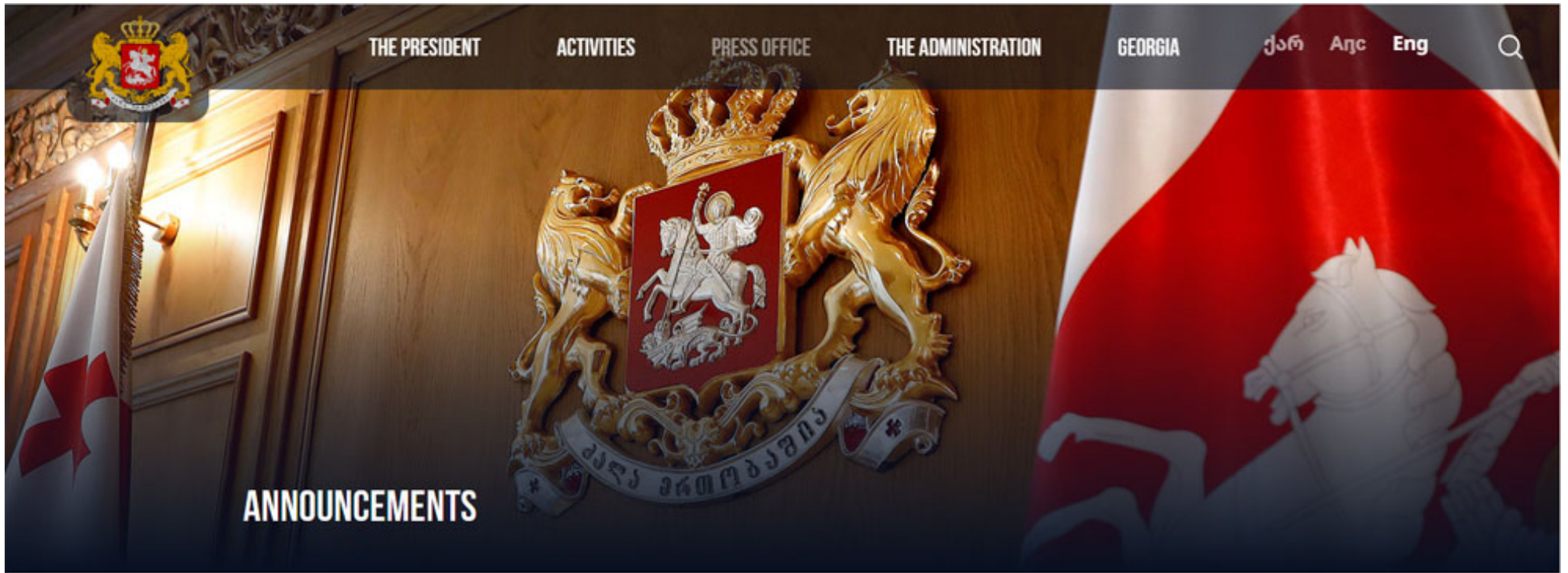


President Salome Zourabichvili Set to Veto Election Code Amendments



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The President's administration announced that President Salome Zourabichvili will veto the amendments made to the Election Code today.

The statement released by the administration expressed concerns about recent amendments to Georgia's Election Code, noting their contradiction with the recommendations of the Venice Commission and the European Union. It highlighted concerns regarding the politicization of the

process for appointing the election commission, potentially resulting in a biased administration.

The President's administration has expressed concerns that one-party control could potentially undermine trust in the electoral process. Furthermore, the President has reaffirmed her commitment to veto any amendments not aligned with European standards, emphasizing the critical importance of upholding democratic principles

"Today, while the new Prime

Minister is in Brussels on his first international visit and an international observation mission is present in the country, the Parliament of Georgia, representing the ruling majority, adopted changes to the election code. These changes contradict both the Venice Commission and the nine recommendations of the European Union.

With the adopted changes, the process of appointing the head and members of the election commission, previously selected and elected through broad consensus,

has become entirely fictitious, tailored solely to the political interests of the ruling party.

A risk has emerged that the elections might be conducted by a one-party, biased, and ruling party-controlled election administration, potentially leading to mistrust in both the public and the international community.

As the President has said many times, the President of Georgia will veto amendments to the Election Code, as well as any law that is not in line with

the European path of the country," the statement reads.

The Parliament has adopted amendments to the Election Code and Regulations in the third reading. 81 deputies supported the project, while 6 voted against it. The new amendments to the Code entail changes in the procedure for electing the CEC chairman and members, as well as the elimination of the position of the CEC deputy allocated for the opposition quota.

ISFED: Amendments to Election Code Don't Align with Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR Recommendations

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

According to the evaluation by the International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED), the amendments to the election code, approved by the Parliament in the third reading, do not align with the recommendations of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR.

"Candidates for the chairmanship/membership of the CEC will once again be selected by the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia and presented to the Parliament. The Parliament will then have the authority to elect the candidates for a full term of 5 years with a simple majority. These factors damage the independence of the CEC and lead to the strengthening of the influence of one party on the election administration. Ensuring the independence of the election administration is one of the 9 steps defined by the European Union for Georgia. Therefore, this decision of the parliamentary majority does not contribute to the

country's progress toward joining the European Union," the statement reads.

ISFED mentioned in their statement that the problematic nature of staffing the CEC was addressed in the mid-term evaluation presented by the European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, in June 2023. This concern was later reiterated in the November 8 enlargement document of the European Commission.

According to ISFED, the amendments made to the Election Code in 2023 deviated from the principles outlined in Charles Michel's document.

"On December 18, 2023, the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR published their joint opinions on the above-mentioned draft laws, criticizing both the 2023 changes regarding the staffing of the professional part of the CEC, as well as the new draft law adopted in the first

„საქართველოს ელექციის კოდექსის“ განმარტება

საქსომის დანაშაულებების შესახებ
 მიწვევები წესი უპირობო და
 პარტიული პრინციპების გამოყენება
 და კანდიდატების არჩევანის პროცესი



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6467; Euro - 2.8600; GBP - 3.3378; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8614; Swiss Franc - 3.0049

ISFED: Amendments to Election Code Don't Align with Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR Recommendations

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

reading in September.

In the joint opinion of these organizations, it is noted that the changes implemented in 2023 gave the ruling party full control over the candidate nomination process, and they allowed the CEC chairman and professional members to be elected

without the support of the opposition.

The document also emphasizes the importance of the support of 2/3 of the parliamentary majority during the election of the CEC chairman and professional members, as well as the anti-deadlock mechanism offered by the agreement reached with the mediation of Charles Michel," the statement reads.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

European Commissioner Announces Reduced Roaming Costs for Georgian Citizens in the EU



Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, stated that the Georgian government has promptly tackled roaming issues, resulting in reduced costs for Georgian citizens in the European Union. He noted that Georgia's attainment of candidate status has already produced tangible results, citing progress in addressing the roaming issue as an example.

"In terms of roaming, we are very satisfied with the Georgian government's progress. Currently, we have all the nec-

essary elements to propose to the Council of the European Union to expedite Georgia's integration into the roaming area," Várhelyi stated.

The European Commissioner emphasized that this achievement is "as tan-

gible as the liberalization of the visa regime."

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze Meets with President of the European Council Charles Michel

During his official visit to Brussels, Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Kobakhidze met with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. Kobakhidze emphasized that his visit signifies the Georgian government's com-

mitment to prioritizing accession to the European Union. He thanked Michel for his support and acknowledged the President's personal involvement in Georgia's EU integration process. In response, Michel congratulated Kobakhidze



on his appointment and wished him success.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze highlighted Georgia's momentum in EU accession since its candidacy, affirming continued dedication and hoping for ongoing EU support.

The meeting also addressed Georgia's political landscape. The Prime Minister confirmed the government's invitation to the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission, underscoring their commitment to ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections.

The discussions also covered Georgia's occupied territories, with Kobakhidze thanking the EU for its support of sovereignty and calling for increased involvement in resolving the Russia-Georgia conflict.

"Both in the format of the Association Council and at bilateral meetings, we discussed various directions of cooperation as well as specific projects. The Black Sea cable project and the issue of roaming were especially highlighted. It is crucial to implement these projects, as they are important for our country and population. We are committed to taking concrete steps in cooperation with the European Union to deepen overall cooperation and to implement these specific projects," Kobakhidze said.

EBRD and EU support upgrade of Georgia's largest hydropower plant

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has decided to provide a Euro 28 million sovereign loan

to modernise and rehabilitate the Enguri hydropower plant, Georgia's largest electricity plant.



The financing extended to the plant's operating company, Engurhesi LTD, will be complemented by a grant of € 7.05 million from the European Union.

This financing package will fund long-term structural stability works of the Enguri dam, repairs to the underground tunnel and penstock to ensure a more reliable power generation and grid system. In addition, the investment will reduce water leakages in the headrace tunnel and enable additional renewable energy production.

The funds will also be used to construct vital infrastructure, such as roads to monitor the dam, improve the safety and reliability of the electricity grid and

energy generation, as well as create a fish passage downstream of the Enguri dam.

Built in the 1970s, an energy complex comprising the Enguri hydropower plant and the Vardnili hydropower plants, meets approximately 30 per cent of the nation's electricity needs and is key to the country's energy infrastructure.

The EBRD has been involved in the rehabilitation of the Enguri hydropower plant since 1998, helping to reduce Georgia's reliance on electricity imports, improve energy security, and support the country's commitment to a greener and more sustainable future.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Wednesday, February 21

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 10°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

Thursday, February 22

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

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