

# Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

04 September 2012

## The sanctity of the secret ballot

**A secret ballot is an essential prerequisite of any free election. Even in the most sophisticated of democracies ensuring the privacy of the voter so that his or her choice will be secret is a crucial part of the electoral process.**

The issue becomes much more serious in societies in transition where voter intimidation is widespread, and where vote buying remains a serious problem, resulting in a voter needing to show his vote to the buyer to justify the payment.

In elections in the Caucasus over the last two decades a pattern has emerged that requires attention. In the central constituencies of the capitals the procedures concerning the secrecy of the ballot is often strictly adhered to. However the further away one goes from the capital the bigger the problem becomes. In areas densely populated by national minorities the problems become even more serious, sometimes reaching a point where voters are actually asked to show their vote to members of the Precinct Elections Commission before putting it into the ballot box. In some situations in rural areas the head of the family sometimes demands to vote for the whole family – and sometimes is allowed to do so!

Central Elections Commissions and their subsidiaries at District and precinct level need to put special attention to this problem and not assume that procedures are going to be followed, because often they are not.

The layout of the polling stations often leaves much to be desired, making the possibility of privacy very limited. The presence of unauthorised personnel inside polling stations is also often a problem.



However the worst culprits are often people who are in the polling station legitimately, either as precinct commissioners or as legitimate observers. Their behaviour is often intrusive, and illegal. Such behaviour should not be tolerated and it should be noted by both international and domestic observers of the election if it occurs, since it undermines the trust of the electorate in the process.

In the elections in Georgia in a few weeks time this issue needs to be looked at very strictly by international monitors. Many Georgian electors are already complaining of intrusive behaviour by people turning on their doorstep ahead of the elections, either to conduct opinion polls or to canvass for a particular party. In the highly charged and polarised political atmosphere that exists in Georgia ahead of the elections, the sanctity of the secrecy of the ballot needs to be paramount. Both political parties and agencies conducting opinion or exit polls need to respect the voter and those who don't should be charged according to the provisions of the law. ■

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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## Yerevan

Local self-government elections will take place across Armenia on September 9 and 23.

Next week's elections will be held in 481 communities in the regions of Ararat, Armavir, Lori, Shirak, and Syunik, according to Tigran Mukuchyan, Chairman of the Armenian CEC.

Gyumri city is the largest community, with 79 electoral precincts, while Kshuni village in Syunik region is the smallest precinct with only 19 voters. Interestingly, 35% of communities only have one candidate running in the election.

Within these communities, 379 will elect community leaders and 454 will elect members to their respective council of elders.

These elections will be contested by 4,789 candidates, of which Mukuchyan noted 3,236 are running as independent candidates with no party affiliation.

Out of the 716 candidates registered for community leadership positions, only 33 are women.

The Office of the Ombudsperson in Armenia has announced that it will be operating during the local self-government elections. Regional offices were established by an EU-funded project supported by OSCE-ODIHR prior to the May 2012 parliamentary elections to provide support for victims of human rights violations throughout the 2012 and 2013 election season.



A free hotline is available through the Office of the Ombudsman for citizens to report violations and to offer legal advice and assistance to individuals whose rights have been violated during the elections. ■

## Tbilisi

The central Elections Commission of Georgia is continuing with its program of training for staff who are going to be involved in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The training for District

and precinct Elections Commission members are being jointly conducted by the Central Election Commission of Georgia, Center of Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Trainings and the UNDP project "Promoting Credible and Sustainable Electoral Institutions and Processes"

On September 3-9, 2012 the second phase of training for PEC members (Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary) will be conducted. Issues on Voters' List, authorities of PEC executives and application/complaint procedures on election day will be discussed during the training sessions.

The third phase of trainings for PEC members will be organized on September 11-27, 2012. ■

## Kakheti

Georgian opposition leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili stated that the ambition of the Georgian Dream Coalition is to win fifty out of the seventy three seats in the part of the parliamentary elections that are run on the majoritarian system

Throughout the campaign period Ivanishvili has been encouraging supporters to vote for the Georgian Dream in both the majoritarian and PR contests.

At a campaign rally in Kakabeti village on 31 August in Kakheti region, Ivanishvili told supporters, "We should definitely win no less than 50 majoritarian MP candidates – that's the minimum we plan and there is a very high probability of it."

In addition to the 73 candidates running for majoritarian seats, the Georgian Dream is also running 200 list-based candidates, 25% of whom are women. ■

## Tbilisi

The Central Election Commission of Georgia has clarified the terms and rules of electoral registration of out-of-country Georgian citizen entitled to vote. A Georgian citizen should be registered at the consular office in order to vote in the Parliamentary Elections of Georgia at the election precinct formed abroad.

A Citizen not registered at a consulate is entitled to register at the election precinct opened abroad or in the relevant consular office, until September 10, 2012.

The list of the voters registered according to the above mentioned rule is drawn up by the head of the relevant consular office and is submitted to the CEC and the Commission for Ensuring the Accuracy of Voters' List, until September 11, 2012. ■

# Party lists reflect delicate balances within National Movement and Georgian Dream

**The deadline has closed for the submission of the list of candidates – the so-called Party list – for the election of 77 out of the 150 seats in the Parliamentary Elections in Georgia next month. Each party will win seats according to the number of votes it gets, as long as it passes the 5% threshold. Seats are assigned according to the ranking on the list.**

In theory parties should put forward their best people first, in practise the lists reflect delicate power balances.



An interesting feature in the lists of the two main political forces facing each other in the 1 October election is that their most important people are not on the list at all. In the list of the governing United National Movement amongst those missing are the President Mikeil Saakashvili, the Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili, the Mayor of Tbilisi, Gigi Ugulava, the Head of the National Security Council, Giga Bokeria and the Prosecutor General, Zurab Adeishvili. Many think that it is this quintet, with possibly one or two others on the side, that are the real decision makers in Georgia. The fact that their names are not on the list however does not mean that their influence is not reflected. Political observers see the UNM list as a compromise between the interests of the members

of the Quintet and other elements within the ruling party. The list of the UNM is headed by David Bakradze, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament.

On the opposition side the situation is not very different. The main person of the opposition, Bidzina Ivanishvili had said all along that unless his citizenship was restored he will not be himself a candidate. The list of his Georgian Dream bloc reflects the nature of the coalition. Heading the list is former footballer Kakha Kaladze, immediately followed by the leaders of the six parties in the coalition. The rest of the list reflects the delicate balance that is the hall mark of any coalition.

Both lists have on the whole good quality candidates, a few but enough women, and especially the UNM list, some young people, recently empowered by an amendment in the electoral law. Under the Georgian system people sitting in Parliament cannot hold office in the Executive. So many of those elected on the list of whoever wins the election will likely have to resign in order to take up Ministerial posts and fill in other jobs in the administration. Apart from that a number of candidates from both parties are also running in the majoritarian elections for the other 73 seats in the parliament. If they get elected they will have to renounce their place on the party list, enabling another person further down the list to replace them.

With the parties and their candidates finally known, it is now up to the Georgian people to make their decision as to which of the teams they want to run the country for the next five years. ■

Report Compiled by the editorial team of CEW

# Ivanishvili issues appeal to international community ahead of elections: Warns of a spiraling political crisis in Georgia

**By this letter, I would like to appeal to the international democratic community.**

**The fate of Georgia will be decided by the outcome of the upcoming October 1 election, and to a great degree, how the election will proceed will be determined by the leaders of international democracies around the world: Will Georgia finally start on a path towards democratic development or will the country continue its fight against authoritarianism and post-communism.**

I entered this race because I saw the extreme to which Georgia was languishing, and I considered it my duty to do what I could to save it from itself. The Saakashvili regime has nearly destroyed my homeland in myriad ways during the past years, exerting unprecedented force and even violence against the business community and subjugating the economy almost entirely. Crackdowns on civil and democratic rallies, as well as on human rights overall, have become a normal phenomenon in addition to the overall violation of human rights. Almost unbelievably so, the processes of imprisonment and plea-bargaining have become routine and people impoverished, intimidated and abused. Free speech has been limited, while state-controlled media have turned into propaganda dispensing tools and pseudo-opposition politicians, parties and media outlets have joined the web of lies, creating an environment in which people have developed distrust of politics and elections.

It was for the sake of much-needed change, the restoration of justice and the country's democratic development that I decided to run to enter politics. Since October 2011 to the present, I have successfully united our previously scattered and weakened oppositional forces and formulated the following priorities of our political coalition: to honour Georgia's Constitution; eradicate corruption at all levels; introduce an independent judiciary; promote a free media; protect human rights; empower civil society; create prospects for the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; improve the investment environment; regulate relations between Russia; promote European and Euro-Atlantic integration; strengthen Georgia's strategic partnership with the United States. These are the goals of our coalition, which the people of Georgia have come to believe out of their high confidence in me and my reputation.

Along with the Georgian people, however, Saakashvili has also realized that my participation in the upcoming election has upset his plans and created an impassable obstacle along the regime's clear path to permanent power.

The recognition of this obstacle is why, from the day I entered this race, Saakashvili started to persecute me as a political opponent, on one hand, and to instil fear and hatred and in the public, on the other. As early as the fourth day of my campaign, he and his regime revoked my citizenship and tried to marginalize my participation in the political process. Two weeks later, he launched an attack on my private property and did the following:

- Abused the Constitution
- Arrested Georgian Dream supporters and jeopardized their employment
- Imposed millions of dollars in fines against the political coalition and its member parties, severely limiting their political activities
- Hijacked the commercial Cartu Bank's armoured cash delivery vehicle and used legislative and administrative gadgetry to drain GEL 190 million from Cartu Bank. Leading to its near bankruptcy
- Imposed fines on and seized the property of the coalition's service contractors, including auctioning of their assets
- Fined me personally over 130 million GEL
- Invented millions of dollars in campaign expenditures that the Georgian government is counting against the coalition's spending cap, so that the government can disqualify the coalition after the election and ban its members from the parliament in the event the spending cap is breached.

In addition to the financial attacks on the campaign and me, the regime developed legislative amendments and established a new agency of political repressions – the Chamber of Control's Political Parties Financial Monitoring Department. The department exists only to restrict the Georgian Dream's and my own personal political activities.

So far, the Political Parties Financial Monitoring Department has auctioned off our contributors' personal residences; fined and subjected to degrading interrogation hundreds of our members and activists; sequestered hundreds of thousands of civilians'

satellite dishes; and fined the companies distributing these dishes millions of GEL. The new "Must Carry" rule, which has only increases the independent media's access to viewers by 25 percent, cannot be considered an alternative to satellite dishes. Moreover, it will only be enforced until the election day, thus allowing for the population to exist in an information vacuum during the vote counting process.

Election day was set for Monday, October 1, a workday, substantially complicating participation in elections by Georgians living abroad. Not surprisingly, the judiciary, in total obedience to Saakashvili, is acting merely as the government's notary.

All this creates a tense electoral environment in the country and has impeded the coalition's political activity to such a degree that a fair and free election on October 1 is out of the question. Due to the matters discussed above and my responsibility before the Georgian people, it is my duty to announce that if no significant changes in the actions of the government are made starting today, a free and fair election will not take place in Georgia.

It is not our goal to fight against election fraud, rather to win the election itself.

Therefore, although it is impossible to fully remedy the effects of the repression of the Georgian people in the past 10 months leading up to the election, the Georgian Dream is willing to sign a commitment letter recognizing the validity of the election results if the electoral environment is radically changed from now until polling day. The following demands must also be met:

1. The enforcement of all fines, sequestrations or sanctions initiated by the State Chamber of Audit must stop immediately as recommended by the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections in the case with the court order section imposing fines on the parties;
2. The Chamber of Control must provide a detailed accounting of its calculation of the coalition's expenses and received donations, including providing concrete and legitimate evidence, so as to ensure it does not claim Georgian Dream has exceeded the campaign spending cap and impose harsh penalties without proof;
3. Ensure that all necessary conditions for citizens of Georgia living abroad (25 percent of the voters) are met to enable their participation in the election, even if it requires rescheduling the polling day;
4. Remove immediately all obstacles put in place to prevent private companies from distributing satellite dishes among the population, and the government support for other projects planned to increase access to information by the public, e.g. initiative by Georgian emigrants;
5. A coalition representative must be made a member of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections, and the agency must work on a daily basis, in a transparent manner, and immediately consider all politically motivated cases of persecution of the Georgian people;
6. In order to monitor compliance with the Code of Ethics proposed by the civic sector and accepted by the coalition, an effective mechanism must be created with the participation of international organizations.

The only opinion still respected by Saakashvili is that of the international democratic community. This was evidenced by the government's recent concessions in relation to a number of incidents (for example, after harsh criticism by the European Council and OSCE representatives, the regime removed holds on the parties' bank accounts, escorted unauthorized persons out of the coalition headquarters, and postponed the enforcement of certain fines.

None of our requests require constitutional changes or a long time to fulfill. All of our conditions can be met provided that the international democratic community is willing to address Saakashvili and categorically demand that he stop exerting violence against his own people and make our electoral environment compatible with international standards.

The people of Georgia as well as the international democratic community face the same choice – either we take decisive measures immediately to ensure the fairness and freeness of the elections, or live with the consequences of a stolen election and a country spiraling further into political crisis. ■

Source: Georgian Dream

# Reactions to Ivanishvili's demands.

Georgian Government rejects Saakashvili's demands.

**The Georgian government has rejected the conditions which the largest opposition coalition says are necessary in order for the October 1 parliamentary election to be considered fair.**

Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the Georgian Dream coalition on Thursday asked the government to respect six principles, as necessary conditions in order to declare the election as fair and the results valid.

The government responded by rejecting the list of principles on Friday, saying that it considers these demands groundless. Chiora Taktakishvili, spokesperson for the ruling party, said the president and the National Movement party have already expressed their readiness to make the upcoming election the most free and fair in Georgia's history.

She said the government has taken many steps to this end, including adopting the so-called code of conduct for political parties. "It was prepared on the basis of recommendations by civil society, and Georgian Dream refuses to share the principles of this document."

Georgian Dream refuses to sign the code of conduct, saying they think there are important issues which haven't been included. "The way Ivanishvili is presenting groundless demands makes us think that the goal of Georgian Dream is not to participate in free and fair elections, but to bring disorder after the election," Taktakishvili said.

The National Movement calls on Georgian Dream to follow the regulations of the law, avoid using hate speech and violence, recognize the election results which will be approved by the Central Election Commission and unbiased international observers. Ivanishvili said Thursday said that his coalition will defend people's vote only by peaceful means and not call for confrontation.

But following the government's statement, Ivanishvili told journalists that the international community and his political force have common views, which means that if the government doesn't respect the principles they presented, the election will not be considered fair by the international community. ■

Source: CEW with [www.dfwatch.net](http://www.dfwatch.net).

Georgian CEC invites Ivanishvili to go and see for himself.



**The Georgian CEC has issued a terse statement in reply to warnings by Georgia's opposition with regard to possible fraud in the upcoming elections.**

The statement said: "The Central Election Commission of Georgia denies that there is any basis in fact for a statement made by Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the election bloc "Bidzina Ivanishvili - Georgian Dream," accusing the CEC of preparing to engaging in electoral fraud. On August 31 during the broadcast of Channel 9's "Main Question," Mr. Ivanishvili stated the following: "... the CEC office will close for one or two hours, or they will suspend the process used in the previous elections, they will rewrite the sheets, they will expel our commission members, etc, and afterwards will summarize and publish the results..."

As a political leader, Mr. Ivanishvili should refrain from slandering the electoral administration of Georgia based only on fabrications and accusations. Such irresponsible actions seem designed to erode public confidence in the electoral process and will impact the electoral environment negatively. All political leaders of Georgia have a duty to help strengthen the electoral process.

We hope that the above-mentioned statement was made out of ignorance and not ill-intention, and we would like to help address Mr. Ivanishvili's lack of knowledge about the election administration and its activities by extending him an invitation to visit the Central Election Commission of Georgia on Monday, September 3, for a personal briefing on the activities, procedures, and oversight of the election administration. ■

Source: CEC of Georgia.

NDI blames them all.

**The Long-term election observation mission of the American National Democratic Institute reports that actions of the ruling United National Movement and the Georgian Dream bloc create false perceptions and undermine public confidence in the elections. The polarization between the ruling United National Movement (UNM) and the Georgian Dream bloc, the two largest electoral subjects, is escalating as a result of rhetoric characterizing each other as a fundamental threat to either a sovereign or a democratic Georgia. This rhetoric is compounded by the actions of both groups, creating false perceptions and undermining public confidence in the elections", the interim report of NDI reads.**

NDI considers that the government has the obligation to enact fair electoral laws and to enforce them impartially; and the opposition to adhere to the law. Both sides, at times, appear to be avoiding these responsibilities in their respective attempts to gain political advantage", the report reads.

NDI assesses the campaign environment. "As the discussion of government interference often turns into undocumented allegations of widespread abuses, it is difficult to discern whether the examples cited are from the current election cycle or past experience".

"Rumors and unfounded allegations appear to be used as campaign tools to undermine candidates, parties and the electoral process. A video provided by the Georgian Dream in an effort to substantiate allegations of violence targeting their supporters showed violence taking place in previously reported incidents (such as those in Karaleti and Mereti), but it did not demonstrate who initiated the conflicts. Despite the staging of two major Georgian Dream rallies in Batumi and Rustavi without incident, there continue to be sporadic incidences of violence. These serve to perpetuate the notion that the two largest electoral subjects are acting like enemies, not political adversaries or electoral opponents", the report reads.

NDI long-term election observation mission considers that "both sides need to contain animosities and prevent violence, while the government has a responsibility to ensure equal protection of the law and prosecution of violators". Also "those making allegations should provide adequate documentation to substantiate such claims". ■

Report compiled by CEW with Inter-Press News.

# Opposition must decide whether to participate in TV debates in Georgia

**The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) has announced that it will host TV debates between prime ministerial and the top-of-the list candidates ahead of the 1 October parliamentary elections, on the 9 and 18 of September, respectively.**

GPB is a publicly funded television station and is obliged under the Election Code to hold debates ahead of the elections.

GPB has sent out formal invitations to four parties which qualify under the Georgian Election Code for the debates. Invitations were sent to the ruling United National Movement (UNM), the Georgian Dream coalition, the Christian Democratic Movement and the Labour Party.

The debates will be moderated by Eka Mishveladze, a journalist at GPB and will last about one hour and a half. According to Gia Chanturia, the director of GPB, the format of the debates will consist of two-minute opening statements from each candidate, followed by three questions posed by the moderator to each candidate. The questions will be selected from surveys conducted by international organisations as well as questions e-mailed to the station by other media representatives. The aim, according to Chanturia, will be to pose questions that are the most relevant for the Georgian electorate.

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of the Georgian Dream coalition as well as the coalition's candidate for Prime Minister, though not refusing to participate in the debate, has come out against the format proposed by GPB.

Ivanishvili challenged President Saakashvili to a debate on 21 August, stating he would refuse to debate the UNM candidate for Prime Minister, Vano Merabishvili, as he feels the current role of prime minister is treated as a "pensioner's" role. Since the role of Prime Minister is set to change following the 2013 Presidential elections and gain significant responsibility - primarily duties that currently fall under the responsibility of the President - Ivanishvili feels that as the Georgian Dream's candidate for Prime Minister now and in 2013 he should be able to debate against President Saakashvili, whom several pundits in Georgia believe plans to take over as the UNM's Prime Ministerial candidate when he steps down from the Presidency in 2013.

Again, the opposition leader stated that if a debate with the President was not possible, he would debate Merabishvili only if he could take on several other leading candidates in the ruling party at the same time.

Furthermore, Ivanishvili restated his refusal - and the refusal of his party - to participate in a debate which includes the Christian Democratic Movement and the Labour Party, which he referred to as "pseudo-opposition" parties.

Calling the format of the debates as offered by the GPB a "falsehood", Ivanishvili explained that the debates can be nothing but a sham "when CDM [Christian Democratic Movement] is represented as an opposition



**Prime Minister and government heavyweight Vano Merabishvili will represent the UNM in the debates even though he is not a candidate in the election**

party; [CDM] is Saakashvili's tail; it's an extension of the National Movement" adding that the Labour Party and New Rights also fall into this category.

UNM spokesperson, Chiora Taktakishvili, confirmed that the UNM is ready to participate in the debates and announced that Vano Merabishvili will participate as the UNMs prime ministerial candidate and Davit Bakradze, the current Speaker of Parliament and UNMs first candidate on the party list, will participate in the debate for the number one positioned candidates.

Upon announcement of the debate participants, Taktakishvili stated on behalf of the UNM, "We have repeatedly said that the goal of the National Movement is to win in free and fair elections. So, we challenge our opponents in election debates, which will contribute to voters making an informed choice." ■

# Saakashvili campaigns relentlessly throughout the four corners of Georgia

**President Mikheil Saakashvili has been campaigning relentlessly throughout the four corners of Georgia, bringing the message of the United National Movement ahead of the 1 October elections. The UNM is basing its campaign on its achievements in government over the last eight years and by striking a contrast between the Georgia of today and that of a decade ago.**

Saakashvili last week visited Guria last week where he learned about the process of the state insurance program at the Ozurgeti Clinic

He later visited the Ozurgeti Medical Center, and learned on site about the state insurance services for pensioners and children under the age of 6. The President received information about the details of the process from the insured patients personally. Mikheil Saakashvili later spoke to the medical personnel about the issues related to salary increase.

“This clinic is like those I have seen in the Netherlands. The increase of salaries beginning in September is the first stage. They will increase even more. Your salaries will now be increased by 20%, but the increased income should be mainly distributed to nurses, doctors’ assistants, and junior medical personnel. This is what’s the most important” Saakashvili was quoted as saying by the presidential press Service.

The UNM candidate for a Majoritarian Deputy of Parliament from Ozurgeti, Ramaz Nikolaishvili, accompanied the president during his visit to Ozurget. The web site of the president of Georgia stated that 2.4 million persons are insured within the scope of the state insurance program including pensioners, persons with disabilities, students, and children under the age of 6.

President Mikeil Saakashvili also met with the youth resting at the Anaklia Patriot Camp and spoke to them about the importance of involving the public in the process of building the new city Lazika. According to the President, Georgian specialists should be the ones to build this city, and for this the country needs many new specialists. He noted that Georgia must definitely develop and jobs be created so that every family benefits, and new forces as well as centers of trade, industry, logistics and tourism be created in the regions.

“We began construction of the Lazika seaport approximately one week ago, and you can see it from here. We will open the Lazika City Hall and seaport administration in September. and this is the center everything will be developed around. To us, it is very important that the public actively participates in the construction of Lazika. This means that we will organize seminars, public debates, and television reviews here. Firstly, this seaport will be built, and later a city around it and I want the public to actively participate in this affair in order for us to consider everyone’s opinion. Georgia is a democratic country building a new city. We won’t be able to do it like it is done elsewhere, in centralized government regime systems, where everything depends on one person. We are a country which has a collective people’s government” – stated the President of Georgia.



Mikheil Saakashvili later focused attention on the existing changes in the education system of which he distinguished one change. He mainly touched on the education financing issue. He said that a prospective student, who has passed the minimal requirement on national exams but has no means of financing education can approach the Ministry of Defense, go through a 12 months military service, and in return the state will finance 4 years of higher education for that student. On the other hand, those who could not even satisfy the minimal point requirement can better their scores throughout the entire year.

“We have interesting changes in the education system. Firstly, I want to tell the prospective students who could not pass exams this year, which from now on they can basically take exams each month. They will be able to arrive at test centers each month and take exams in desired subjects. This will be a motivation for sophistication. We have the same approach towards teachers. They will be able to pass exams in a similar way...so if you couldn’t do it in summer you can take exams in September, October, November...now the second issue. Let’s say you have passed the minimum requirement, you but do not have enough money to finance your education. You have a chance to retake exams at the end of each academic year and better your results. For example, if you have partial scholarship the first year and you do well, then it is possible for you to have a 100% tuition scholarship the following year. The Ministry of Defense offers everyone a 12 month service after which it will finance all four years of their education in universities. Despite what kind of income your families have, this gives you an opportunity to go to college no matter what. If you go through a 2 year military service then you will have a contract with the Ministry of Defense regarding the financing of your Master’s Degree. No matter where young persons live across the unoccupied parts of Georgia, we have to give all of them an opportunity to have new prospects” he stated according to the presidential press Service. ■

Source: The Press Service of the President of Georgia

# “Who are all these people?”

## 17 parties and blocs to contest Georgian elections

**Fifteen political parties and two blocs have been registered to contest the parliamentary elections in Georgia on 1 October. They have now also submitted their list of candidates to the Central Elections Commission.**

18 other parties who started the process of registration have not been registered. According to the Central Elections Commission of Georgia six withdrew at their own request, six did not submit a list of supporters as they are required to do by law, and six submitted incomplete or inaccurate documentation. None of those refused registration constitute a major political force and the CEC is deemed to have acted according to the law with regards to the registration process.

A question often asked by those who do not follow Georgian politics often is who are all these people? Why do many of these parties appear only during election time?

The appearance of satellite parties is not a purely Georgian phenomena, but has been a feature in a number of other post Soviet countries over the last two decades. Its origin is in the Soviet system which at times, in an effort to show diversity created fake parties that ran symbolically for elections. The whole process was carefully manipulated by the Communist Party. Old habits die hard and some of the post soviet political parties, even those professing to be democratic and liberal, saw benefit in having satellite parties. This was particularly useful for entrenched ruling parties that wanted to dilute the impact or importance of the real opposition parties, but opposition parties have resorted to this tactic also. Political parties during elections are supposed to be treated equally, so they get free air time, may be eligible for some election funding, but perhaps more importantly are able to participate in the election process by having representatives within the polling stations. Phantom political parties are therefore sometimes vehicles for election fraud. Sometimes parties are registered with names similar to a main rival to confuse the voters. There is little evidence that this tactic works, but amazingly it is still used often.

In Georgia some of these trends exist – some have even been developed to sophisticated levels. Also a number of parties have glorious historical roots, but current perspectives. So parties appear on the eve of elections and then go dormant for five years, until they are next called to their mission. ■

This report is prepared by the CEW editorial team. Names of parties and data on registration are taken according to information from the Central Elections Commission of Georgia.



The 15 political parties and two blocs registered for the 1 October Parliamentary elections in Georgia are:

1. “Justice for Georgia”
2. “Freedom – The Way of Zviad Gamsakhurdia”
3. “Our Country”
4. Political Union “Jondi Baghaturia – Georgian Group”
5. Political Union “New Rights”
6. “Merab Kostava Society”
7. “Future Georgia”
8. “Labour Council of Georgia”
9. “Bidzina Ivanishvili – Georgian Dream”
10. “National Democratic Party”
11. Political Union “Kakha Kukava – Free Georgia”
12. “Public Movement”
13. “Giorgi Targamadze – Christian-Democratic Union”
14. “United National Movement – More Benefits to People”
15. “Shalva Natelashvili – Labour Party of Georgia”
16. “People’s Party”
17. “Georgian Sportsmen’s Community”

Source: Georgian CEC