

OSCE/ODIHR Report Highlights Polarization and Concerns Ahead of October 26 Parliamentary Elections

By Liza Mchedlidze

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) released an interim report on October 11, evaluating the election environment leading up to the October 26 parliamentary elections. The report highlights the deep political polarization and tensions, along with concerns from opposition parties regarding state institutions and the protection of fundamental rights, such as association and expression.

The report points to a "highly polarized" campaign atmosphere, with some EOM contacts reporting alleged intimidation tactics by ruling party supporters and state authorities against their campaign activities and voters. Additionally, the ruling party has framed the election as a choice between peace and war, while most opposition parties present it as a referendum on the country's geopolitical stance.

While many of the EOM's interlocutors trust the election administration's technical and organizational capabilities, concerns have been raised about the impartiality of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Specifically, the simplified decision-making process, the removal of the opposition-appointed deputy chairperson, and the recent changes in appointment methods have sparked worries about the election administration's neutrality.

Since the last parliamentary elections, the Election Code has undergone over 20 amendments.



The report acknowledges that while the 2022 and 2023 amendments were publicly discussed and addressed some previous recommendations, the 2024 changes lacked sufficient public consultation. The absence of consensus has raised concerns about their potential impact, with several ODIHR recommendations remaining unaddressed, including those related to campaign finance, misuse of administrative resources, media regulations, and the impartiality of the election administration.

The report also raises con-

cerns about the capacity of Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) to handle the increased number of registered voters per polling station, which has doubled since the last election. There is also a need for transparent auditing of voting technology and enhanced voter education to dispel fears about breaches of vote secrecy.

On the issue of voter lists, most ODIHR interlocutors did not report significant concerns, although some noted inaccuracies, including the presence of deceased voters and citizens liv-

ing abroad.

So far, election administration and courts have handled about 120 complaints, mostly related to lower-level commission appointments, misuse of administrative resources, and violations of campaign rules. Many complaints were dismissed, and concerns have been raised about the ability of law enforcement, the judiciary, and the election administration to impartially handle politically sensitive matters.

Regarding observers, as of October 10, the CEC had accred-

ited 68 civil observer organizations with 2,602 observers and 51 international observer groups with 512 observers. Some civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in long-term election monitoring noted a more challenging environment following the enactment of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence.

Lastly, the report points out that women's representation in elected positions remains low, particularly following the 2024 amendments that abolished the mandatory gender quota.

Strong Georgia Leader Ana Natsvlishvili Criticizes Georgian Dream for Creating Unfair Election Environment



By Liza Mchedlidze

Ana Natsvlishvili, a leader of the Strong Georgia party, has strongly criticized the ruling Georgian Dream party following the release of the OSCE election monitoring mission's interim report. According to Natsvlishvili, the report reflects a systemically unfair and unequal election environment, far from democratic standards, which has been orchestrated by the current government.

"The report reflects the fundamentally unfair and unequal election environment that Georgian Dream has established. This is a clear example of a hijacked state, where institutions are staffed based on the ruling party's trust, not the people's. These institutions are being used to repress and obstruct opposition parties, and the media environment is neither free nor equal," Natsvlishvili stated.

She stressed that the situation described in the report is a key indicator of why every citizen's vote in the October 26

elections is crucial. Natsvlishvili urged voters to participate actively in order to combat any potential interference, manipulation, or attempts to rig the election process. "The great activity, mobilization, and principledness of the citizens can stand in front of any interference, manipulation, and attempt to hijack the elections from the government," she said.

Natsvlishvili also framed the upcoming elections as a defining moment for Georgia's future, with the potential to either steer the country towards European integration or further entrench the current regime's authoritarian tendencies. "This election is not only about choosing representatives; it's about the future direction of our country. Every citizen's vote is a statement for democracy, freedom, and a European future. Georgian Dream's manipulation of state institutions is a direct threat to these values," she added, urging voters to resist any efforts that undermine their democratic rights.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7263; Euro - 2.9804; GBP - 3.5600; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8367; Swiss Franc - 3.1782

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Bidzina Ivanishvili's plan to restore Georgia's territorial integrity

Head of the parliamentary elections, one of Bidzina Ivanishvili's main promises is to restore the country's territorial integrity through peaceful means. For this, he is asking for a constitutional majority in the parliament to make the necessary changes to the constitution. However, no details have been provided about what changes are being proposed, and the opposition suspects that Georgian Dream and its honorary chairman are acting under Russia's instructions and plan to recognize the "independence" of the Russian-occupied territories.

Upon Ivanishvili's third return to politics, several pro-government commentators hinted that he came back to politics to restore the country's territorial integrity. As the election campaign intensified, Ivanishvili indeed began speaking on this topic, claiming that Georgian Dream needs a constitutional majority to restore the country's territorial integrity and make the necessary changes to the constitution. However, neither he nor other Georgian Dream leaders have specified what those changes would be. Meanwhile,

Russia and the puppet authorities of the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia have made mocking comments about Ivanishvili's plans.

For instance, Russian Duma member Konstantin Zatulin stated that the train for Georgia's territorial restoration "has long passed" and that there will be "no return of Abkhazia or South Ossetia" to Georgia. He added that Russia would not pressure these regions in any way and would not back down from recognizing their "independence." Similar statements were made by the puppet regimes of Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, who also reaffirmed that they have no intention of giving up their "independence," and Russia's position remains unchanged on this matter. Georgian Dream has ignored these comments, refraining from making any response.

On the other hand, representatives of Georgian Dream were pleased with a statement by

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who said Moscow was ready to help Georgia "normalise relations" with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgian Dream Secretary General and Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze was the first to comment on this statement, followed by other party representatives echoing similar sentiments.

However, Georgian Dream commentators failed to address Lavrov's full statement. Lavrov referred to Abkhazia and "South Ossetia" as independent states and mentioned that Moscow would help with normalisation efforts only if these "countries" were interested.

The opposition interpreted Lavrov's statement as open support for Georgian Dream ahead of the elections and saw it as confirmation that Russia and Georgian Dream were acting in concert. While Georgian Dream talks about restoring the country's territorial integrity, Lavrov's statement was pre-

sented as hopeful, as though Russia might somehow assist in this process. Yet, Lavrov's message contained nothing new; he simply reiterated Russia's position since the August 2008 war. According to him, Georgia must recognize Sokhumi and Tskhinvali as independent states and sign non-aggression pacts with them, while Russia would act as a mediator. The opposition has argued that Russia cannot serve as a mediator because it is an occupying force. They fear that Georgian Dream plans to execute the Russian plan, which would divide the country.

Former Prime Minister and leader of the party For Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, stated that discussing Georgia's territorial integrity behind closed doors and keeping citizens uninformed is unacceptable. Gakharia demanded Ivanishvili answer three key public questions:

1. In what form and under what conditions do they plan to restore Georgia's territorial in-

tegrity?

2. What constitutional changes are they seeking a parliamentary majority for?

3. In the context of growing tensions with the West, how do they plan to maintain the policy of non-recognition?

Georgian Dream has not responded to these questions, but opposition criticism was so strong that some party representatives, while commenting on Lavrov's statement, demanded that Russia take appropriate steps, including withdrawing its forces from Georgian territory.

In the little time left before the elections, it is unlikely that the situation will change. Georgian Dream will continue discussing the restoration of territorial integrity without specifying any details, and Moscow might make some "warm" statement about starting negotiations. If Georgian Dream stays in power after the elections, steps may be taken toward "normalisation" according to the Russian plan.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian President Zourabichvili to Present Technical Government Before Elections, Urges Opposition to Commit to Pro-European Charter



On October 12, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili announced her intention to form a technical government ahead of the parliamentary elections. During a briefing at the Orbeliani Palace, she called on the four main opposition alliances to reaffirm their commitment to the Georgian Charter, which

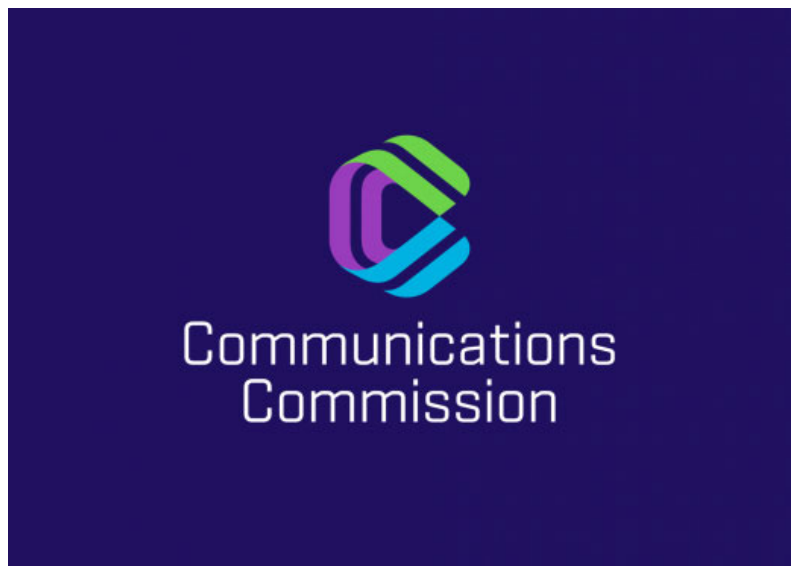
outlines the country's plan to return to the European Union path. She has been meeting with the pro-European opposition groups — Unity to Save Georgia, Coalition for Changes, Strong Georgia, and For Georgia — to review the Charter and ensure all its points are met. The President also received assurances from European leaders that Georgia's EU accession talks would resume if the Charter is fully implemented.

While Zourabichvili confirmed broad support from opposition parties, she highlighted differing interpretations of one key point: the formation of a technical government responsible for executing the Charter. She stressed that this government, focused solely on implementing the Charter, must be in place before the elections to ensure stability and progress under parliamentary oversight.

Zourabichvili urged opposition parties to demonstrate their full commitment to the Charter, warning that the country's future stability relies on this collective effort.

TV Networks Rustavi 2 and TV Imedi Found in Violation of Election Code

Meanwhile, TV Imedi faced similar charges for refusing to air both paid political ads and illegal dissemination of public opin-



The Georgian Communications Commission has found TV Company Rustavi 2 and TV Imedi in violation of the Election Code for failing to air paid political advertisements. Rustavi 2 was cited for not broadcasting paid ads from the political union Strong Georgia - Lelo for the People, for Freedom, despite having a signed agreement to do so.

ion poll results.

The Commission has drawn up a protocol of administrative offenses against both TV stations. According to the complaint filed by Strong Georgia - Lelo, TV Imedi's refusal to air the opposition's political advertisements became public knowledge on the same day through media reports.

Weather

Monday, October 14

Day Rain
High: 17°C

Night Showers
Low: 13°C

Tuesday, October 15

Day Showers
High: 19°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 13°C

outlined the country's plan to return to the European Union path.

Zourabichvili emphasized that the Charter aims to unite political forces and prevent Georgia from falling back into the Rus-

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The United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) has hosted a photo exhibition "I Wish" by award winning photographer Dina Oganova at MOMA Tbilisi, dedicated to the International Day of the Girl Child. The exhibition was held within the framework of the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality, with the support of the Government of Sweden on October 10.

October 11 marks the International Day of the Girl Child, recognizing girls' rights and the unique challenges they face around the world, including in Georgia.

Photo exhibition „I wish” dedicated to the Int’l Day of the Girl Child

Adolescent girls have the right to a safe, educated, and healthy life, not only during these critical formative years, but also as they mature into women. But the

harmful practice of child marriage, which is a human rights violation, threatening girls' lives and health, and limiting their future prospects, remains a challenge in Georgia.

With the photo exhibition, the UNFPA has introduced 20 parents from different

age-groups, backgrounds and interests, who have adolescent girls and want to speak up and stand against child marriage, causing trauma and depriving girls of their childhood and opportunities to study, play, dream and explore the world.

