

Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

18 September 2012

A tale of two reports

A stream of European and American officials have been visiting Georgia in the weeks running up to the 1 October parliamentary elections. They all seem to have the same message: the importance for Georgia's future that the elections are deemed free and fair. But the question is already arising, who if anybody, is going to decide if they were or not?

Two reports issued last week by two reputable organisations, both claiming to cover the pre-election period, whilst not exactly contradictory, leave the reader with two different impressions. The first report, issued by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission was published on 10 September. The report is 8 pages long and claims to cover the period 22 August to 5 September 2012. The second report was issued by Transparency International Georgia, an NGO that has established a reputation for independent and rigorous monitoring of different aspects of governance in Georgia. It covers a longer pre-election period from 1 October 2011 to 1 August 2012.

The ODIHR report has been criticised for its blandness and for failing to tackle properly the main issues, such as the controversy surrounding legislation on party financing. The TI Georgia report on the other hand, has been praised for its candidness. It identifies what it calls "anti-competitive trends" in the pre-election environment and details "worrying trends" in Georgia's political system from the day Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the opposition Georgian Dream coalition, announced his intention to run for politics. Noting that the forthcoming 1 October elections represent a milestone for Georgia, and likely the most competitive elections since independence, the TI-Georgia report meticulously documents constitutional and electoral violations over the past year, both by the authorities as well

as the opposition. Of particular concern are the incidences of reprisals, voter intimidation and abuse of administrative resources identified in the report. The TI Georgia report was funded by USAID and Open Society Georgia Foundation.

Part of the problem with the ODIHR report is the methodology. Constrained by strict operating procedures, and under constant attack from within the OSCE Permanent Council, ODIHR has become increasingly cautious. Its claim of long term monitoring, in a situation as has developed in Georgia where electioneering has been going on for a year, are uncertain when the mission deploys just five weeks before the day of the election, and its first interim report covers such a short period. Another issue with the ODIHR report is related to the choice of words. For example the reference in section 4 about Bidzina Ivanishvili having "lost" his citizenship rather than a more robust description of what happened is a case in point. Even if the ODIHR Mission had limited its remarks to things that actually happened in the 14 days covered by the report, some obvious facts are missing. For example, the fact that the former Head and Deputy Head of the controversial State Audit Office – the persons that headed the office when the Georgian Dream Coalition and its supporters were being investigated a few weeks ago, were presented in this period as candidates in the elections on behalf of the United National Movement.

One of the best outcomes of political events in Georgia over the last year, has been the re-emergence of Georgian civil society as a dynamic and forceful element in Georgian society. Their contribution to containing the excesses of both government and opposition are highly commendable. The international community will do well to listen to what they are saying very carefully as should ODIHR. ■

Source: This comment was prepared by the editorial team of CEW.

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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Baku

Presidential elections will be held in Azerbaijan on October 16, 2013. The Central Elections Commission has announced that it will soon start the process for preparation of the elections with training for staff of the different regional and local Election Commissions. ■

Yerevan

Another round of Municipal elections will be held in Armenia on 23 September. Elections will be held in the districts of Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Tavush for September 23.

The ruling Republican Party has the largest number of candidates, followed by Prosperous Armenia. Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutyun is the third, followed by the Rule of Law party.

A different feature of this election is the nomination of Yezidi candidates in a number of Yezidi-populated villages of Armenia. ■

Tbilisi

After two months of demonstrations and appeals, Maestro TV will finally be getting back the 30,000 satellite dishes and 15,000 TV antennas that were seized by the authorities in Georgia on 12 July 2012.

The decision to reverse the seizure was made on 11 September during negotiations between Maestro TV, representatives of the Georgian media and the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) of the National Security Council. IATF was created in order to monitor elections decisions and ensure transparency on the part of the authorities.

The dishes were initially seized by the authorities on suspicion of attempted bribery on behalf of the opposition coalition Georgian Dream. However, given the very weak evidence provided by the State Audit Service (SAS) alleging the intent of bribery on the part of Maestro TV, the IATF upon reviewing the case has decided to reverse the seizure – a major win for the media activists that have come out in support of Maestro TV.

Maestro TV, with the support of over 20 different media outlets, major Georgian NGOs such as the Georgian Young Lawyers Association and Transparency International Georgia as well as words of encouragement from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Amnesty International, held its ground arguing that the dishes were intended as part of a marketing campaign to increase its viewership. The dishes, argues Maestro TV, were intended for low-income Georgians who otherwise would not

have access to their channel, and would not be handed out for free. Rather, they would form part of a scheme in which recipients would pay a very low fee over a given period of time to pay for the dish received from Maestro TV.

The dishes will be returned to Maestro TV on two conditions established by IATF: first, that the dishes will be distributed by the Georgian Postal Service; and, second, that the dishes will only be delivered to families who face economic hardship.

Though negotiations as to the exact conditions for release of the dishes are still underway, there is a general sense that things are moving in the right direction, both from the government and from the media and civil society representatives.

“[Giga] Bokeria [Secretary of the National Security Council] made the step regarding our demands and this is a scheme on which we can start a discussion, in my opinion,” said Lasha Tughushi, editor-in-chief of the daily Resonanzi, and a central organiser and activist for the protests against the seizure of the satellite dishes.

Tughushi expressed his hope that the negotiation process between the authorities and Maestro TV will not drag on too long in order that people in need will be able to receive the satellites ahead of the elections. However, he acknowledges the time constraints and urges both sides to work with expediency for a solution that works for both Maestro TV and the Georgian people.

One key point of contention surrounds the definition of “economic hardship.” As Ilia Kikabidze, the Executive Director of Maestro points out, for the government this seems to mean “below the poverty line.” Kikabidze points out that if this is the case, many people living below the poverty line might not even have a television set, thus making the distribution of satellite dishes and TV antennas redundant for a company whose main objective was to increase viewership.

“If there is no TV set at home, the satellite antenna is useless and the situation creates a disadvantage for the channel which is trying to increase its viewers,” Kikabidze said.

He also added that there is a fear that if the postal service controls the distribution of dishes they may only go to those families which support the ruling United National Movement. Furthermore, noted Kikabidze, the postal service will only be able to distribute the dishes and antennas, but who, he wondered, will actually install the dishes? Maestro TV has stated that they will discuss the details of the negotiations with their foreign partners and make a final decision on the deal in the coming days. ■

Report prepared for CEW with additional reporting from messenger.com.ge and dfwatch.net.

Dangling the carrot

A US Government delegation led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas O. Melia was refreshingly candid in its comments whilst on a pre-election visit to Georgia, sending clear and unambiguous messages. Karina Gould discusses the visit and wonders if the west's approach of dangling the carrot of future Euro-Atlantic integration will be enough to secure a good election for the Georgian people.

There is one thing that appears to be clear to all foreign interlocutors of the Georgian elections: the pre-election environment is decidedly tense. Before the date was even set, both sides were ramping up rhetoric and actions, notably the legal actions taken by the authorities against the opposition leadership and supporters. One Georgian reporter gloomily noted recently that, "since regaining independence some 20 years ago there has been no peaceful change of government in Georgia, only a coup d'état and a revolution: winning or losing everything seems to be a rule for Georgian politics."

Yet, the West remains - against all odds - optimistic about this election's democratic potential. Europe and the US retain hope for "free and fair elections". They think they hold a trump card for Georgians of all political stripes: the coveted memberships to NATO and the European Union. These elections, representatives of the West remind all Georgian political stakeholders, will be the test for Georgia's future prospects of joining the West's camp. Western leaders appear hopeful that holding out the carrot of membership to NATO and the European Union will encourage Georgian politicians to play by the rules of the game.

At least this appears to have been the tactic rolled out by the recent visit of the American inter-agency delegation to Tbilisi last week from 10-12 of September.

"The upcoming elections are critical to helping Georgia advance its Euro-Atlantic aspirations," said Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, Thomas O. Melia, who led the pre-election mission.

"Domestic and international perceptions of fairness of the campaign environment, including adherence to the rule of law, media access, transparency and fair play in adjudication of disputes will be important indicators of Georgia's democratic development," he said.

Melia made it clear that the United States is committed to working with the government chosen by the Georgian people, and that the United States does not favour any party, coalition, or political movement. It does, however, favour a democratic election, maintaining that the people's choice is also America's choice in October.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State assured all electoral stakeholders that the message the delegation brought with them to Georgia was repeated in each of their meetings both with government and opposition leaders as well as with representatives of civil society and the media. That is, as Melia put it, that "the long-term work of building a vibrant democracy is not over on Election Day." The US representative stressed that to build and sustain a democratic society the following essential principles are necessary both during and beyond the elections process: an equal playing field for all political actors, rule of law and due process, respect for fundamental freedoms, access to diverse media sources and constructive engagement.

Melia conceded that though there have been "a variety of shortcomings in recent months, it is clear that there is a competitive campaign under way."

The American official urged the authorities to ensure that "campaign and election laws are applied equally and transparently, and that all participants are held to the same high standards of conduct as spelled out in Georgian law." He called on political parties to "participate constructively, follow the law scrupulously, and to pursue their political goals at the ballot box."

Respect for peaceful protests, added Melia, was a "hallmark of democratic society."

"We have heard from all the political parties we have met that they have been able to travel the country, hold rallies, and get their messages out to the voters. In those conversations, we also urged that all parties should renounce violence and avoid provocations," he said.

With regards to access to media, the U.S. Official welcomed the "must offer, must carry" legislation and stated that the U.S. "strongly support[s] its extension through the post-election complaints process and beyond." A statement, representatives of the Georgian Young Lawyer's Association (GYLA) had hoped the U.S. representative would make during his press conference, noting the weight these words would have coming from an international perspective.

"Efforts to promote wider access to a diversity of opinions and media outlets would reflect fundamental values democracies share," stated Melia.

During their visit the delegation met first with members of the opposition on Monday, including Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of the Georgian Dream Coalition, and with Giorgi Targamadze, leader of the Christian-Democratic Movement.

Having discussed the difficulties of a modern campaign and the expectations they have for the elections, Targamadze said he is sure that the visits from the U.S. government officials will have a "positive influence" towards ensuring a fair campaign, explaining that the American delegation was highly versed in Georgia's political system and the challenges it faces.

Ivanishvili also commended the Americans for their interest and knowledge in Georgian political affairs. The opposition leader felt that this visit demonstrates the interest that U.S. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have in Georgia and their hopes for a democratic election process. Ivanishvili promised the delegation that his coalition would do everything they can to ensure peaceful and democratic elections in Georgia.

The U.S. inter-agency delegation also met with Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili, Minister of the Interior Bacho Akhalia, the Director of the State Audit Service Lasha Torfia, the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission Zurab Kharatishvili as well as with civil society and media representatives.

All the advice from the U.S. delegation seems remarkably simple: just don't break the rules and let everyone vote for who they want to vote for. Yet we know that this simple act can be an exceedingly difficult thing to achieve in reality. Georgian leaders know what democracy is and what it takes to become a true democracy, the question remains as to whether they are willing to take the risk and allow for the people's choice to run its course. Is the carrot of the West a big enough incentive?.

Report prepared by Karina Gould for CEW with additional reporting from the Georgian media

What do they stand for?

Amidst all the controversy surrounding the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia it is sometimes easy to forget the issues at stake, and what the parties stand for. Marion Kipiani has been going through the election programmes of four major Georgian political parties to compare their positions on a range of issues.



	UNM	Georgian Dream	CDM	New Rights
Governance	<p>Latest constitutional changes have led to improved structure of government and balance of power. Amendments created mixed system of governance with strong parliament and a government directly accountable to it.</p>	<p>Latest amendments to the constitutions violate the principle of distribution of powers. Georgian Dream programme foresees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * strengthening of constitutional provisions guaranteeing respect for human rights; * reaching wide public agreement Georgia's constitutional order and system of governance; * promoting multiparty democracy and responsible parliamentary opposition (including through appointing opposition MPs to head parliamentary committees); * simplifying impeachment procedures; * increasing the minimum age of judges, modifying the rules of appointment for the High Council of Justice and expanding the range of competences of the Constitutional Court; * promoting an independent, non-politicised Prosecutor's Office; * increasing the independence of the Office of the Public Defender; * defining a system for local self-governance; * changing the procedures to amend the constitution to promote the stability of the constitution. 	<p>CDM supports a balanced constitutional system with a strong parliament and a president with strong arbitration powers. CDM supported recent constitutional amendments but suggests modification of the current model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * simplification of the procedures for a vote of no confidence in the government; * introduction of an obligatory vote of confidence in case a third of ministers are replaced. <p>CDM also supports a constitutional model where the president is elected by the parliament in order to prevent unstable political situations due to frequent elections.</p>	<p>The best model of governance for Georgia would be a parliamentary monarchy; as such a model however is impossible to implement at the given time, New Rights support the idea of a parliamentary republic with a directly-elected president. The party proposes to strengthen parliamentary oversight over executive power through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * possibility for the parliament to declare no-confidence in the government by a single-majority vote; * possibility to set up investigative committees by one fifth of MPs without resolution.

	UNM	Georgian Dream	CDM	New Rights
Education	<p>GEL 4bn fund for education for 2012-16, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * renovation of public schools; * 150 new schools; * new technological university in Batumi; * 3 new state professional colleges; * summer employment programme for students; * increase in grants and scholarships; * increase in teachers' salaries. 	<p>Main priority is to ensure equal access to education and professional training. Priorities of the Georgian Dream programme include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * de-politicisation and effective management of the education sector, including strengthening self-governance of educational institutions and introducing annual monitoring; * increasing the share of education in the state budget, transparent rules for basic financing of access to education (instead of voucher system), increase in teachers' salaries; * adopting standards for access to education in villages, towns and cities and for provision of social assistance to enhance affordability of education; * evaluation to approximate educational standards to the international level; measurable indicators for authorization/ accreditation; revision of national curriculum; * abolishment of teaching foreign language and computer skills from grade 1 and of computerized teaching; * increasing scientific potential of higher education through effective support mechanisms and a state programme for financing research. 	<p>CDM regards the social aspects of education policy and access to education as a priority area. Policy propositions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * distribution of school books to all families who do not pay declared property tax; * increase of voucher funding for schools and increase in teachers' salaries; * establishment of at least one school in every village; * support to professional development of teachers and improvement of teacher training; * reimbursement of tuition fees to students with academic success (in part) and students from vulnerable families (in full); * responsibility for pre-school education will be returned to the Ministry of Education and official recognition of pre-school teachers; * increased funding for vocational schools. 	<p>New Rights propose to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * double the education budget to 16% of the state budget; * increasing the qualification level of teachers through teacher training and an increase in salaries; * prioritizing essential professions for the country and promoting education in these sectors; * financing of higher education from the state budget; * funding increases for scientific research; * funding increases for professional education; * free school books for all children; * switch to a three-stage school educational system (primary, basic and upper); * support to inclusive education; * decentralization and de-politicisation of the education system.

	UNM	Georgian Dream	CDM	New Rights
Employment	<p>Recent creation of Ministry of Employment was set up to improve information of employers and unemployed about job offers and available skills and to improve professional training. Main focus in 2012-16 will be on creation of new jobs through economic growth and attraction of foreign investment; growth of the tourism industry; investments into public infrastructure..</p>	<p>Main priorities are to guarantee labour rights and respectable living conditions, reversing the mass emigration of workers and reducing the number of crimes due to social hardship. Proposed measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * improving workers' professional qualifications to ensure that employer demands are met; * development of wider agricultural sector and of SMEs, including through a fund to support the establishment of family and small businesses; * increasing levels of cooperation, commercialization and technological development, especially in the agricultural sector, to lower the share of self-employed workers; * harmonizing labour legislation with European standards; * creating a register of the unemployed to offer relevant professional training and employment opportunities; increasing unemployment benefits; * ensuring an effective system of social dialogue and social partnership. 	<p>Employment for all is the priority goal. Partnership with private sector will be increased for job creation and increased employment; unemployed persons will be offered retraining and employment. Targeted investments in the education sector, legal definition of the term unemployment and corresponding unemployment benefits will address the unemployment problem. CDM will tackle hidden unemployment (through classification as self-employed persons) through agricultural reform that will include a transition from small-scale agriculture to large farms and through agricultural cooperatives. Direct investment into the Georgian economy will be encouraged by decreasing utility charges.</p>	<p>Main task of the government's long-term development strategy must be creation of a business environment based on liberal, free and competitive markets, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * safe and predictable business environment; * effective anti-monopoly policies; * SME development and support to SME access to finance; * development of the agricultural sector. <p>In order to achieve this goal, the following measures will be taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * prohibiting criminal prosecution of businesses, abolishing pre-trial detention for economic crimes, abandoning punitive policies on businesses etc; * transforming Georgia's tax code into an organic law and making changes and amendments subject to a preliminary public discussion; * enforcing comprehensive anti-monopoly and anti-trust legislation; * introducing a grace period for taxation of small enterprises (producers of agricultural goods, food processing, tourism export-oriented businesses); * establishing a small-business development foundation and agricultural bank to increase the availability of cheap loans.



	UNM	Georgian Dream	CDM	New Rights
Social security & health care	<p>Basic health insurance packages for all citizens; special insurance coverage for socially vulnerable persons and children up to 5 years of age. Pensions will be increased. Each family will receive a GEL 1,000 voucher to cover expenses for utilities, education and health expenditures.</p>	<p>The main policy goal is to offer universal basic health insurance to all citizens. The basic package will include dispensary services, national screening and vaccination programmes; medical emergency services; hospital services including cardiovascular surgery; prenatal care and childbirth; diagnostics and fertility treatment; treatment of oncological diseases; emergency dental care; pharmaceuticals.</p> <p>Propositions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * establishing an internationally-approved mechanism for healthcare financing; * establishing an independent non-commercial agency to manage health care finances and health care agents; * including private insurance companies in the provision of services not included in the basic package; * continuing and increasing financing for specialized health care programmes (e.g. diabetes, psychological health, safe blood, HIV/AIDS, drug addiction programmes, palliative care etc.) <p>Other policies to improve social security are proposed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * establishment of a cumulative pensions system based on mandatory contributions, with state and private pension pillars; * legal provisions to ensure that monthly pensions are at least equal to the minimum levels of subsistence, eradication of the provision that discriminates former employees of law enforcement agencies; * increase of social benefits and coverage of social assistance for vulnerable persons; introduction of a unified social security system; * social service provision through specialized organizations for orphans and vulnerable children, with financing and management delegated to regional and municipal self-government bodies. 	<p>An accessible health care system with acceptable conditions for patients, medical personnel, insurance and pharmaceutical companies is the overall policy goal of CDM. The party proposed to establish an optimized and transparent system of medical care and management that will make rational use of financial resources, technical capacity and professional staff. CDM proposes to provide special subsidies to vulnerable population groups (children, pensioners, persons with disabilities, veterans, students, large families, IDPs, people living in high mountain areas). A universal package of medical services will be delivered to the entire population through state funding, which will be complemented through private health insurance package (state will determine the cost of the package). For vulnerable groups, costs for the additional package will be covered by the state. Universal health insurance will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * public health-care programmes (e.g. vaccination, screening programmes); * primary health-care services (outpatient services and family doctors); * accident and emergency care (including ambulance service); * mental health programme, treatment of acute infectious diseases, tuberculosis treatment, HIV/AIDS treatment, hepatitis treatment and prevention, cancer treatment, cardiac treatment, dialysis programmes; * pre-natal and paediatric care; * palliative and hospice care; * supply of specific medicines. <p>Apart from health care, other social policy propositions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * pension increase (up to GEL 240 by 2016); revising pension values of former law enforcement officers; * introducing a non-taxable minimum level of income adjusted to subsistence minimums; * reducing utility tariffs; * paying salary arrears for civil servants for the period 1998-2004. 	<p>Universal health coverage should be ensured. Policy propositions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * providing state-funded insurance for all citizens aged over 65, all children aged up to 16, people living in villages; * tax incentives equal to the cost of insurance packages for vulnerable families; * deduction of medical insurance cost of employees from profit tax; * yearly agreements between the state and insurance companies on the cost of basic health insurance package; * strengthening social provisions for health care (epidemiology, disease prevention); * development of special programmes for prevention & treatment of dangerous and infectious diseases such as hepatitis, tuberculosis etc; * efficient anti-monopoly measures for pharmaceutical and medical services markets; * obligatory professional risk insurance for medical institutions; * increasing the rights of medical staff through revised labour agreements. <p>Apart health care, other social policy provisions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * tackling injustice, lack of transparency, absence of clear criteria of "charity care" programmes; * systemic transformation of the pensions system to base a new system on the principles of individual contributions and individual savings with an ensured basic rate no less than the subsistence minimum for all citizens. Special pensions rates should be established for persons with disabilities and for veterans..

	UNM	Georgian Dream	CDM	New Rights
Foreign policy	<p>UNM main foreign policy priority is NATO integration and close interaction with EU, including agreement of AA and DCFTA. UNM supports active cooperation with EU EaP and other regional integration platforms in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions. Regional cooperation should be strengthened especially with neighbouring countries. Georgia's main strategic partner are the U.S.A.; UNM supports deepening political and economic cooperation with the U.S. Georgia also maintains a strategic partnership with Azerbaijan through joint energy, transportation and communication projects and seeks the further deepening of close political, economic, trade, energy relations with Turkey. Cooperation with Ukraine and Armenia are strategic interests of Georgia. UNM also supports links with North Caucasian peoples in neighbouring regions of the RF.</p>	<p>The main foreign policy priority is Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration by first of all sharing their human rights and democratic values and forsaking the rhetoric of war. Georgia should initiate a dialogue with the RF to overcome current crisis of bilateral relations. Georgia should contribute to international efforts to manage global challenges, such as participation in NATO operations. The country should cooperate with the U.S.A. in the frame of the Strategic Partnership Agreement and should fulfill its obligations undertaken in agreements with the EU. Relationships with the peoples of the North Caucasus should not be used as a "weapon" in the conflict with the RF. Greater priority must be given to deepening relations with neighbouring countries (Azerbaijan, Turkey, Armenia, Iran). Georgia should become a regional platform for political, economic, social and business opportunities. The country should renew its efforts toward multilateral diplomacy within I.O.s and regional organizations (specifically the BSEC) to resolve conflicts.</p>	<p>Georgia's security and democracy are impossible without NATO integration and close integration with the EU. NATO is the only alliance to whose membership Georgia aspires. However, measures need to be taken to ensure that Georgia preserves its national identity and traditional heritage. The country should pursue a multi-vector foreign policy and strengthen bilateral strategic relationships (with U.S., selected EU members [UK, Poland, Czech Republic, Baltic States] states and politically and economically influential Asian countries [China, India, Japan]). Georgia should continue taking an active part in NATO peace-keeping operations. At the same time, friendly relations should be cultivated with the Central Asian states and Iran for Georgia to fully realize its potential as an energy transportation corridor. With regard to the RF, dialogue and full economic relations should be restored. Basis for the improvement of bilateral relations between Georgia and the RF should be shared interests in stability in the North Caucasus. Religious extremism and fundamentalism there can pose a danger of disintegration for the RF, which will pose a threat to Georgia.</p>	<p>The overarching policy goal is to achieve Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. NATO membership would be a stable security guarantee for the country. Foreign policy priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * NATO membership; EU integration; cooperation with the U.S.A. as Georgia's most important strategic partner; * partnership-based and free trade relations with all states, especially the U.S., EU and regional neighbours; * peaceful resolution of existing disputes, preservation of regional stability and security including through international cooperation; * intensified cooperation with Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as Turkey and Ukraine; * strengthening Georgia's role as a transit and energy corridor; * ensuring Georgia's successful contribution to NATO-led operations (particularly ISAF).

	UNM	Georgian Dream	CDM	New Rights
Territorial integrity	<p>Territorial integrity should be restored through peaceful means and intensified dialogue. Policy focus is on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Georgia's general economic and institutional development; * continuing diplomatic pressure on Russia to achieve "de-occupation"; * supporting economic relations between communities across the ABLs; * renovating and developing infrastructure to improve freedom of movement and transportation of goods; * improving access to health care and to education for conflict-affected population; * joint projects and initiatives to foster P2P contacts, coordination of humanitarian projects. 	<p>Georgian Dream works under the general principle that there are no quick or unilateral solutions to the conflicts and that only peaceful measures must be used for their resolution. The strategy to achieve a peaceful resolution should be based on direct contact and dialogue with Abkhaz and South Ossetians to restore trust and reconciliation. Attention will be focused on cooperation in the economic, humanitarian, educational, health care and cultural field as well as joint infrastructural programmes. Another pillar of the party policy is to receive maximum support from the international community on questions of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity with a view to continuing the non-recognition policy. International forums (UNSC, UNGA, CoE, OSCE, EU) are to be used to monitor situation in the conflict regions, protect human rights and make peace. Of specific importance in this regard are the proper functioning of the Geneva Discussions and of EUMM. Direct dialogue with the RF is necessary for the withdrawal of Russian armed forces and the deployment of international observers.</p>	<p>The pre-requisite for restoring Georgia's territorial integrity is the "de-occupation" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Talks should be resumed with the RF over the provisions of the cease-fire agreement. Georgia's foreign policy should continue to focus on promotion the international non-recognition policy. International partners of Georgia should play an important role in restoring territorial integrity.</p>	<p>All legal and peaceful measures must be used to restore and preserve territorial integrity and protect the internationally recognized borders. For this, Georgia must succeed in bringing about "de-occupation". Membership of Euro-Atlantic structures would guarantee security and territorial integrity. The international community must continue its policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. EUMM activities should be extended to include both territories. New Rights commit to observing the provisions of the 2008 cease-fire agreement. Georgia's attractiveness to people living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be increased by pursuing constructive policies and respecting democratic values.</p>

PACE delegation worried about political polarisation overshadowing competitive nature of Georgian Elections

Calling the upcoming Georgian parliamentary elections, set to take place in just under two weeks, “crucial for Georgia’s democratic development” and a “litmus test to confirm the country’s commitment to democratic values and principles,” the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) echoed the remarks of NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who used the same metaphor last week to describe the approaching polls.

At this stage in the game, it appears that the PACE delegation did not have much that was novel to say – most of the criticism and the praise issued by the Council of Europe group that visited Tbilisi last week has been said before. However, the delegation was adamant in its support for the importance of all electoral stakeholders abiding by the law and the benefit of extending the “must offer, must carry” legislation beyond the campaign period.

The PACE delegation, led by Luca Volontè of Italy, visited the capital city on 11 and 12 September. Though generally positive about the nature and conduct of the pre-electoral period, the delegation expressed concern in a statement on the visit “about the increasing polarisation and antagonism in the pre-electoral environment, which is overshadowing the election campaign.”

The delegation made clear that many positive advances have been made in Georgia, particularly in reference to previous electoral cycles, however, the negative rhetoric being espoused across the political spectrum is damaging to the public image of the whole electoral process. The statement advises parties to “refrain from such negative campaigning and focus on informing voters about their views and party platforms, according to their proper duties and responsibilities.”

The delegation then urged the authorities and all electoral stakeholders to “take all necessary steps to ensure a constructive and inclusive campaign environment and refrain from any action that would increase tensions or undermine the full and equal participation of all parties in the electoral process.”

As has been customary in recent weeks, the PACE delegation criticised the activities of the State Audit Service (SAS), specifically the fines issued against members of the opposition and several of the opposition parties forming part of the Georgian Dream coalition, reinforcing the comments made by the PACE rapporteurs late last month. The delegation was pleased that the authorities would not uphold the enforcement of the most recent set of fines issued against the Georgian Dream.

In a warning to the opposition, the PACE delegation reminded all those competing in the upcoming elections that it is their duty to abide by the electoral legislative framework. Even, the delegation, included, if the contestants “perceived injustices in the law,” that is not a “justification for breaking the law.”

Civil society members in Georgia who are part of the “This Affects You Too” campaign, will be happy to hear that the PACE delegation is also calling for the Georgian authorities to consider “extending the period in which the “must offer, must carry,” provisions are mandatory and for media providers to consider voluntarily abiding by these principles until the election process has been finalised.”

Volontè stated that “full and equal access of all parties to the media, as well as impartial coverage by media outlets are therefore an essential condition for democratic elections.”

The public campaign has been calling on the government to extend this period and enshrine it into the law on media rather than as a temporary initiative in the electoral code. As of now, the “must offer, must carry” legislation is only applicable for the 60 days leading up to an election, whereas pro-democracy campaigners with “This Affects You Too”, the Georgian National Platform and the Coalition of Media Advocacy, have demanded the initiative become permanent.

“The mass media play a crucial role in the electoral process,” reads the PACE delegation’s statement, “as they are often the primary source of information for voters to acquaint themselves with the views of the parties contesting the elections.”

The delegation called upon the authorities to do everything in their power to “explore all possibilities to improve media access in those regions not covered by cable television,” as the delegation also understands that cable television is “not widely spread in a number of regions in Georgia.”

On a more positive note, the delegation was very pleased with the good work of the multi-partisan electoral bodies created to establish public trust in the election process, specifically the Voters’ List Verification Commission (VLVC), which the delegation felt underlined the potential for cooperation amongst the various political stakeholders in Georgia. The Inter-Agency Task Force also received good reviews from the PACE team which described it, along with the VLVC, as effective in building trust and confidence amongst the electorate.

The statement of the PACE delegation concludes by calling on all those involved in the upcoming elections to “take all possible steps to strengthen the public trust in the election process and refrain from any action that could undermine it.” In direct reference to suggestions made by the opposition that the ruling party is preparing for fraudulent elections, the PACE delegation appealed to parties “not to question the legitimacy of the election and its outcome before the elections have even taken place.” ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould