

# Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

11 September 2012

## Parties mobilise supporters ahead of polls

**Thousands of Georgians took to the streets of the main cities of the country over the last weekend in support of the two main political forces contesting the forthcoming Parliamentary elections.**

The governing "United National Movement" held pre-election activities in the capital of Georgia and in 10 other towns throughout the country on Saturday, September 8th. Meetings were held in Ozurgeti, Batumi, Ambrolauri, Akhaltsikhe, Kutaisi, Gori, Telavi, Rustavi, Mtskheta and Tbilisi. President Saakashvili criss-crossed the country, addressing supporters who attended the rallies held in Zugdidi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Gori, Telavi, Rustavi and Tbilisi.

The main activity of the opposition Georgian Dream coalition bloc was held the following day in the town of Telavi, in Georgia's Eastern Kakheti Region. Georgian Dream leader, Bidzhina Ivanishvili was the main speaker in the Rally.

Enthusiastic crowds are flocking to the events of the two main political parties, making this campaign very different from previous Georgian elections. Observers have remarked that up to now the crowds have been peaceful and well behaved with very few incidents reported. Police have been largely keeping a low profile at Georgian Dream's rallies, but the party has been providing its own stewards to manage crowd control.

The two parties are building up to a climax during the last week of the campaign at the end of September.

On 15 September the Georgian Dream opposition is planning a rally in Akhlatiskhe, in the mainly Armenian populated Samskhe Javakheti Region. ■

Prepared by the editorial team of CEW.



President Saakashvili at a rally of the United National Movement in Tbilisi on 8 September.



The Georgian Dream opposition coalition held a rally in Telavi in Georgia's Eastern Kakheti region on 9 September.



**Exclusive Interview: In the first in a series of interviews with Georgian politicians ahead of the 1 October elections CEW speaks with Irakli Alasania, Leader of "Our Georgia – Free Democrats". Read the interview in full of pages 4-5.**

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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### Published by

LINKS Analysis,  
7-10 Adam House,  
Adam Street,  
London WC2N 6AA

T +44 2075209308  
F + 44 2075209309  
E [analysis@links-dar.org](mailto:analysis@links-dar.org)  
W [www.links-dar.org](http://www.links-dar.org)

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International Centre on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN)

Machabeli str. No 5;  
P.O. Box 38 Tbilisi 0179  
Georgia

T: (995 32) 923 920  
F: (995 32) 939 178  
W [www.iccn.ge](http://www.iccn.ge)

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## Tbilisi

Last week, both the U.S. State Department and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) announced they would be sending delegations to Georgia as part of their pre-electoral assessment missions.



The U.S. State Department will be sending an inter-agency delegation led by Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas O. Melia of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour to Tbilisi from September 10 – 12.

According to the U.S. State Department's website, "the delegation is visiting Georgia to highlight the importance of a democratic electoral process that results in a Parliament which reflects the will of the Georgian people."

The website also confirmed that the delegation will hold various meetings "to urge the Georgian Government to implement Georgia's electoral laws in a fair, impartial, and transparent manner, and to urge all political parties to fully participate in the process while abiding by the law."

In addition to U.S. State Department officials, representatives from USAID and the Departments of Defence and Justice will also form part of the delegation.

During the same period, Tbilisi will also host a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from September 11-12. The PACE delegation will also be present in the capital to assess the electoral framework and campaign environment. The PACE delegation will be led by Luca Volontè of the Italian Christian Democrat Party.

Volontè will be accompanied by Meritxell Mateu Pi of Andorra (ALDE), Christopher Chope of the United Kingdom (GDE), and the PACE co-rapporteurs for the monitoring of the Georgian elections, Boriss Cilevics of Latvia (SOC) and Michael Aastrup Jensen of Denmark (ALDE).

The PACE delegation will meet with both government officials including President Mikheil Saakashvili, Davit Bakradze, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Grigol Vashadze, the Foreign Minister as well as with representatives of political parties participating in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Meetings have also been

arranged with key members of the electoral administration, such as the Chairperson of the Central Elections Commission, the head of the Voters' List Verification Commission and the Director of the State Audit Service. The delegation is also making a point to meet with representatives of civil society and the media.

PACE will send a full 21-member short-term election observation mission to assess the conduct and outcome of the elections on October 1. ■

Prepared for CEW by Karina Gould

## Tbilisi

The first debate for political leaders organized by the Georgian Public broadcaster took place on Sunday, 9 September.

Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili, representing the United National Movement (UNM), Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM) leader MP Giorgi Targamadze and Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili participated in the debate which was boycotted by the Georgian Dream leader Bidzhina Ivanishvili. The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) had invited to take part in the debate prime ministerial candidates of the four political groups. According to the constitution after the October elections, the government and PM will have to resign and President Saakashvili will have to present new cabinet or re-submit the one existing at the time to the newly elected Parliament for confidence vote.

Ivanishvili, who was in Telavi for his coalition's campaign rally at the time when debates were about to start, cited two reasons behind his refusal to participate – the first was the presence of what he calls, "pseudo opposition" parties in the debates, CDM and Labor Party; and the second reason was that Ivanishvili wanted debates with President Saakashvili, who is UNM chairman, or as an alternative with PM Merabishvili on the condition if the ruling party would have declared him as its prime ministerial candidate not only for this upcoming election, but for post-2013 presidential election, when new constitution goes into force empowering PM with significantly more authority than it has now.

All three participants of the TV debates were given questions two days prior the debates, so their answers to each of the four questions during the program were mainly pre-prepared three-minute speeches with less actual debating; few exceptions were perhaps when the participants were giving one-minute rebuttal remarks following opponents' answers.

There were total of four questions on topics like how parties are planning to reduce unemployment; how they will distribute budgetary funds based on their respective priorities; what will be their tax and fiscal policy and a question on security issues, foreign policy and territorial integrity. ■

Source: CEW with civil.ge

# Relations with West at stake as international leaders weigh in on Georgian elections

**With three weeks to go before the polls open for Georgia's parliamentary elections, foreign leaders are adding their two cents to how the forthcoming elections will be conducted and what they could mean for Georgia's future.**

Georgia's elections are not just important for the domestic impact but also what their results will mean for Georgia's prospects for joining the European and North Atlantic economic, political and security communities. European and North Atlantic leaders will be watching how the elections are conducted in their continuous assessment of whether Georgia gains club membership or remains in the periphery of partnership.

An aspiring member of the club, Georgia needs to demonstrate this autumn that it is indeed pursuing the reforms necessary in order to stay the course of joining both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Considered a vital partner in both organisations for its strategic energy and geopolitical positions, as well as its commitment and contribution to NATO's operations in Afghanistan, Georgia has yet to bridge the gap to full membership in either organisation – one important criteria it must convince the current members of is its respect and adherence to democratic principles, not just in rhetoric but also in practice.

This past week witnessed a plethora of foreign leaders coming out in support of Georgia's democratic credentials, from NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, to the Foreign Ministers of Sweden and Poland – the leaders of the Eastern Partnership Initiative of the European Union.

Standing beside the NATO Secretary General, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili announced at a press conference on 6 September in Tbilisi, "We will hold the freest and the most transparent elections in Georgia's post-independence history."

Saakashvili continued that these elections, which will have the largest presence of international observers in Georgian history, will enable the Georgian people to "make the choice that serves our Euro-Atlantic integration."

Rasmussen was quick to commend Georgia for its "tremendous progress" in its quest of democratic reforms. "That hard work," confirmed Rasmussen, "has brought [Georgia] closer to NATO membership."

Urging the country "to keep the momentum of democratic reforms," the NATO Secretary General called the conduct of the campaign and autumn elections a "litmus test for Georgian democracy." He continued that he trusts "all political players in Georgia will play a responsible role in this process."

"The future," he concluded, "is in your hands."

**NATO Secretary General Rasmussen addressing a press Conference in Tbilisi with Georgian President Saakashvili**



President Saakashvili has confidently reassured both the Georgian and international publics, that Georgia is ready for the challenge. Saakashvili, expounding on Georgia's tackling of corruption and criminality, promised the elections will be held in a peaceful manner and that the authorities will not allow for violence.

"It is always possible to buy someone both within and outside [of] Georgia," noted Saakashvili, "but [just] like Georgia can never be sold, the democratic world is not for sale either and the truth is also not for sale."

"We, as the government – now I am speaking not as the [ruling United National Movement] party leader but as the President – will ensure that fundamental democratic values, the rights of every citizen regardless of their views – radical or non-radical – are expressed and protected and eventually common sense will always prevail in Georgia; I am sure about it, because it is in line with our Euro-Atlantic aspirations," he added.

The Swedish and Polish Foreign Ministers, Carl Bildt and Radoslaw Sikorski, were more cautious in their praise than the NATO Secretary General.

Sikorski explained that Europe and the world are watching the conduct of both the government and the opposition this autumn. He continued that Georgia has "a chance to establish a standard of transparent elections."

Both Bildt and Sikorski recognised the progress Georgia has made with regards to democratic reforms, but also stressed that there is still much room for improvement.

"I would expect that this election will be a further significant improvement in terms of quality and standards [over] the elections that you had lately in 2008 [presidential and parliamentary elections] and 2010 [local elections]," said Bildt.

The two Foreign Ministers expressed their hope that the 2012 Parliamentary elections in Georgia would be the most fair and democratic of all post-Soviet states. "it is what Georgia wants and what Europe needs," they stated.

Bildt stressed that the conduct of the elections would be judged first of all by the international observers present in Georgia and not the political parties involved.

Bildt wrote on his blog on 4 September, before his trip to Georgia, that there were two messages the Foreign Ministers hoped to convey during their trip: first, to the government, that they must do their utmost to ensure the upcoming elections are held in line with European standards; and, second, to the opposition, that they must accept the results of the elections, even if they are not in their favour.

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould with additional reporting from civil.ge and messenger.ge.com

# IRAKLI ALASANIA: “Georgia’s foreign policy is refocused on establishing regional stability in the Caucasus”



**In the first in a series of interviews with Georgian political leaders ahead of the 1 October Parliamentary elections, Caucasus Elections Watch interviews Irakli Alasania, Leader of our Georgia-Free Democrats, one of the coalition partners in the Georgian Dream Opposition bloc. In the interview Alasania speaks in detail of his party’s plans in the social-economic sector, as well as on the need for a refocus of Georgia’s foreign policy within a pro western orientation.**

**What is the most important issue for “Our Georgia – Free Democrats” and how does the party plan to make a difference on this topic in Georgia if you win parliamentary representation?**

Individual freedoms are central in our ideology. Restoration of rule of law and general appreciation of justness, building democratic institutions that guarantee and secure the provision of basic human rights will be the primary goals for Our Georgia Free Democrats.

**According to the National Democratic Institute survey conducted this past June, jobs and unemployment are the most important national issue for the Georgian electorate. What is your party proposing to do to address the issue of unemployment and to create jobs in Georgia?**

The authorities have promised us new workplaces many a time. This promise, among many others, has remained lip service. Against the background of high unemployment rates, having a job has become a privilege primarily enjoyed by supporters, relatives, and friends of the authorities. Instead of decreasing, unemployment has increased in Georgia even further. We promise to make employment the foremost priority of our economic policy. We will promote the creation of a fair and competitive labor market so that workplaces will be equally accessible to everyone.

People are unable to protect their rights out of fear of losing their jobs. Labor relations acquire distorted forms, while pay received as a result of slave labor and unconditional obedience does not suffice even to cover basic needs. We will protect the rights of employees and treat trade unions with due respect. Through negotiating with employees and employers, we will develop a new labor code and depoliticize the public service. Our commitment is to decent work for everyone!

We will attract billions in investment into industry, agriculture, education, healthcare, and other fields. We will defeat elite corruption, rid business of political pressure. Entrepreneurs will be provided with means to start new businesses and create workplaces. Our priority will be the development of SMEs. We will make horticulture modern and income generating, ensuring the welfare of those occupied in the village.

We will protect the labor rights of citizens, adopt a labour code commensurate with European standards, and ensure equal pay for equal work. We will fight against political and other types of workplace discrimination. We will foster capacity development of local human resources and the growth of competitiveness of each person and the country as a whole.

**With regards to territorial integrity and relations with Russia, almost half of all Georgians feel the situation has deteriorated since January 2008, according to the survey mentioned above. Furthermore, about the same number of respondents felt that Georgia’s prospects for EU and NATO membership remained about the same as in 2008. Could you please briefly outline your party’s position on foreign affairs and which issue it will focus most on in this area?**

Free Democrats will ensure Georgia’s pro-Western orientation. NATO and EU membership is Georgia’s destiny. The Saakashvili government is unable to achieve a peaceful accommodation with Russia that allows Georgia to protect its interests and sovereignty, reduces the threat of war, and increases trade and economic development. By bringing stability to Georgia’s relationship with Russia, Free Democrats can further strengthen Georgia’s ties with the West, become more integrated into positive trends of regional economic development, and take its rightful place as a regional power playing a positive strategic role for international trade and security.

Georgia’s foreign policy should be refocused on establishing regional stability in the Caucasus. It should concentrate on assisting its neighbors to settle their difference and build a more integrated region.

Media freedom and diversity has been a controversial issue in the lead up to the elections and has received considerable attention from the international community. What does your party intend to do to ensure and protect both the safety of journalists and freedom of expression?

Freedom of speech is a foundation of any democratic state. Media should be and will be free after our political coalition come into power. The current practice of having the news portrayed by the national media outlets, which are orchestrated by the administration of the President of Georgia, is unacceptable. It is incomprehensible that there are no debates or discussions around the problematic issues; and Georgian society is being fed with one-sided monologues from the man and the party in power.

**Universal health care is a central item on the campaign agenda. Could you please elaborate on your party’s position on healthcare and what policies “Our Georgia – Free Democrats” is proposing in this area?**

Quality healthcare is not a privilege but a right of each of us! As a result of healthcare reform implemented by the current government and due to disastrous medical treatment bills, many of our fellow citizens have gone broke and wound up homeless. We will create a European-type healthcare system based on the principle of social solidarity. We will ensure quality and accessible healthcare for everyone!

# foreign policy should be national stability in the Caucasus.”

1. Only every fourth citizen is currently insured – We will provide every citizen with universal health coverage.
2. Pharmaceutical and medical treatment prices are unjustifiably high nowadays – We will succeed in lowering prices and improving the quality of service.
3. The presently existing insurance cannot cover even the basic needs of the majority of population – Our insurance package will fully finance services provided by family and village doctors, preventive examinations and vaccinations, emergency treatment, childbirth, infertility diagnostics treatment of oncologic diseases, hospitalization, etc. Our insurance will cover fifty percent of first-aid medications.
4. The current healthcare program financing is not sufficient – We will double the financing of diabetes, mental illnesses, anti-rabies, safe blood, and other programs.
5. Many physicians are presently between jobs, while patients remain without physicians – Enhancement of medical service will create additional workplaces for medics.
6. Due to the malfunction of the system, the level of medical service and use thereof drops on a daily basis – We will create a flexible and self-governing system of healthcare.
7. The rights of patients, insurance companies, healthcare institutions and their staff are ambiguous – We will clearly separate the obligations of the state, insurance companies, and healthcare institutions.

## **Given the significant role agriculture plays in the Georgian economy, what policies does your party intend to develop to stimulate and support rural economies?**

Immediately after coming to power, the Georgian Dream will create a billion GEL fund for the village. Processing industry will develop, the acreage of irrigated lands will increase, agricultural service centers will become available, every farmer will be provided with long-term loans, modern equipment and technology, and consultations with highly qualified experts. A system of insurance related to natural disaster risks will be developed.

We will provide care not only to farm enterprises but smallholdings as well. The latter, in the initial years of their existence, will be provided with highly fertile seeds and saplings, fertilizers, safe and quality pesticides. No harvested crop will go to waste unsold.

We will study and help every village in accordance with its needs. No subsidy or aid intended for the village will any longer depend on the willful decisions of the authorities. Population itself will be in charge of village property and assets.

Dozens of thousands of workplaces will be created in processing plants, new outpatient hospitals, schools, and small and medium-size enterprises. Innovative technology, free kindergartens and good schools, in addition to workplaces, will impel youth to dedicate their lives to the village.

We promise that: Horticulture will become income generating. The state will create all necessary conditions for farmers to harvest and sell crops. Novelties, information, and innovations will be introduced in the village. The village will have its own financing, property, and self-government.

The market will overflow with Georgian production.

## **Considering there are only nine current female members of parliament, does your party have an action plan to encourage more participation of women in politics?**

We already have very strong Women organization. OGFD women are represented at the political board of the party as well as the coalition. They actively participate in the formation of decisions and will be also represented at the Parliament.

## **Given that the Georgian Dream Coalition, in which the OGFD is participating for the parliamentary elections, is comprised of several political parties, how will the OGFD be able to influence policy development and implementation if the Coalition is elected?**

OGFD is a bit more than 3 years old party, but has already demonstrated that it is one of the most progressive and speedy growing party. From organizational/structural point, as well as by representation of highly qualified human resources, the party is one of the strongest. We believe that OGFD will be significantly represented in the future Parliament by both proportional and majoritarian MPs. Accordingly, we will be represented at the executive branch.

## **Is there any other point, related to your campaign platform, that we have not discussed that you would like to mention?**

Our country must succeed not only in learning everything innovative and progressive from others but also in creating and disseminating on its own. We have all preconditions to achieve this goal. Knowledge and education have been traditionally highly appreciated and recognized in Georgian society. We intend to build the advancement of the country's development upon this very tradition.

Our care for the country's future has been, and remains, inseparable from care for education, sciences, literacy, and culture. Under our governance, education and science will become priority fields, and their financing from the state budget will increase. We will improve every stage of the system of education. Development of a child's reason and behavior will start in the kindergarten. School education will be improved. Teachers and professors of every educational institution will be free of political pressure, unlawful persecution, and fear. Students' tuition fees will be lowered.

The system of education will ensure the development of multifunctional work force – the country needs nurses, agrarians, and veterinarians, as well as engineers and shoemakers. We will support persons of any age in mastering new vocations and improving their qualification.

We promise that: Kindergartens will become accessible to every family and free of charge; every village will have a school of its own, the quality of middle school education will improve; a part of school textbooks will be free of charge, while prices for others will decrease, teacher's vocation will become prestigious and appreciated. Universities will regain their autonomy and become places where new knowledge is generated. ■

The interview with Irakli Alasania was prepared by Karina Gould and Marion Kipiani for CEW.

# Voting made difficult for Georgians living abroad

## **The current election date does not facilitate voting for Georgians living abroad, argues a loose coalition of NGO representatives, public defenders and journalists.**

October 1, the date of the upcoming Parliamentary Elections in Georgia falls on a Monday. In Georgia, the election day is by law declared a national day off work so that all eligible voters are able to participate in the elections and cast their vote. For those Georgian citizens living abroad, however, they will likely have to work during the chosen election date.

For this reason, a wide cross-section of Georgian NGOs, public defenders and journalists have appealed to the Central Election Commission to extend the period of voting for those voters living abroad to September 29 or 30, the Saturday or Sunday before the election. The idea is that these individuals will be more likely to vote if they can do it over the weekend when they are less likely to have to go to work.

Changing the days Georgians abroad are able to vote is not without precedent.

Georgian soldiers serving in Afghanistan will be able to vote on September 23, according to Nino Chkhobadze, Chairperson of the Georgian Greens Movement.

"We have appealed to the CEC to do the same concerning all the Georgians who are living abroad now," said Chkhobadze.

The appeal was sent to Zurab Kharatishvili, the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission, and was signed by 32 individuals.

It reads, "The Central Election Commission (CEC) has the power to specify voting terms and its procedures; if Georgian citizens are not able to take part in the parliamentary elections on October 1, the CEC can express its goodwill and allow them the opportunity to vote either on September 29 or 30 which are days off."

The response from the CEC was not favourable to changing the date. Eka Azarashvili, a spokesperson for the CEC, made it clear that the parliamentary election will be held on October 1 whether the voter lives in Georgia or abroad. "The day of the election is chosen by the President and is defined by the Georgian Constitution," said Azarashvili. "We cannot change the date, it does not depend on us."

In reality, the Election Code of Georgia allows for the date to be changed under necessary circumstances. Whether changing the date for Georgians living abroad is a "necessary circumstance," however, is a matter of opinion, and one the CEC does not appear to share with those who would like to see the date changed.

Officials remain unconcerned with the election date being held on a Monday. According to Mamuka Kaduva, the Georgian Ambassador to France, holding the election on October 1 will not discourage voters to cast their ballot since the embassy will be open from early in the morning to late at night, enabling Georgians living abroad to vote before or after work as well.

It should also be highlighted that in many countries, election days are normal working days and voters are expected to make time and effort to get to the polls. However, most of these countries also allow for early voting procedures or advanced polls to accommodate those individuals who cannot make it to the polling station or who will be outside of the country on election day.

Another issue that remains unresolved is the fact that Georgians residing illegally abroad will not be able to vote in this election. Changes to the requirements for voter registration, specifically the requirement to demonstrate legal residency in the place of registration, will make it impossible for those individuals whose status abroad is questionable to register. According to Davit Usupashvili, a representative of the opposition coalition, Georgian Dream, there is nothing in the Georgian legislative framework that would prohibit Georgian citizens residing illegally in a foreign country the right to vote. "It is unclear why the government is trying to seize their right to vote when the same government has granted voting rights to criminals who are in prison," commented the opposition representative.

The opposition has raised issue with both the election date and the restriction on Georgians living illegally abroad as another attempt by the government and the ruling party to limit the possibility of opposition supporters to vote in the upcoming elections.

One possibility that Georgians living abroad in an irregular capacity might not be able to register is because the CEC is trying to avoid the potential for multiple voting, though the CEC has not confirmed this position. Either way, the CEC should address both of these issues and demonstrate that it is acting in good faith to ensure all Georgian citizens, regardless of where they reside, and in what capacity, will be able to vote under reasonable conditions next month.

The number of Georgians living abroad is unknown, but some estimates place it as high as one million. The Georgian government last carried out a national census in 2002. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould, with additional files from messenger.com.ge and DFwatch.net

# Karabakh President inaugurated

**Bako Sahakyan was inaugurated for his second term as President of the self declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) in a ceremony held at the Palace of Culture in Stepanakert which was also attended by the president of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan and other dignitaries.**

The inauguration statement published on the website of the NKR leadership states that “by resuming the office of the President of Artsakh [NKR],” Sahakyan recognises and assumes the “huge responsibility” with which it comes. It continues that he is ready and will be committed to implementing the promises he made during the election which aim to benefit the NKR, ensure stability and contribute to its development. Finally, the statement concludes that Sahakyan is committed to the security and prosperity of the citizens of the NKR.

Sahakyan was re-elected President in the July 19 elections held in the territory. He won with 66.7 percent of the vote (47,095 votes). He was followed by Vitali Balasanyan, who received 32.5 percent of the vote (22,966 votes) and Arkadi Soghomonyan, who received 0.8 percent (594 votes). Voter turnout was 73.43 percent.



**The inauguration ceremony of Bako Sahakyan as President of the self declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was held in Stepanakert on 7 September 2012**

The inauguration ceremony was held on Friday, September 7, in the context of a special session of the territory’s National Assembly. It was followed by a military parade in Renaissance Square, in downtown Stepanakert. ■

Source: report prepared by Karina Gould with news.am

# Armenian regions vote for local government

**The voter turnout in the local self-government elections held in Armenia’s second and third largest cities and several regions on Sunday, 9 September was 49.52%.**

According to the Armenian Central Elections Commission, a total of 479,625 voters cast their votes. The lowest turnout - 15.01% - was recorded in Gai community (Armavir region) where only 418 out of the 2,718 registered voters took part in the voting. The most active voters were in Aravus village that saw a 93.81% turnout.

Elections of heads of communities, and members of Council of Elders were held in 97 communities of Ararat and Armavir, 113 communities of Lori, 119 of Shirak, 109 communities of Syunik provinces.

129 candidates were registered in Ararat, 103 in Armavir, 166 in Lori, 174 in Lori and 144 in Syunik.

289 of the candidates were non-party, 342 were members of the Republican party; Forty-eight candidates running for heads of communities are Prosperous Armenia party members, 20 are from Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutyun, 12 Rule of Law party members.

Heritage party, Ramkavar Azatakan, National Democratic Union, Democratic Homeland have joint candidates.

Non-party candidates competed for mayor’s post in Etchmiadzin. One of them is acting mayor Karen Grigoryan and the other candidate is Armine Hovhannissyan.

In Kapan Republican party member Ashot Hayrapetyan forced the incumbent, ARF-D member Artur Atayan to withdraw his nomination.

The most important election was that for mayor of the city of Gyumri, Armenia’s second largest city. The incumbent Vardan Ghukasyan did not contest. The election was won by Samvel Balsanayan, a candidate of the Prosperous Armenia Party, who however had also the support of the ruling party, the Republican Party. The position was also contested by a representative of the Dashnak Party (ARF-D), Hovsep Simonyan. ■

Source: CEW with Tert.am

# Preparations for elections are in full swing at the Georgian CEC

**The Georgian Central Elections Commission is working in full swing in preparation of parliamentary elections on 1 October.**

The Commission on September 7, 2012 held a meeting with representatives of political parties at Courtyard Marriott Hotel. Participants discussed issues regarding voting abroad and the rules of financing of the election subject representatives.

According to the Commission comments and recommendations related to the above mentioned topics were presented by the attendees.

The meeting was the latest in a series organized by International Republican Institute (IRI) and are financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Earlier in the week the Central Election Commission and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) organized meeting with the representatives of diplomatic corps accredited to Georgia. The CEC website said that "Diplomats were provided with the information on the activities implemented by the CEC in order to maximally involve ethnic minorities in election processes. Representatives of Public Defenders' Office and the members of the Group Working on Ethnic Minority Issues of the CEC attended the meeting."

The CEC presented implemented and planned activities for raising ethnic minority voter awareness. Participants in the meeting were also presented with the translated election documentations on ethnic minority languages for the Elections of the Parliament of Georgia of October 1, 2012.

The two meetings were chaired by the Chairman of the Central Elections Commission, Zurab Kharatishvili. ■



**The Chairman of the Georgian CEC, Zurab Kharatishvili addressing a meeting with representatives of political parties on 7 September.**



**A meeting between the Georgian CEC and representative of diplomatic missions in Tbilisi on 5 September focused on issues related to national minorities and the electoral process.**