were damaged in the clash.



**EU Commissioner Štefan Füle greeting the Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili in Brussels on 28 June 2012.**

**“The EU is increasingly concerned about growing political tension and polarisation in the run-up to the parliamentary elections and I have expressed the conviction that the elections will be first of all about political programmes and ideas.” Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy.**

Four people have been arrested and sentenced to ten days imprisonment in the town of Gori; two of those detained are Georgian Dream supporters.

The opposition has accused the government of inciting the violence. Ivanishvili before leaving the village stated, “This is a typical policy of Saakashvili – provoking confrontation between people. Of course not everyone might support our policy, but they should not thwart a meeting with my supporters.”

The government has denied involvement in the incident.

Expressing his understanding that many Georgians might be upset about Ivanishvili’s position on the 2008 war, Parliamentary Chairman, David Bakradze, called for restraint ahead of the October parliamentary elections “no matter how unacceptable [the] remarks and position of a political group might be.”

On 28 June, the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia announced that it had launched an investigation into the incident citing media footage which demonstrated that some of the “persons, who were involved in the incident, are public servants.” These included employees

of the governing body of Gori as well as emergency services personnel from the Shida Kartli region.

Without directly implicating the involvement of the authorities in the incident, the Public Defender’s Office explained in its statement that the participation of public servants in this kind of confrontation is inappropriate behaviour and that the study will address any wrongdoing committed by anyone in the employ of the government and will submit its findings to the Chief Prosecutor’s Office.

The Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) of the National Security Council also released a statement condemning the violence in Mereti and called for political parties to maintain distance between people with opposing views at public events. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with additional reporting from Democracy and Freedom Watch as well as civil.ge

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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## Tbilisi

Georgia has a new Prime Minister. Interior Minister and government strongman, Vano Merabishvili, was appointed Prime Minister on 1 July and asked to form a new government. The move is seen as



decisive ahead of Parliamentary and presidential elections and consolidates and formalises Merabishvili's position as the second most important person in the country. Merabishvili has been Interior Minister since 2004 and is considered the bedrock of the current government. ■

## Mtskheta

A large crowd of more than twenty thousand people turned up for the latest rally of Georgia's opposition "Georgian Dream" party which was held in the ancient town of Mtskheta on Sunday 1 July. Leader of "Kartuli Otsneba" (Georgian Dream) Bidzina Ivanishvili promised in a speech promised that healthcare will be a priority of the government after his political alliance comes into office.



Inter Press news reported that Ivanishvili told the crowd that "The people went broke for paying for treatments. People die due to lack of drugs. The price of our medicine is equal that in Europe and often is higher and of poor quality."

Ivanishvili says that "Kartuli Otsneba" has already worked out a healthcare bill. "Our motto is Free healthcare for all." ■

## Tbilisi

Two months after being elected as deputy chairman of Tbilisi City Council (Sakrebulo), Davit Saganelidze was sacked from this post after ruling party members of Sakrebulo voted in favour of his dismissal on June 29. Saganelidze's dismissal came one month after he joined Bidzina Ivanishvili-led opposition coalition Georgian Dream, according to a report in [civil.ge](http://civil.ge).

The news portal said that the Chairman of Tbilisi City Council, Zaal Samadashvili, at a session on June 29 read out a statement laying out reason behind the decision to sack his deputy; among the reasons he cited that Saganelidze's "promised constructiveness has disappeared" and his "rhetoric has been radically changed."

"[Saganelidze's] constructiveness has been replaced by destructiveness," Samadashvili said.

"There is no need to examine reasons behind this metamorphosis, because everything is obvious – this person has found better conditions for himself," he said, apparently referring to Saganelidze's decision to join the Georgian Dream. Saganelidze, who formerly was with the New Rights Party, became deputy chairman of Tbilisi City Council in late April and joined the Georgian Dream in late May.

The post of deputy chairman of Tbilisi City Council, which Saganelidze filled in April, became vacant in late October, 2011 after the ruling party members of Sakrebulo sacked Zurab Abashidze of Our Georgia Free Democrats (OGFD) after it was announced that OGFD would cooperate with Ivanishvili. Also in October, another OGFD member of Tbilisi City Council Victor Dolidze was sacked from his post of chairman of Sakrebulo's commission for social affairs. ■

## Stepanakert

Campaigning has continued ahead of presidential elections in the self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic scheduled for July 19th. All four candidates running for the presidency are actively participating in the election campaign. Armenpress reported last week that in his election campaign incumbent NKR President Bako Sahakyan is highlighting the continuation of state-building and the primary importance of Agriculture in his campaign.

On his part, former Deputy Defence Minister of NKR Vitaly Balasanyan singles out the issue of international recognition of Nagorno Karabakh, as well as security and development.

Another candidate, Arkady Soghomonyan is concentrating on education and medical aid whilst Valery Khachatryan too has started campaigning, focusing on citizens' day to day issues



Bako Sahakyan and Vitaly Balasanyan are the front runners in the elections according to the poll. ■

# Legal squeeze of Georgian Opposition continues.

**Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the opposition coalition Georgian Dream (GD), had some of his assets impounded by the government on Tuesday for his refusal to pay a multi-million dollar (about \$45 million) fine he was sentenced to for violation of party funding rules.**

Ivanishvili has repeatedly stated that the government is acting beyond legal means and is targeting him as part of their campaign strategy leading up to the parliamentary elections to be held this fall.

This week the National Enforcement Bureau of Georgia (NEB) seized Ivanishvili's shares in Cartu Bank and Progress Bank. Ivanishvili claims that he no longer owned shares in Cartu Bank, as he had transferred the assets to his eldest son, Uta, when he decided to enter politics.

The NEB stated that the Georgian National Bank had not been notified of a change in ownership for Cartu Bank and therefore Bidzina Ivanishvili remained the beneficial owner. This claim has been refuted by one of Ivanishvili's lawyers, Shalva Tadumadze. He affirmed that, "This is not a mistake, but a political decision. They made it on purpose, to make sure that Ivanishvili doesn't have appropriate property to pay the 75 million lari fine. They decided to take revenge by rules which are not defined by law."

According to Georgian Dream spokeswoman, Tina Khidasheli, the value of the property that has been seized by the NED far exceeds the fine with which Ivanishvili has been sentenced.

Furthermore, this past Thursday has also seen a major fine imposed upon the opposition coalition as a whole. Georgian Dream has been sentenced to 2 383 097 lari, or nearly USD 1.5 million by Tbilisi City Court based on a report prepared by the Chamber of Control (CoC) alleging illegal campaign donations.

The CoC report claims that a company called Management Service Ltd. spent 476, 614 lari on the rent and refurbishment of office space which it then made available to Georgian Dream coalition members for free across the country.

The coalition has five days to re-pay the fine or risk having their assets frozen and potentially confiscated by the authorities. Alexander Baramidze, a lawyer for the opposition, has stated that this move is illegal and that Georgian Dream will be filing an appeal of the decision.

Irakli Alasania, leader of Our Georgia-Free Democrats Party, a member of the opposition coalition, noted that if the authorities were to seize the assets of the coalition members it would result in the disqualification of the opposition from the elections. However, he told Maestro TV that he does not see this scenario playing out because there is enough pressure from the international community to ensure competitive elections in Georgia.

Khidasheli stated that "We [Georgian Dream] will continue our campaign just like we did before." She continued that Georgian Dream is prepare for a legal battle with the government.

This last comment was likely in reference to a speech made by incumbent President Saakashvili in his meeting with governors and officials from across the country in Tbilisi Monday evening.

In the speech he made it clear that Georgia would follow a policy of zero tolerance when it came to the elections in October, stating that



"the law is above everyone and everything regardless of social status, wealth or political affiliations, regardless of a person's name or a person's past."

He went on to say, in direct reference to Georgian Dream, that "in recent months the representatives of certain political forces thought it was possible to carry out impudent aggression, attack against the principles of legality and fairness of elections. [...] They have already experienced it and everyone else should know that such attempts will not work; each and every attempt will be eradicated with all the existing laws. No one will be able to bribe the electoral process or to buy Georgian democracy."

In a final blow to the opposition this week, Ivanishvili's appeal of the revocation of his Georgian citizenship by President Saakashvili last fall was rejected by the Appeals Court in Tbilisi on Friday. The opposition leader's lawyers accuse the government of trying to suspend the process until after the fall elections. Ivanishvili's defence team took the issue to the United Nations Human Rights Committee and confirmed that they will also bring the case to the European Court of Human Rights as well as the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Ivanishvili has stated that he will not run in the autumn elections without Georgian citizenship. The amendments to the Georgian Election Code, reported previously in CEW, which would allow him (and any other person born in Georgia, with EU citizenship and having made Georgia their country of residence for the past five years) to run for office, passed the third and final reading on Thursday. Amendments also include lowering of the minimum age for running for Member of Parliament from 25 to 21, including deregistered persons on the voters' list, establishing maximum donations made by an individual to political parties and the criteria for international electoral observers to be accredited by Georgia. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with reporting from Democracy and Freedom Watch as well as civil.ge

# Armenia between elections.

**The dust has hardly settled following the 6 May parliamentary elections in Armenia but attention is already shifting to Presidential elections scheduled for early next year.**

**The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission has released the final report of its observation of the May elections in which it highlights a number of recommendations which it says should be taken into account prior to the next poll. The report states:**

“Following an invitation from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed on 22 March 2012 an Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the 6 May 2012 parliamentary elections in Armenia. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM assessed compliance of the election process with OSCE commitments, and other international standards for democratic elections, as well as with domestic legislation. For election day, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM joined forces with delegations of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the European Parliament (EP), issuing a joint Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions.



The elections, which were held under an improved legal framework, were characterized by a competitive, vibrant and largely peaceful campaign, which was, however, marked by a low level of confidence in the integrity of the process. Some violations of campaign provisions by electoral contestants, including the use of administrative resources and attempts to limit voters' freedom of choice, created an unequal playing field and ran counter to OSCE commitments. The elections were administered in an overall professional and transparent manner prior to election day. Election day was generally calm and peaceful, although organizational problems and undue interference in the process, mostly by party representatives, were observed. Deficiencies in the complaints and appeals process were cause for concern.

The elections were held under a new Electoral Code, which provides a generally solid framework for the conduct of democratic elections. It contains a number of improvements, but a number of substantive shortcomings remain to be addressed. The implementation of the Electoral Code fell short, both in letter and spirit, in ensuring an equal playing field for campaigning and protecting voters from undue influence.

The election administration, headed by the Central Election Commission (CEC), administered the elections in an overall professional and efficient manner. Some conflicting guidance and the lack of clarification by the CEC of some important aspects resulted in inconsistent implementation of procedures, such as the inking procedure against possible multiple voting. The CEC and Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) worked in an open and transparent manner, and generally enjoyed the trust of the representatives of parliamentary parties at the regional level.

Many contestants questioned the accuracy and quality of the

voter register and voter lists, claiming they were open to abuse on election day. While the authorities took numerous steps to improve the accuracy of voter lists, additional efforts and better coordination among government institutions are required for further improvement.

Candidate registration was inclusive, and very few prospective candidates were rejected. It was problematic that the CEC took no steps to define the five-year residency requirement for candidates and to establish clear and objective procedures for its certification. The 20 per cent gender quota for proportional lists was met, although the effectiveness of the quota is limited as candidates may withdraw after a list has been registered. There is no requirement for the original gender proportions to be maintained. Women account for only 11 per cent of all elected Members of Parliament (MPs).

The election campaign was vibrant, competitive and largely peaceful, with a few isolated violent incidents. Electoral Code provisions aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all contestants with regard to campaign venues and poster space were generally respected. At the same time, the campaign was marked by lack of confidence by the public and many stakeholders in the integrity of the electoral process and allegations of electoral malpractice, especially vote buying.

There were cases of misuse of administrative resources, especially mixing of campaigning and official duties by education-sector employees, and cases where the governing Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) actively involved teachers and pupils in campaign events. The Prosperous Armenia party and one RPA candidate violated the Electoral Code provision that prohibits contestants and associated charitable organizations from providing or promising goods and services to voters. The misuse of administrative resources, including human resources of education-sector employees, violated the Electoral Code and contributed to an unequal playing field for political contestants, contravening paragraph 7.7 of the OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document. Campaign financing rules have been strengthened and were largely respected but would benefit from further improvement.

The media overall met their obligation to provide free and paid airtime and ensure non-discriminatory conditions and unbiased news coverage of contestants during the official campaign period. Nonetheless, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM noted cases of bias toward certain parties in some private media, which contradict the principle of unbiased coverage set by the Electoral Code, and cases where campaign materials produced by parties were presented as news items by some private broadcasters, which undermined the credibility and independence of media reporting and deprived viewers of independent reporting.

Some 27,000 domestic observers from 54 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were accredited by the CEC. At the same time, a narrow and literal interpretation of the applicable legal provision resulted in the rejection of a number of NGOs. Only four of the registered NGOs produced post-election reports on their findings. The Electoral Code provision requiring testing by the CEC of citizens wishing to be domestic observers remains a concern.

The legal framework unduly restricts the right to file election-related complaints. This and the manner in which election commissions and courts dealt with election complaints often left stakeholders without effective consideration of their claims, contravening paragraph 5.10 of the OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document and Article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Election commissions and courts in general took an overly formalistic approach to handling complaints, frequently dismissing complaints on technicalities or without examining their core substance or relevant evidence. In some cases, legally unsound decisions were issued. The prosecutor general's office and the police were transparent in their follow-up activities on reported violations but launched few criminal investigations in election-related cases and often rejected opening criminal cases on spurious grounds.

Election day was calm and peaceful overall. The voting process was orderly and well organized in the large majority of polling stations observed. However, international observers assessed voting negatively in nine per cent of polling stations, which is considerable. This assessment was mainly due to organizational problems, undue interference in the process, generally by proxies, and cases of serious violations, including intimidation of voters. One fifth of observed vote counts were assessed negatively, mainly due to procedural problems, such as failure to perform basic reconciliation procedures, cases of non-transparent counts, problems completing the results protocols, and isolated cases of serious violations. The tabulation process at most TECs was assessed positively, although many TEC premises were overcrowded and inadequate. Several challenges to the validity of results were lodged to TECs, the CEC and the Constitutional Court, all of which were rejected at the time of this report."

**At the end the OSCE/ODIHR Mission lists 26 recommendations that it makes to the Armenian government. This, the report makes clear, is over and above other recommendations included in the reports of missions that have monitors previous elections in Armenia in the last years which have not yet been implemented. ■**

Source: [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org)

## **"More at Stake than who will be the next President" in upcoming 2013 elections in Armenia, says International Crisis Group in report released at the end of June.**

Noting the current Armenian President's promise that the upcoming Presidential elections will be the "cleanest elections in Armenian history" the International Crisis Group (ICG) has released a report expressing the necessity in the country for legitimate elections in 2013.

Referring to the violence that left 10 people dead and another 450 injured following the controversial Presidential elections in 2008, ICG has called upon the Armenian authorities to take courageous steps to address issues that have fostered a lack of confidence in the electoral process in the country.

While acknowledging that the current administration has already taken some important measures to address corruption and promote a fairer political playing field, the international think tank echoed OECD comments that the modifications appear stronger on paper than they are in actuality.

The report highlights that firing corrupt officials is simply not enough; "offences should be prosecuted." Crisis Group is especially concerned about the lack of criminal investigation and prosecution of state officials involved in the violence in 2008, citing that while other international organizations have deemed this incident to have blown over, ICG believes it is still a serious fault line for political tensions in the country.

Attributing slow implementation of political and economic reform to "weak political will and strong vested interests, as well as a culture that values family and clan ties over civic values," the report emphasizes the need to address high-level corruption and a stagnant economy not only to consolidate democracy and public confidence internally, but also to foster peace and stability in the region.

In reference to conflicts with neighbouring Turkey and Azerbaijan, the report called for Armenia "to be fully engaged if there is to be progress in securing peace and stability in the South Caucasus – not distracted by deep domestic political conflict, institutional breakdown and lack of popular trust in the social contract."

The report hailed the recent parliamentary elections in Armenia as "genuinely competitive" noting that media coverage was more balanced than in previous cycles and that respect for freedom of assembly, expression and movement were by and large upheld. This enabled the main opposition parties to truly participate and contest the elections for the first time in 10 years.

Nevertheless grave concerns were raised with regard to abuse of administrative resources during the campaign period, inflated voters' lists, vote buying (ranging from gifts of potatoes and jam to tractors), the complete absence of redress for election violations, and incidents of multiple voting and voter intimidation at the polls.

Referring to recommendations made by Crisis Group following the 2008 Presidential elections, the report noted that improvements, notably the release of over 100 political prisoners in 2009 and 2011, as well as lifting the ban on political gatherings by the opposition, and the introduction of the "Emergency Law" in March 2012 which outlines in greater detail the role of security forces in times of emergency, were made under incumbent President Sargsyan.

However, the Crisis Group report highlights the deep level of distrust of government institutions in the country, stating that "a deeply dissatisfied population votes with its feet" citing the fact that over one million Armenians have left since independence. According to the report only 35% of Armenians "fully or somewhat trust" the president, and only 22% and 23% of the population has confidence in the judiciary and parliament, respectively.

Lawrence Sheets, Crisis Group's Caucasus Project Director has said that another "seriously flawed" election "would further distract from peace talks and severe economic problems."

ICG encourages the international community, primarily the United States and the European Union to not be timid in tying development aid to greater advances in governance and economic reform in Armenia.

Finally, the report sheds a glimpse of optimism with regard to the increased number of technocrats under the age of 40. These government officials, the report explains, have not been influenced by Soviet-style democracy, were educated mainly in the West, speak fluent English and appear to be more open to reform than their predecessors.

"The country," continues the report, "needs a better future than a stunted economy and dead-end conflicts with neighbours." ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould

# Americans start arriving to monitor Georgian Elections

**A large number of American election monitors are expected to monitor the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia. They come from a myriad of organisations, some well known in the country and others less so.**

**NDI Mission issues statement, makes recommendations.**



The National Democratic Institute, probably the first international non-governmental organisation to set up shop in Georgia in the early 1990s last

month deployed a mission to assess the situation ahead of the elections. The delegation included Secretary of State of the state of Missouri, Robin Carnahan; former U.S. Congressman Sam Gejdenson; former European Union Ambassador to Georgia, Per Eklund; NDI President Kenneth Wollack; and NDI Resident Director in Georgia, Luis Navarro.

An NDI statement said that “the delegation’s purpose was to accurately and impartially assess the electoral preparedness in advance of the October parliamentary elections; review the broader political environment; examine factors that could affect the electoral process; and offer recommendations to support increased dialogue and consensus-building towards peaceful, credible elections, and give voters confidence that the elections reflect the will of the people.

The delegation held meetings with leaders of the ruling and opposition parties contesting in the elections, the Chairman of the Central Election Commission, the President of Georgia, members of parliament including its Chairman, the Ombudsman, the Chairman of the Commission for Ensuring Voters’ List Accuracy, members of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections, the Chairman and Deputy of the State Audit Agency (Chamber of Control), domestic citizen election monitoring and other non-governmental organizations, U.S. and European diplomats, the Georgian Public Broadcaster, members of the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), and national and regional media outlets.

The delegation conducted its activities in accordance with the laws of Georgia and international standards outlined in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which has been recognized with appreciation by the United Nations General Assembly. NDI does not seek to interfere in Georgia’s election process, nor does it intend to, or could it, render a final assessment of the election process. The delegation recognizes that, ultimately, it will be the people of Georgia who will determine the credibility of their elections. The delegation therefore offers this pre-election statement in the spirit of supporting and strengthening democratic institutions and processes in Georgia,” the statement said.

**In a summary of its conclusions the NDI delegation stated the following:**

“It has been more than eight years since the Rose Revolution and nearly four years after the Russian-Georgian war; and while many Georgians have expressed optimism regarding certain democratic and economic advancements in their country, they hope for further reform toward Euro-Atlantic integration. While challenges to Georgia’s security and territorial integrity remain, further development of democratic institutions and practices offer the best chance for western integration and for long-term economic prosperity and stability. The upcoming parliamentary elections provide an important opportunity to deepen, expand and institutionalize democratic processes in the country.

The delegation acknowledges a number of positive steps taken since 2008 in preparation for the upcoming election cycle. New election-related institutions have been established, such as the Commission for Ensuring Voters’ List Accuracy (known by the initials “VLC”) and the Financial Monitoring Department of the State Audit Agency (better known as the Chamber of Control). Others have been further developed as in the case of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections. Combined with amended electoral legislation and the proposed so-called “Must Carry” provisions for the media, the 2012 electoral process is more formalized and regulated compared to past elections. These initiatives also present a challenge for developing the competence of, and public confidence in, the institutions and processes in a short timeframe.

# ng in force to ections.

At various stages of the election reform process, parliament, political parties, and civil society organizations engaged in dialogue and negotiations that led to a number of legislative amendments. These included:

- the division of party-list and majoritarian seats decided through the mixed voting system;
- the creation of a voters' list verification commission;
- some improved definitions regarding the use of administrative resources in the campaign;
- stricter regulations on political party financing;
- financial incentives for parties placing women on their candidate lists;
- removal of a blanket ban on prisoner voting;
- allowance for individuals to run as independent candidates; and
- automatic authorization for parties that clear the 5 per cent threshold to form a parliamentary faction.

Citizen monitors have noted that the Central Election Commission has, thus far, operated in a transparent and inclusive manner. There have been vibrant and major opposition rallies that have, thus far, taken place largely without incident.



The proposed expansion of media access demonstrates responsiveness to the concerns of civil society and, if implemented properly, could enhance the opportunities for Georgian citizens to make more informed choices at the polls.

### Committee for Open Democracy

Another American Group, the Committee for Open Democracy established a monitoring mission in Georgia in April. The Group has not issued any substantive statements but members of its core team have held meetings with officials of the central Elections Commission and of various political parties. The Committee for Open Democracy is deploying both a long term and a short term observation teams.



**The Committee for Open Democracy announcing the launch of their monitoring mission in Georgia on 27 April 2012**

### International Republic Institute

The International Republican Institute (IRI) is sending a long-term observer mission to Georgia, which will arrive on July 18. Resident Country Director Andrea Keerbs says the IRI will have both long-term and short-term observers from the U.S. and Europe. 25-26 observers are expected to come, she said. ■

# OSCE pushes for more women participation in politics in the South Caucasus.

As part of its mandate to support and promote pluralism and equal democratic representation, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) recently organised events to address the issue of women's political participation in Baku and Yerevan.

On June 21 and 22, the OSCE office in Baku with support from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) brought together over 30 senior political party officials to discuss how to increase participation amongst women in political parties.

In her opening remarks, Melissa Stone, Deputy Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, began, "Given that political parties are the primary and most direct vehicle through which anyone can access elected office and political leadership, the deliberate inclusion of women in political parties' values, practices, structures and policies is essential for women's equal participation in political life."

While women's involvement in politics in Azerbaijan has improved in the past decade, the results are certainly not breath-taking. Female Members of Parliament have increased from a feeble 11 per cent in 2005 to 16 per cent in 2010. The local level, however, has seen greater advances in women's participation. Numbers increased from just four per cent of municipal councillors in 2004 to 26 per cent in 2009.

Diana Digol, a project officer with ODIHR noted that "Political parties can play a key role in increasing the level of women's political participation in elections, both as voters and candidates." She went on to say that, "Women's chances of gaining higher elected office will not improve if political parties fail to promote them."

Participants heard from both local and international experts about legislative initiatives to increase female participation in politics as well as best practices in OSCE member states for overcoming barriers to entry and gender stereotypes.

Four days later in Yerevan, the OSCE office held a roundtable discussion on the personal experiences of female candidates in the parliamentary elections held last month. The event follows-up on a workshop held in Yerevan in December 2011 similar to the one carried out in Baku last week.

Oliver McCoy, Democratization Officer for the OSCE Office in Yerevan, commended women leaders as playing a "vital role in the development of robust pluralistic societies." In reference to the roundtable discussions, Mr. McCoy explained that "As we look to build on what has been achieved, it is important that we touch base with the women involved in political parties on a regular basis."

The overall picture for women in Armenian public life, however, remains rather grim. Despite the establishment of a quota system for the proportional representation (PR) lists, only 14 women were elected to

**Participants at a roundtable discussion organised by the OSCE Office in Yerevan, for women in political parties to share their experiences of the May 2012 parliamentary elections, Yerevan, 26 June 2012**



parliament in the recent election, a slight increase from the 12 that held seats in the previous parliament.

Women made up 22% of candidates on PR lists, meeting the legal requirements as confirmed by the OSCE monitoring mission. However, seats are awarded from the top of the list down, and although female candidates are required to be listed at regular intervals, seven dropped out at the last minute allowing male counterparts to take their places.

The gender quota does not apply to the remaining 41 constituency-based seats. Furthermore, of the 155 candidates running for constituency seats, there were only 12 female candidates; three of whom reported no campaign expenditures leading the OSCE to conclude these women were not in fact genuine contestants in the elections.

Analysts in Armenia cite several obstacles to women's participation in politics, not least of which are cultural norms and values that are not conducive to advancing women in leadership positions, the dearth of official support for women's political advancement as well as the fact that there simply are not many women in Armenia who have the financial independence that would enable them to run for office.

One female candidate, who ran as an independent in the May elections, Narine Moysisyan, head of the research centre at the Yerevan Agricultural University, explained that she was denied access to advertise on local television, blocked from campaigning by some local officials and that her family members received threats regarding her candidacy.

Despite all of this, she remained optimistic about the advances made by female candidates. "By putting myself forward, I dispelled the long-held myth that one needs support from some quarters to become a candidate. Under a total electoral blockade, with no campaign headquarters, no full-time campaigning, and no media visibility, I still managed to win 1,340 votes [...] I don't consider myself defeated."

Nevertheless it is clear that gender equality in politics has yet to be achieved in the region and must remain a priority on the agenda in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries should continue to work with the international community and domestic civil society on this vital issue on the road to fair and equal democracy. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with additional reporting from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting