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# UNOFFICIAL PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN MONITORING REPORT FOR THE 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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June 1 – August 26



The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) monitors the pre-election period with the financial support of the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The views expressed in the document are those of ISFED only and may not necessarily reflect the views of any donor organization.

**September 4, 2024**

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## 1. Introduction

Parliamentary elections in Georgia are scheduled for October 26, 2024. In accordance with the legislation of Georgia, the official pre-election period began 60 days before the election day - August 27; however, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (hereinafter ISFED) began monitoring the pre-election processes across the entire country, inclusive of 73 electoral districts, earlier on June 1, 2024. On June 25, ISFED published a document assessing the pre-election environment.<sup>1</sup>

This report covers monitoring results of election processes from June 1 to the start of the official pre-election period August 27. It reviews the current political context, various aspects of the election administration, the registration process for political parties, the progression of the unofficial campaign period, the media environment, and other key trends observed during the pre-election period.

## 2. Key findings

Within the framework of ISFED's observation mission, from June 1 to August 26, 2024, during the unofficial pre-election period, the following main election-related trends were revealed:

- Georgia faces the start of the official pre-election campaign under conditions of intense political polarization. As soon as pre-election events began, the leaders of the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia party promised their voters they would declare the main opposition parties unconstitutional if they were to obtain a constitutional majority in the upcoming elections.
- The final adoption of the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" by the Parliament of Georgia in May 2024 significantly contributed to the increase in polarization. Even after the veto of the President was overridden, the campaign of intimidation of critics of the government continued. Threatening calls turned into physical attacks.
- The adoption of the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" by the Parliament of Georgia, accompanied by intensified anti-Western rhetoric and conspiracy theories, triggered a sharply negative reaction from the international community and prompted the European Union and Western states to reassess their policies toward Georgia.
- In June, the ruling party once again made changes to the Election Code of Georgia, based on which the established need for a qualified majority for decision-making at the Central Election Commission (CEC) was diminished. If, following a particular vote, the CEC fails to make a decision for which it needs the support of at least two-thirds of the total number of members, this decision will then go to a re-vote at the same session and will be considered adopted if it is supported by the majority of the total number of members. According to ISFED, these changes reduce the possibility of consensus-based decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy. "2024 Parliamentary Elections: Assessment of the Pre-Election Environment." *ISFED.ge*, June 25, 2024. <http://isfed.ge/eng/2024-saparlamento/2024-tslis-saparlamento-archevnebis-tsina-periodis-garemos-shefaseba> (accessed August 24, 2024).

- During the reporting period, certification examinations were held for Election Administration officials, Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members, and PEC head officers. ISFED representatives observed the conduct of exams for Election Administration officials in exam centers in Tbilisi (2 centers) and 10 municipalities, and the certification exams for PEC head officers in 33 municipalities. According to ISFED observers, the exams were generally well-organized, although some issues were noted in certain centers. These included several instances where invigilators attempted to indicate the correct answers to test-takers and one case where a candidate passed the exam with the assistance of an invigilator. Additionally, there were cases where participants were unaware that they were attending an exam and believed they were going to a training session.
- During the reporting period, the election administration conducted a large-scale information campaign for citizens regarding new electronic technologies, which is crucial for voters to be sufficiently prepared for October. In July and August, the CEC conducted a campaign to demonstrate election technologies to the public. Representatives of ISFED attended the mock voting processes held in Tbilisi and 56 municipalities. However, they were unable to fully observe the two electoral districts of Tbilisi and 20 municipalities. Specifically, after completing the procedures as defined for voters, the organization's accredited observers (for the non-election period) were asked to leave the building on the grounds that the mock voting procedure did not include observation. It should be noted that some District Election Commissions did not see any issue with observing this process and did not hinder observation efforts. Based on the observations of representatives of ISFED, a significant portion of the participants in the process were public servants and individuals employed in budget-funded organizations (including teachers from public schools and kindergartens). These participants arrived at the relevant locations in an organized manner, on official grounds, and some of them were not informed about the nature of the process in which they were expected to participate. In several municipalities, there were instances where citizens reported being instructed by ruling party coordinators and/or higher officials to come and participate in the process.
- On August 16, 2024, the CEC adopted a resolution changing the schedule for casting lots to distribute functions among PEC members. According to the new procedure, this process will now be completed in all election precincts no later than seven days before the election day. ISFED considers that this resolution contradicts Georgia's electoral legislation and could jeopardize the independence and impartiality of commission members at the lower levels of the election administration. Conducting the casting of lots before the elections may put commission members at direct risk of being pressured. Additionally, moving the casting of lots to an earlier date will significantly complicate efforts to observe this process.
- Preparations for the pre-election campaign intensified as the parliamentary elections approached. Political parties mainly began opening their regional offices in June, and pre-election activities entered an active phase in July. As some opposition parties carried out their pre-election activities, several incidents of interference and violence were recorded, including difficulties in renting office spaces and cases of attacks on offices.
- During the reporting period, representatives of ISFED noted five cases of alleged vote-buying, three of which were related to the ruling party and two to an opposition political party.
- From June 1 to August 20, 2024, 16 political parties received 7,395,731 GEL in donations, more than 84% of which went to the ruling party. It should be noted that in July, compared to the

previous month, the amount of money donated to Georgian Dream increased five-fold. Much smaller increases or decreases were observed in the cases of the opposition parties.

- As the official pre-election campaign approached, the ruling party increasingly initiated large-scale state projects, a trend that has traditionally been observed. Although the pre-election campaign officially begins 60 days before the elections, the planning and implementation of these initiatives and projects suggest the use of administrative resources for electoral purposes, blurring the line between the ruling party and the state. Several decrees from the Government of Georgia, including those for financing various projects, a program for paid internships, a bill on amnesty, and the mobilization of individuals working in budgetary institutions for ruling party events, are particularly notable.
- During the reporting period, the Georgian National Communications Commission warned or fined 7 media organizations for violating the rules and norms stipulated by Georgian legislation concerning the placement of political/pre-election advertisements. All cases were related to the airing of videos with content considered to constitute political advertising during the non-election period. Several instances of the suspension of accreditation of journalists representing critical media outlets by the legislative body were revealed. In the same period, there were three attacks on journalists.

### 3. Political context

At the start of the official election campaign for Georgia's parliamentary elections taking place on October 26, 2024, the country continues to face intense political polarization, exacerbated by the ruling party's anti-democratic rhetoric aimed at opposition parties. As pre-election activities started, leaders of the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia party promised<sup>2</sup> voters that they would declare the main opposition groups unconstitutional if they were to secure a constitutional majority. Such rhetoric, regardless of its likelihood of being implemented, harms both the integrity of the election process and the broader effort toward democratic consolidation in Georgia.

The rise in political polarization was further fueled by the final adoption of the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" by the Georgian Parliament in May 2024.<sup>3</sup> Even after the president's veto was overridden, the government's campaign of intimidation against its critics persisted, escalating from intimidating phone calls to physical attacks. Notably, the office of the United National Movement was targeted in an attack allegedly involving up to 30 to 40 individuals<sup>4</sup>, according to the mentioned opposition

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<sup>2</sup> Bogveradze, Mariam. "კობახიძე აკონკრეტებს, რომელი პარტიების აკრძალვას გეგმავს „ქართული ოცნება“ [Kobakhidze Specified Which Parties the Georgian Dream Is Planning to Ban]." *Netgazeti.ge* (blog), August 23, 2024. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/738901/>.

<sup>3</sup> Parliament of Georgia. *Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence*, Pub. L. No. 4194-XIVმს-XXმ (2024). <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6171895> (accessed August 11, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Civil Georgia. "Intimidation Campaign Against Opposition, Civil Society, Gov't Critics as Repressions Announced by GD MPs." June 1, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/610802>.

party representatives. Civil activists also faced physical assaults<sup>5</sup>. One attack on an activist on June 11 occurred shortly after a statement by the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, who accused<sup>6</sup> the activist of making threatening and offensive phone calls. A representative from Amnesty International warned<sup>7</sup> that such actions from government officials could easily be interpreted as a green light to commit violence against government critics with impunity. In response to these incidents, the European Union spokesperson issued a statement on June 12, urging the Georgian authorities to put an end to such negative developments and to conduct timely, thorough investigations into the documented cases of violence and intimidation<sup>8</sup>. Despite repeated calls, no effective steps have been taken to address or investigate the violence.

According to the assessment of a number of local and international organizations, the Law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence” adopted by the Parliament of Georgia contradicts Georgia's European and democratic aspirations and poses an existential threat to media and civil society organizations.<sup>9</sup> In response to the aforementioned law, several lawsuits and the ‘friend of the court’ opinions (*Amicus Curiae*) were sent to the Constitutional Court of Georgia. The President of Georgia<sup>10</sup> and some members of Parliament (38 in total)<sup>11</sup> filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court. A constitutional lawsuit was also filed by 122 plaintiffs,<sup>12</sup> among whom were non-governmental and media organizations.<sup>13</sup> A constitutional lawsuit concerning the same issue was also filed by the Information Centers’ Network and

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<sup>5</sup> Radio Liberty. "აქტივისტ ნიკო მანაგაძეს თსუ-სთან სცემეს [Activist Niko Managadze Was Beaten Near the Tbilisi State University]." რადიო თავისუფლება [Radio Liberty], June 7, 2024. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32983594.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Civil Georgia. "Another Activist Battered as Parliament Speaker Talks of ‘Terror Campaign’ Against MPs." June 11, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/612360>.

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International. "Georgia: Authorities Must Immediately Investigate Attacks on Government Critics." June 11, 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/06/georgia-authorities-must-immediately-investigate-attacks-on-government-critics/>.

<sup>8</sup> Civil Georgia. "EU Urges Georgia to Investigate Acts of Violence Against Civil Society, Media, Politicians." June 12, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/612530>.

<sup>9</sup> International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy. "2024 Parliamentary Elections: Assessment of the Pre-Election Environment." *ISFED.ge*, June 25, 2024. <http://isfed.ge/eng/2024-saparlamento/2024-tslis-saparlamento-archevnebis-tsina-periodis-garemos-shefaseba> (accessed August 11, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> President of Georgia. \*საქართველოს პრეზიდენტი საქართველოს პარლამენტის წინააღმდეგ [President of Georgia v. Parliament of Georgia], No. N1828 (Constitutional Court of Georgia, July 18, 2024). <https://constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=16675> (accessed August 12, 2024).

Sarukhanishvili, Sandro-Giorgi. *Amicus Curiae*, N ac1828, August 1, 2024. <https://constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=17019> (accessed August 12, 2024).

Erkvania, Tinatin. *Amicus Curiae*, N ac1828, August 6, 2024. <https://constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=17037> (accessed August 24, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Members of the Parliament of Georgia: Tamar Kordzaia, Ana Natsvlishvili, Levan Bezhashvili, and others (38 MPs in total) v. Parliament of Georgia. *Constitutional Lawsuit* N1834, July 31, 2024. <https://constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=17000> (accessed August 12, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> N(N)LE "Institute for Development of Freedom of Information," N(N)LE "Rights Georgia," N(N)LE "Civil Society Foundation," and others (122 plaintiffs in total) v. Parliament of Georgia. *Constitutional Lawsuit* N1829, July 24, 2024. <https://constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=16941> (accessed August 12, 2024).

<sup>13</sup> Albrecht Weber and Wolfgang Babek. *Amicus Curiae*, Nac1828, 1829, August 2, 2024. <https://constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=17020> (accessed August 12, 2024).



Studio Monitor.<sup>14</sup> The hearing of the case in the Constitutional Court was scheduled<sup>15</sup> for August 29, 30 and 31.

On August 1, Georgia's Minister of Justice issued an order to enforce the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence".<sup>16</sup> The order outlines procedures for creating a registry of organizations acting in the interests of foreign powers, the submission of financial declarations, and the implementation of monitoring. According to the order, entities defined in Article 2 of the law are required to submit an application through the Public Service Hall to register as organizations acting in the interests of foreign power. The order mandates that these organizations submit a financial declaration within 10 working days of applying and be given access to a website specifically created by the Ministry for this purpose. Like the law itself, the order includes repressive measures: forced registration for those who fail to voluntarily comply, ongoing monitoring to identify organizations serving foreign interests or to ensure compliance with the law, and administrative penalties in the form of fines for non-compliance.

The adoption of the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" by the Georgian Parliament, accompanied by an increase in anti-Western rhetoric and conspiracy theories, triggered a sharp negative reaction from the international community. This led to a reassessment of policies toward Georgia by the European Union and Western states. The U.S. Embassy confirmed that it canceled<sup>17</sup> its participation in the military component of the event commemorating Georgia's Independence Day on May 26, in response to anti-Western statements made on April 29 by Bidzina Ivanishvili, the honorary chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party. In a joint French-American road map published by the White House on June 8, U.S. President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron urged the Georgian government to respect the public's wishes by returning to the Euro-Atlantic path.<sup>18</sup> Despite these calls, the Georgian government has continued its anti-Western policies.

On June 24, following a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, once again criticized Georgia's Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence." He stated that the EU would reduce political engagement with Georgia and consider suspending financial aid to its government.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after, in July of this year, it was announced that the European Union had stopped<sup>20</sup> Georgia's accession process. Additionally, the EU froze 30 million euros

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<sup>14</sup> LTD "Network of Information Centers" and N(N)LE "Studio Monitor" v. Parliament of Georgia. *Constitutional Lawsuit* N1837, August 19, 2024. <https://constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=17057> (accessed August 28, 2024).

<sup>15</sup> Tabula. "Constitutional Lawsuits Against the Russian Law to Begin on 29 August." August 21, 2024. <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/721971-sakonstitutsioshi-rusuli-kanonis-sarchelebis>.

<sup>16</sup> Minister of Justice of Georgia. *Order No. 1019*, August 1, 2024, "On the Preparation of the Registry of Organizations Carrying Out the Interests of Foreign Forces, the Submission of Financial Declarations, and the Approval of the Monitoring Rules." <https://matsne.gov.ge/document/view/6238278?publication=0> (accessed August 13, 2024).

<sup>17</sup> Civil Georgia. "U.S. Embassy: Participation in Independence Day Event Canceled Due to Ivanishvili's Anti-Western Speech." June 10, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/612229>.

<sup>18</sup> Civil Georgia. "Biden, Macron Urge Georgian Dream to 'Return to Euro-Atlantic Path.'" June 10, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/612154>.

<sup>19</sup> Pertaia, Luka. "Borrell Speaks of 'Immediate Reduction' of Political Contacts with Georgia." *Radio Liberty*, June 24, 2024. <https://bit.ly/3SGcZbc>.

<sup>20</sup> Gavin, Gabriel. "EU Announces Georgia's Accession Is 'Stopped' After Anti-West Pivot." *Politico*, July 9, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/georgia-eu-accession-stopped-anti-west-pivot-russian-law-foreign-agent-bill/>.

in aid intended for Georgia's defense, which had been planned to come from the European Peace Facility (EPF).<sup>21</sup>

Germany also decided to comprehensively reassess its relations with Georgia, which includes canceling the joint legal forum, withdrawing from participation in the "Noble Partner 2024" exercises, and not taking on any new financial commitments.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Denmark, another EU member state, announced a complete review of its aid and support to the Georgian government<sup>23</sup>. The United States also paused \$95 million in assistance that "directly benefits" the Government of Georgia, a decision announced by Secretary of State Antony Blinken<sup>24</sup> on July 31. A week later, on August 7, in a letter to Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili marking the anniversary of the 2008 war, U.S. President Joe Biden expressed his disappointment over the Georgian government's anti-democratic actions and anti-Western messages.<sup>25</sup>

Amid the European Union and Western states' reassessment of their policies toward Georgia, Russian interference in Georgia's domestic politics has intensified, with increased information manipulation and public statements in support of Georgia's ruling party. On August 25, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service issued a statement<sup>26</sup> backing the ruling party while criticizing the opposition. A clear example of Russia's efforts to influence Georgia's information space is reflected in Meta's August 15 threat report, which revealed that the social media company removed a coordinated, inauthentic network managed by Russia. This network sought to shape public opinion across all three Caucasus countries. According to Meta, the network supported Georgia's ruling party and criticized those protesting against the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence".<sup>27</sup>

In June, the ruling party once again amended Georgia's Election Code, reducing the qualified majority required by the Central Election Commission (CEC) for decision-making. Specifically, if the CEC fails to reach a decision that requires the support of at least two-thirds of the CEC members, the issue will face a re-vote at the same session. This decision will then be considered adopted if it receives the support of a simple majority of the full house. It is the conclusion of ISFED that these changes decrease the likelihood of consensus-based decision-making<sup>28</sup>. The Venice Commission also expressed concern, citing its Code

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<sup>21</sup> Netgazeti. "The European Union Has Suspended Aid to the Georgian Defense Forces Through the EPF." July 9, 2024. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/730738/>.

<sup>22</sup> Jamnews. "'Germany Is Reassessing Its Relations with Georgia,' Says the German Ambassador." July 10, 2024. <https://jamnews.net/germanys-relations-with-georgia/>.

<sup>23</sup> Civil Georgia. "Denmark Fully Reviews Aid to Georgia, 'Will Suspend Some Planned Activities and New Programming Support.'" July 31, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/618279>.

<sup>24</sup> Secretary of State. "United States to Pause Assistance to the Government of Georgia." Antony J. Blinken. <https://www.state.gov/united-states-to-pause-assistance-to-the-government-of-georgia/> (accessed August 7, 2024).

<sup>25</sup> Civil Georgia. "President Biden 'Disappointed' with Georgian Gov't Anti-Democratic Actions and False Statements." August 9, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/619785>.

<sup>26</sup> Interpressnews. "Russian Foreign Intelligence: Americans Are Preparing a 'Color Revolution' in Georgia." August 26, 2024. <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/133086-russian-foreign-intelligence-americans-are-preparing-a-color-revolution-in-georgia/>.

<sup>27</sup> Franklin, Margarita, Mike Torrey, David Agranovich, and Mike Dvilyanski. *Second Quarter, Adversarial Threat Report*. <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/metasecurity/threat-reporting/> (accessed June 27, 2024).

<sup>28</sup> International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy. "2024 Parliamentary Elections: Assessment of the Pre-Election Environment." <https://isfed.ge/eng/2024-saparlamento/2024-tslis-saparlamento-archevnebis-tsina-periodis-garemos-shefaseba> (accessed August 22, 2024).

of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, which advises against altering fundamental elements of electoral law when elections are less than a year away. Additionally, the commission stressed that legislative changes should not be used for manipulation for the advantage of the party in power.<sup>29</sup>

The ruling party continued discussions on the anti-LGBTQIA+ bill titled “On Family Values and Protection of Minors,” which passed<sup>30</sup> its first reading on June 27, along with other bills in the legislative package. On June 26, the Venice Commission released an opinion on a similar constitutional draft, urging Georgian authorities to “thoroughly review this legislative proposal and cease its adoption.” If the adoption were to proceed, the commission recommended removing or modifying certain articles to ensure non-discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals and to ensure compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights.<sup>31</sup>

In the spring of 2024, the gender quotas in Georgia’s Election Code and the Law “On Political Associations of Citizens” were abolished. Previously, the quota required that at least one in every four candidates on a party list for the 2024 parliamentary elections be a woman. The financial incentive offering a bonus of 30% in additional basic funding for parties with women on their lists was also eliminated. On July 1, the OSCE/ODIHR issued an opinion criticizing the abolition of gender quotas, stating that without alternative measures to enhance women’s political representation, this decision represents a setback for gender equality in Georgia and does not align with international standards.<sup>32</sup>

With the abolition of electoral blocs for the upcoming parliamentary elections and a heightened electoral threshold of 5%, political parties are likely to engage in active consolidation in the months leading up to the elections. Compared to previous elections, this change in electoral strategy is evident in the significant reduction in the number of electoral participants. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, 50 entities took part. By the end of the reporting period, the number of political parties registered or assigned electoral numbers for the upcoming elections had dropped to fewer than 30.

On July 9, three opposition parties – New Unity – Gvaramia Melia, Girchi – More Freedom and Elene Khoshtaria – Droa – announced<sup>33</sup> their participation in the October 26 parliamentary elections under a single list (initially using the official party name New Unity – Gvaramia Melia, electoral number 4). At the beginning of August, it was announced that in order to participate in the elections with a single list, the party New Unity – Gvaramia Melia (formerly named State for the People) would adopt a new name, Coalition for Change - Gvaramia, Melia, Girchi, Droa.<sup>34</sup> However, this change has not yet been registered

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<sup>29</sup> European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). *CDL-AD(2024)010-e, Georgia - Follow-up Opinion to the Joint Opinion on the Draft Amendments to the Election Code and to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia, Adopted by the Venice Commission at Its 139th Plenary Session (Venice, 21-22 June 2024)*. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2024\)010-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2024)010-e).

<sup>30</sup> Civil Georgia. "Anti-LGBT Legislation Passed in First Reading." June 27, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/614345>.

<sup>31</sup> Civil Georgia. "Venice Commission Opinion Advises Against Adopting Anti-LGBTQ Laws." June 26, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/614276>.

<sup>32</sup> Civil Georgia. "OSCE/ODIHR: Abolition of Women’s Quotas on Party Election Lists 'Not Consistent' with Georgia’s Obligations." July 1, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/615025>.

<sup>33</sup> Civil Georgia. "Ahali, Girchi-More Freedom and Droa Unite Ahead of Polls." July 9, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/615707>.

<sup>34</sup> Mtavari Arkhi. "Coalition for Change - Gvaramia, Melia, Girchi, It’s Time' | The New Name of the Party Was Determined at the Session of the Political Council." August 4, 2024. <https://mtavari.tv/news/162502-koalitsia-tsvlilebistvis-gvaramia-melia-girchi>.

in the National Agency of Public Registry as of August 29. In addition, on August 18, another political organization, the Republican Party of Georgia, joined this political union.<sup>35</sup>

To reflect the consolidation of various political parties, several parties applied for name changes. For instance, the political party United National Movement officially changed its name to Unity - National Movement (abbreviated as Unity – UNM), according to the official documents in the National Agency of Public Registry dated August 14. On August 17, European Georgia joined the alliance of United National Movement and Strategy Agmashenebeli, although certain key figures, including Giga Bokeria and Tamar Chergoleishvili, left the party prior to this decision. They subsequently founded a new party, Federalists, which will not be able to participate in the parliamentary elections due to the expiration of the electoral registration deadline.<sup>36</sup> Simultaneously, Strategy Agmashenebeli, whose representatives will run in the 2024 elections on the party list of Unity - National Movement, changed its name to Yes to Europe - Strategy Agmashenebeli (abbreviated as Yes to Europe). This name change was registered in the public register on August 6.

On July 10, the official Facebook page of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia announced that several political parties would join them in the October 26 parliamentary elections alongside Conservative Movement/Alt Info, the registration of which had been revoked by the public registry. The parties participating in this political union include Georgian Idea, Georgian Mission, Conservative-Monarchist Party, Christian-Democratic Movement, and National Unity.<sup>37</sup>

Another opposition alliance was formed around the political party Lelo for Georgia. At a presentation held on July 17, it was announced that the party Ana Dolidze – for the People and the newly established movement - Freedom Square had joined Lelo for Georgia to form a union.<sup>38</sup> By mid-August, Aleko Elisashvili – Citizens officially became part of the union,<sup>39</sup> and former New Rights leader Davit Gamkrelidze<sup>40</sup> was appointed head of the united election headquarters. On August 22, Strong Georgia – Lelo, for the People, for Freedom! was registered as the new name of Lelo for Georgia in the National Agency of Public Registry.

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<sup>35</sup> Publika. "Republicans and Activists for the Future Join the Akhali, Girchi, Droa Coalition." August 18, 2024. <https://publika.ge/akhali-girchi-droa-koalicias-respublikelebi-da-aqtivistebi-momavlistvis-sheuertdnen/>.

<sup>36</sup> Radio Liberty. "The Bokeria-Chergoleishvili Team Presented the New Party Federalists." August 15, 2024. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33080302.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Irma Inashvili, Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. Facebook post, July 10, 2024. <https://bit.ly/4g77Bbx>.

Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Irma Inashvili, Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. Facebook post, July 10, 2024. <https://bit.ly/3YOOsVv>.

<sup>38</sup> Netgazeti. "Lelo, Ana Dolidze and Freedom Square Unite for the Elections." July 17, 2024. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/731991/>.

<sup>39</sup> Interpressnews. "Aleko Elisashvili Joined 'Lelo,' Ana Dolidze and 'Freedom Square' in 'Strong Georgia.'" August 12, 2024. <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/132961-aleko-elisashvili-joined-lelo-ana-dolidze-and-freedom-square-in-strong-georgia/>.

<sup>40</sup> Itv.ge. "Davit Gamkrelidze to Head the Election Staff of 'Strong Georgia.'" August 15, 2024. <https://itv.ge/news/dzlieri-saqartvelos-saarchevno-shtabs-davit-gamyrelidze-ukhelmdzghvanelebs/>.

Like the opposition political parties, representatives of another party, People's Power, will also be included<sup>41</sup> on the party list of the ruling party, Georgian Dream. Prior to this announcement, People's Power was part of the parliamentary majority in the current convocation. Analysts noted that despite its formal separation from the ruling party, People's Power did not pursue an independent policy.

On October 26, 2024, together with the election of the Parliament of Georgia, the election of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara will be held. Like the parliamentary elections, for the first time in history, representatives constituting the highest legislative body of the Adjara region will be elected by a fully proportional electoral system. According to the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic and the Law on "Elections of the Supreme Council", the highest legislative body of the region consists of 21 deputies elected by the proportional system for a 4-year term by Georgian citizens with electoral rights registered in the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

#### **4. Election administration**

The reporting period did not include the official pre-election period. Therefore, ISFED observed several activities carried out by the election administration, which are considered important for the 2024 parliamentary elections. These include the certification of election administration officers and Precinct Election Commission (PEC) head officers and regular members, the general demonstration of new technologies to the public, as well as CEC sessions and the decisions made during them.

##### **4.1. Certification exams for heads and members of Precinct Election Commissions**

Following changes made to the Election Code of Georgia in 2022, it became mandatory for the head officers and regular members of PECs elected on professional grounds to pass relevant certification exams. Accordingly, the CEC and the LEPL Center for Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Training (hereinafter Training Center) conducted a total of 9 exams from September 2023 to July 2024 for those wishing to become head officers or members of PECs.

- 5 exams – for those wishing to be elected as head officers of a PEC (among these 5, 2 exams were conducted in the languages of ethnic minorities);
- 4 exams – for those wishing to become a member of a PEC (among these 4, 2 exams were conducted in the languages of ethnic minorities).<sup>42</sup>

Representatives of ISFED observed 2 certification exams conducted for head officers of PECs in 33 municipalities.<sup>43</sup> Observers from the organization at all examination centers were given the opportunity to observe the process, which was generally well-organized from a technical standpoint. However, it

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<sup>41</sup> Radio Liberty. "'People's Power' Will Be on the List of Georgian Dream in the Parliamentary Elections." July 16, 2024. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33038882.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. "Summary of the Cycle of Certification Exams for Members and Leaders of the Precinct Election Commission." <https://cesko.ge/ge/siakhleebi/pres-relizebi/singleview/11033586-saubno-saarchevno-komisiis-tsevrta-da-khelmdzghvnel-pirta-sertifitsirebis-gamotsdebis-tsiklis-shejameba> (accessed July 23, 2024).

<sup>43</sup> ISFED observed the certification process that started on January 29, 2024, and then the exams that started on July 17.

should be noted that observers were not informed in advance about the number of exams taking place at each exam center or provided with an exam schedule. This information was not publicly available on the websites of the CEC or the Training Center and could only be obtained through direct communication with the relevant District Election Commissions (DECs).

Regarding the conduct of the exams, observers from ISFED noted that most participants worked independently on their tests. However, problems were observed at some examination centers. Notably, there were a few attempts of cheating, though these were promptly stopped by invigilators. Additionally, while most invigilators performed their duties with integrity, in certain exam centers (Akhaltzikhe, Marneuli, Tbilisi), there were instances where invigilators attempted to hint the correct answers to exam participants. One specific case was recorded at the Tbilisi N2 examination center, where one of the participants essentially passed the exam with the assistance of two members of the Vake DEC. Despite the ISFED observer raising concerns, the individuals involved disregarded the remarks. There were frequent instances where participants claimed they had not been informed about the exam and believed they were attending a training session. Some also stated that they were unprepared because they were not given advance notice of where they would be allowed to take the exam (Tbilisi, Mtskheta, Marneuli, Batumi).

None of the applicants registered at the Shuakhevi examination center on July 17 appeared for the exam, although they were given the opportunity to take the exam on the following days—July 18, 19, and 22. Additionally, an unauthorized person was present at the Shuakhevi examination center but left after being addressed by ISFED’s representative. In municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities, despite the tests being available in three languages—Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani—many participants struggled to read and understand the materials (Akhaltzikhe, Marneuli). It should also be noted that some of the participants – mainly the elderly – struggled to adapt to the electronic system and needed assistance (Akhaltzikhe, Tetritskaro, Gardabani, Dusheti, Tbilisi).

#### 4.2. Certification exams for election administration officials

In parallel with the certification exams for prospective members and leaders of PECs, the CEC, and the Training Center conducted 2 certification exams for election administration officials in 2024. Exams were held in 12 exam centers across 11 municipalities in Georgia.<sup>44</sup> Out of 1,766 registered citizens, 1,114 (63%) participated, and 818 (73%) successfully obtained certificates.<sup>45</sup>

ISFED observed the certification process announced on August 9 in the examination centers of Tbilisi (2 examination centers) and 10 municipalities (Rustavi, Kutaisi, Zestafoni, Tkibuli, Senaki, Gori, Akhaltzikhe, Telavi, Batumi, Ozurgeti).

The exams were technically well-organized, and observers from ISFED were given the opportunity to freely monitor the process at all examination centers. The examinees generally worked independently on the tests, and the invigilators performed their duties properly. However, at some examination centers in

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<sup>44</sup> Tbilisi (2 examination centers), Telavi, Rustavi, Gori, Akhaltzikhe, Tkibuli, Kutaisi, Zestafoni, Ozurgeti, Senaki, and Batumi.

<sup>45</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. "Summarizing the Cycle of Certification Exams of Election Administration Officials." <https://cesko.ge/en/siakhleebi/pres-relizebi/singleview/11033630-saarchevno-administratsiis-mokheleta-sertifitsirebis-gamotsdebi-dasrulda> (accessed August 15, 2024).

Tbilisi, there were attempts by invigilators to assist the examinees. On August 13, during the exam, two members of the Vake DEC entered the exam center and attempted to assist one of the participants. The observer from ISFED intervened to prevent them from providing help, although their presence and conversation caused a disturbance that hindered other exam participants.

On August 12, at the Tbilisi N1 exam center, a member of the Gldani DEC was observed helping a participant multiple times. However, after an observer highlighted this issue, such assistance did not reoccur.

### 4.3. Nationwide demonstration of election technologies conducted by the election administration

Throughout the year, the election administration conducted various events as part of its voter information campaign. Among these, from July 6 to 29, 2024, a general demonstration project of election technologies was implemented. The purpose of this project was to inform voters about the adoption of voting technologies and develop their practical skills in voting procedures. The project was implemented at 89 predetermined locations across administrative centers in 64 municipalities throughout the country.<sup>46</sup>

According to the CEC, within the framework of the project, 65,321 voters were registered throughout Georgia to participate in mock voting using election technologies, and 43,864 voters took part in the mock voting (67.15% of those registered).<sup>47</sup>

During the project, a survey was conducted to assess whether voters found it easier to participate in voting using technology. According to the CEC, 27,684 voters participated in the survey, with 27,360 (98%) reporting that using technology made voting easier.<sup>48</sup>

Given the significance of the new voting procedures, representatives of ISFED attended the mock voting processes in Tbilisi (8 districts) and 56 municipalities. However, in 2 districts of Tbilisi and 20 municipalities, observers were not allowed to complete their observation duties. Specifically, after completing the procedures as defined for voters, the organization's accredited observers (for non-election period) were asked to leave the building because the simulated voting procedure did not include observation. It should be noted that some DEC's did not see any issue with observing this process and allowed such efforts to proceed without hindrance. ISFED believes that the decision of a number of DEC's to limit efforts to observe mock voting processes contradicts the principles of election monitoring and transparency of the election administration. Any procedure related to the elections should be open for observation to ensure that citizens are fully informed about the process.

Information about the project's progress was disseminated through the election administration's website and social media. According to observations by ISFED representatives, many participants were civil servants and individuals employed by budget-funded organizations (including teachers from public schools and kindergartens). These participants arrived in an organized manner on official grounds, and

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<sup>46</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. "43,864 Voters Participated in the Nationwide Demonstration of Voting Technologies Project." <https://cesko.ge/en/siakhleebi/pres-relizebi/singleview/11033602-saarchevno-teknologiebis-saqoveltao-demonstrirebis-proektshi-43-864-ma-amomrchevelma-miiqho-monatsileoba> (accessed July 29, 2024).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

some were not informed about the nature of the process they were involved in. In the municipalities of Senaki, Khobi, Poti, and Kutaisi, there were reports from citizens claiming that they had received instructions from ruling party coordinators and/or higher officials to come and participate in the process.

#### 4.4. Changes to rules concerning the allocation of functions to members of Precinct Election Commissions

On August 16, 2024, the CEC adopted a resolution<sup>49</sup> changing the rules for the procedure of casting lots to distribute functions among members of PECs. As a result of said resolution, this procedure will now be conducted in all election precincts in advance, no later than 7 days prior to voting day. The CEC explained that this change aims to ensure the election process is conducted in an organized manner and to prevent inconsistencies that could arise from conducting the casting of lots at different times.

According to ISFED's assessment, the resolution adopted by the CEC creates several challenges. Firstly, the CEC had no justifiable reason to change the timing of the casting lots process for members of PECs. The resolution in question was adopted by the CEC based on Article 14, Paragraph 1, Subparagraph C of the Election Code, which allows the CEC, in exceptional cases where it becomes impossible to meet certain requirements/deadlines established by the Election Code, to determine through adopting the decree on the conduct of election events and deadlines for elections/polling. According to Article 61 of the same Code, functions are distributed among the members of a PEC by casting lots on the day of voting. For years, this procedure has been conducted on the day of the elections, even at polling stations where electronic technologies were used in previous elections. Therefore, the lottery procedure is neither exceptional nor impossible to carry out.

According to the statement released by the CEC, "certain procedures of drawing of lots at the 2,262 electronic polling stations were scheduled to be completed seventh day before Election Day. This approach was implemented during the by-/extraordinary elections in 2023 and did not disrupt the election process at any stage."<sup>50</sup> According to Article 76<sup>2</sup> of the Election Code, the CEC holds the authority to regulate issues related to elections held using electronic means. Based on this, the CEC adopted the decree<sup>51</sup> "On determining the manner and conditions of conducting voting using electronic means", by which it was determined that in precincts where voting would be conducted using electronic technologies, commission members responsible for carrying the mobile ballot boxes would be chosen by lot no later than the 7th day before voting day. According to the newly adopted resolution, the casting of lots for all commission members will be held no later than the 7th day before election day at both traditional and electronic polling stations.

ISFED believes that the resolution contradicts Georgia's electoral legislation and may undermine the independence and impartiality of the members of the election commission, particularly at the lower levels

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<sup>49</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. *Decree N 32/2024 of the Central Election Commission of Georgia Dated 16 August 2024 - 'On Determination of Some Election Procedures and Deadlines for the Elections to Be Held on October 26, 2024.'* <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6247488?publication=0> (accessed August 22, 2024).

<sup>50</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. "Information on the Distribution of Functions among Members of Precinct Election Commissions." <https://cesko.ge/en/siakhleebi/pres-relizebi/singleview/11033664-informatsia-saubno-saarchevno-komisiebis-tsevrta-funktsiebis-ganatsilebis-tsisis-shesakheb> (accessed August 29, 2024).

<sup>51</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. *Decree No. 7/2023 of the Georgian CEC Dated February 6, 2023 'On Determining the Rules and Conditions for Conducting Voting Using Electronic Means,'* Article 8. <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5713266?publication=9> (accessed August 29, 2024).



of election administration. The resolution could create a direct risk of undue pressure being placed on commission members. Additionally, conducting the casting of lots before election day would make it more challenging to observe this process. When the casting of lots was held on election day, observers registered by observation organizations could monitor all election procedures, including the casting of lots. However, if the lottery is held prior to election day, observation organizations will need to mobilize observers separately for this procedure. Given the limited resources of most organizations, this additional requirement may make it impossible for many to ensure adequate observation.<sup>52</sup>

The resolution in question was challenged by the political party Lelo for Georgia. However, the Tbilisi City Court rejected the claim on August 20, 2024. The decision was then appealed to the Court of Appeals, but on August 23, 2024, the Tbilisi Court of Appeals also dismissed the appeal.

## 5. Election registration of political parties

During the election registration process, the Election Code of Georgia classifies political parties into two categories based on their status and previous electoral performance. A political party that has a member in the Parliament of Georgia at the time of the elections has the right to apply to the CEC and register no later than the 57th day before the election. If a party does not meet this condition, it must apply to the election administration from 1 January to 15 July of the year of the parliamentary elections. Additionally, the party is required within 60 days after a sample form of the list of party supporters is received, but not later than 1 August, to submit to the CEC the list of no less than 25 000 voters supporting participation of the party in elections of the Parliament of Georgia. During the election period, an appropriate CEC office then verifies the submitted lists of party supporters and submits its findings to the CEC chairperson, who must register the party and its representative no later than the 42<sup>nd</sup> day before election day.<sup>53</sup>

According to the CEC, out of those political parties that were required to submit a list of supporters, 30 filed applications in order to register for the elections. However, only 17 successfully registered.<sup>54</sup> The registration procedures for two political parties were terminated by the decision of the public registry. Among these, the public registry canceled the registration of the political party Conservative Movement/Alt Info; moreover, the leadership authority of the head of the Georgian Idea was terminated. Additionally, the CEC reported that the party Freedom - the Path of Zviad Gamsakhurdia failed to submit an extract from the public register, and its chairman's term of office had expired. Similar circumstances were established in the case of the Development Party of Georgia. Five parties (United Communist Party of Georgia, Victory - for a United Georgia, Homeland, Language, Faith, Whites, Generations for Georgia) were unable to correct errors established in their list of supporters. Furthermore, four parties (European

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<sup>52</sup> International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy. "CEC Decree That Alters the Timelines for Casting Lots in Precinct Election Commissions Is Inconsistent with the Law." <https://www.isfed.ge/eng/gantskhadebebi/tsekos-dadgenileba-romlitats-itsvleba-saubno-saarchevno-komisiebshi-tsiliskris-chatarebis-vadebi-kanontan-sheusabamoa> (accessed August 22, 2024).

<sup>53</sup> Organic Law of Georgia. *Election Code of Georgia*, Article 113, registration/cancellation of parties. <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=90>.

<sup>54</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. "Registration Process of Political Parties for October 26 Parliamentary Elections Is Concluded." <https://cesko.ge/en/siakhleebi/pres-relizebi/singleview/11033658-26-oktombris-archevnebisvis-politikuri-partiebis-natsilis-registratsiis-protsebi-dasrulda> (accessed August 19, 2024).

Socialists, People's Party, National-Democratic Party, and Union of Georgian Traditionalists) did not submit any list of supporters to the CEC.

At the session held on August 16, the CEC assigned sequence numbers to 30 electoral subjects for the October 26 Parliamentary Elections. The sequence numbers for election subjects were defined by the CEC, using both the approach of casting lots as well as the information which was submitted to the CEC by the entitled political parties through their applications within the timeframes stipulated by the law.<sup>55</sup> In particular, according to the Election Code of Georgia, political parties that received state funding according to the results of the previous parliamentary elections have the right to apply to the CEC by July 17. These parties could either retain the number assigned to them in the previous parliamentary elections, take a number corresponding to the sequence of funding, or choose any unassigned sequence number that has not already been designated to a political association with better funding. Electoral subjects that received at least 0.75 percent of the vote in the last proportional election were also eligible to request the same sequence number they used in that election unless the number had been assigned to a better-funded party. In cases where an electoral bloc had a particular sequence number in the last general election, the first party listed in that bloc is given the right to use the number again.<sup>56</sup>

Electoral subjects registered for the parliamentary elections must submit their party lists to the CEC chairperson no later than 30 days before election day. If a political party fails to submit a party list with at least 30 and no more than 200 candidates within the specified time frame, or if the submitted list is not registered due to uncorrected issues, the electoral subject's registration will be canceled.

## 6. Pre-election campaign

As the parliamentary elections approach, political parties are visibly building up their preparations for the pre-election campaign. According to the Election Code of Georgia, the official pre-election campaign begins 60 days prior to the election day.<sup>57</sup> However, some political parties began their pre-election activities much earlier. According to information provided by ISFED's long-term observers, political parties started opening regional offices and meetings with local residents as early as June. By July, the pre-election activities of political parties had entered a more active phase.

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<sup>55</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. "Ordinal Numbers of Electoral Subjects Have Been Determined for the Elections of October 26, 2024." <https://www.cesko.ge/en/siakhleebi/pres-relizebi/singleview/11033639-2024-tslis-26-oktombris-archevnebisvis-saarchevno-subiektebis-rigiti-nomrebi-ganisazghvra> (accessed August 19, 2024).

<sup>56</sup> Organic Law of Georgia. *Election Code of Georgia*, Article 38(1). Determination of a Sequence Number for an Electoral Subject. <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=90>.

<sup>57</sup> Organic Law of Georgia. *Election Code of Georgia*, Article 45. Pre-election Campaign (Canvassing). <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=90>.

## 6.1. Incidents of interference in the pre-election campaign

As pre-election campaigning commenced, there were multiple incidents involving violence or obstruction of political campaigns.

- On June 2, 2024, Mariam Sichinava, a member of the Elene Khoshtaria–Droa political party, was attacked in the presence of her underage son. Per an announcement issued by the party, one of the perpetrators – armed with a baton – both physically and verbally attacked her in front of her son, who is a minor.<sup>58</sup> According to Mariam Sichinava, the attacker was identified as Tamaz Tsurtsunia, an employee of a Zugdidi cleaning management service. According to ISFED, an investigation was started under Article 126 of the Criminal Code.
- On August 3, 2024, an attempt to disrupt a pre-election meeting of the Gakharia For Georgia party in Batumi was reported. During a meeting with voters on the street, several individuals verbally confronted the leader of the party, Giorgi Gakharia. Among the initiators and participants of the conflict were employees of public organizations and members or activists of the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia party.<sup>59</sup>
- On August 11, 2024, Nika Melia, one of the leaders of the Coalition for Change political union, was physically assaulted during the opening ceremony of the party's regional office in Samtredia. According to media reports, after the office's opening, Melia was answering questions from journalists when an individual attacked him both physically and verbally.<sup>60</sup>

During the same period, various political party representatives reported difficulties renting regional office spaces. For example:

- Nika Melia, one of the leaders of the political party New Unity – Gvaramia Melia, reported that the party had been searching for office space in Sagarejo. However, while they were preparing to furnish the office, the property owner abruptly refused to rent the space. Party representatives believe this was due to pressure exerted on the owner.
- A representative of the Gakharia for Georgia party stated that most business property owners in Mtskheta refused to rent office space to the party, likely due to indirect pressure being placed on them.

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<sup>58</sup> Netgazeti. "According to 'Droa,' Their Member Was Attacked in Zugdidi." June 3, 2024. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/725123/>.

<sup>59</sup> Interpressnews. "Natia Mezvrishvili - GD Has Started to Implement the Repressions Announced by the Speaker of the Parliament on July 26 and Interfere with the Election Campaign - It Is Hard to See How GD Uses the Methods of the UNM." August 6, 2024. <https://bit.ly/4g26KbQ>.

<sup>60</sup> Interpressnews. "Nika Melia Was Attacked in Samtredia." August 11, 2024. <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/132951-nika-melia-was-attacked-in-samtredia/>.

In addition to the difficulties encountered in renting office space, during the reporting period, there were also incidents of attacks on the offices of political parties.

- On June 1, 2024, around 02:00, the central office of the United National Movement was attacked by several dozen people armed with bats and stones. According to the information of the chairman of the party at that time, Levan Khabeishvili, members of the party were also present in the office, including himself and his 14-year-old son. According to him, the attackers also tried to enter the office. Party members opposed them.<sup>61</sup>
- According to information from the United National Movement, on June 25, 2024, the office of their local branch in Poti was raided. According to Davit Khomeriki, chairman of the office of the party's Poti branch, a glass window was likely hit several times with a heavy object. According to him, a number of surveillance cameras are installed in the vicinity of the office. Therefore, if there is a will to do so, it should not be difficult for the police to identify the attackers.<sup>62</sup> According to ISFED's information, an investigation has been started.
- The district office of the United National Movement in Zestafoni was burglarized. On the morning of June 8, it was discovered that unknown individuals had entered the office through a back window and stolen various types of equipment.<sup>63</sup> An investigation into the incident is ongoing.
- On August 22, 2024, in Chokhatauri, party members discovered that a banner affixed to the facade of the Coalition for Change - Gvaramia, Girchi, Droa office had been vandalized with paint. An investigation regarding this incident is currently underway.

In order to ensure free and fair elections, it is important that in the pre-election period, political parties are given the opportunity to conduct election campaigns under equal conditions and in an environment free from violence. Considering this, the aforementioned facts significantly harm the pre-election environment. In connection with several of these facts, ISFED issued a statement and called on law enforcement authorities to fully investigate violent incidents and respond accordingly.<sup>64</sup>

## 6.2. Cases of alleged vote-buying

According to the Criminal Code of Georgia, vote-buying is offering, promising, handing over or rendering directly or indirectly money, securities (including financial instruments), other property, title in property,

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<sup>61</sup> Netgazeti. "The UNM Office Was Raided by Dozens of People Armed with Stones and Clubs." June 1, 2024. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/725021/>.

<sup>62</sup> Netgazeti. "According to the UNM, the Party's Office in Poti Was Raided." June 25, 2024. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/728391/>.

<sup>63</sup> Kutaisipost. "The Office of the 'National Movement' in Zestafoni Was Burglarized." June 10, 2024. <https://www.kutaisipost.ge/ka/akhali-ambebi/article/27824-zestafonshi-nacionaluri-modzraobis-ofisi-gaqurdes>.

<sup>64</sup> International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy. "ISFED Responds to the Attack on the Opposition Leader and the Attempt to Disrupt the Election Campaign." <https://isfed.ge/eng/gantskhadebebi/samartliani-archevnebi-ekhmianeba-opozitsiuri-partiis-liderze-tavdaskhmisa-da-saarchevno-kampaniis-tsarmoebistvis-khelis-sheshlis-faqtebs> (accessed August 22, 2024).

services or any other advantage, or knowingly accepting such offering, or entering into fraudulent, sham or other transactions to avoid statutory restrictions, for election purposes.<sup>65</sup>

On August 4, 2024, in Beshumi, within the framework of the Shuamtoba public holiday, the Prime Minister of Georgia presented a couple with a golden ring. According to media reports, unlike in previous years, the Khulo Municipality Hall did not buy a gold ring for the event this time.<sup>66</sup>

On August 10, 2024, Sopo Japaridze, chairperson of the Tbilisi organization of the political party United National Movement and Giuli Alasania, the mother of the 3rd president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, together with doctors, met with residents in Mukhiani<sup>67</sup>. Doctors provided free medical services and gave medicines to those interested. A similar incident was reported on August 21, 2024 in Isani district.<sup>68</sup>

On August 21, 2024, businessman Giorgi Chkonia, who was included by Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia in their list of so-called ‘delegates’, gifted water to the inhabitants of Ochkhauri township. Before this, locals protested the lack of water and blocked the highway for a few minutes. Chkonia sent the gift to the local population through employees of his own company, Château Kvirike, and transported it using the ‘company’s cars. According to locals, employees had told them that Chkonia had gifted them the water. City hall representatives also assisted Chkonia’s employees, and even delivered water to several families.

Under the initiative and organization of the Tsalenjikha youth wing of the political party Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia, a mini-football championship – Tsalenjikha Cup 2024 – was held in Tsalenjikha. The supporters of Tsalenjikha Cup 2024 were the chairman of the Tsalenjikha district organization of Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia, Bakur Songulia, and the youth wing of the same party. According to information published by Georgian Dream’s Tsalenjikha organization, the championship was planned for August 24-27, 2024. The prize fund of the tournament was 3,000 GEL<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Criminal Code of Georgia. *Article 164.1, Vote Buying.*

<https://www.matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/16426?publication=262>.

<sup>66</sup> Adjara Times. "The Prime Minister Gifted a Gold Ring to a Couple - Lawyers Speak of Signs of a Crime." August 4, 2024. <https://ajaratimes.ge/?p=5271>.

<sup>67</sup> United National Movement. "The Humanitarian Project Initiated by Mikheil Saakashvili Will Continue Throughout Georgia and We Will Help Everyone Who Needs to Stand by the Doctors; - Sofo Japaridze." Facebook video. August 10, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?mibextid=oFDknk&v=1113504186798444&rdid=3y4KFKDmxsarQrL0>.

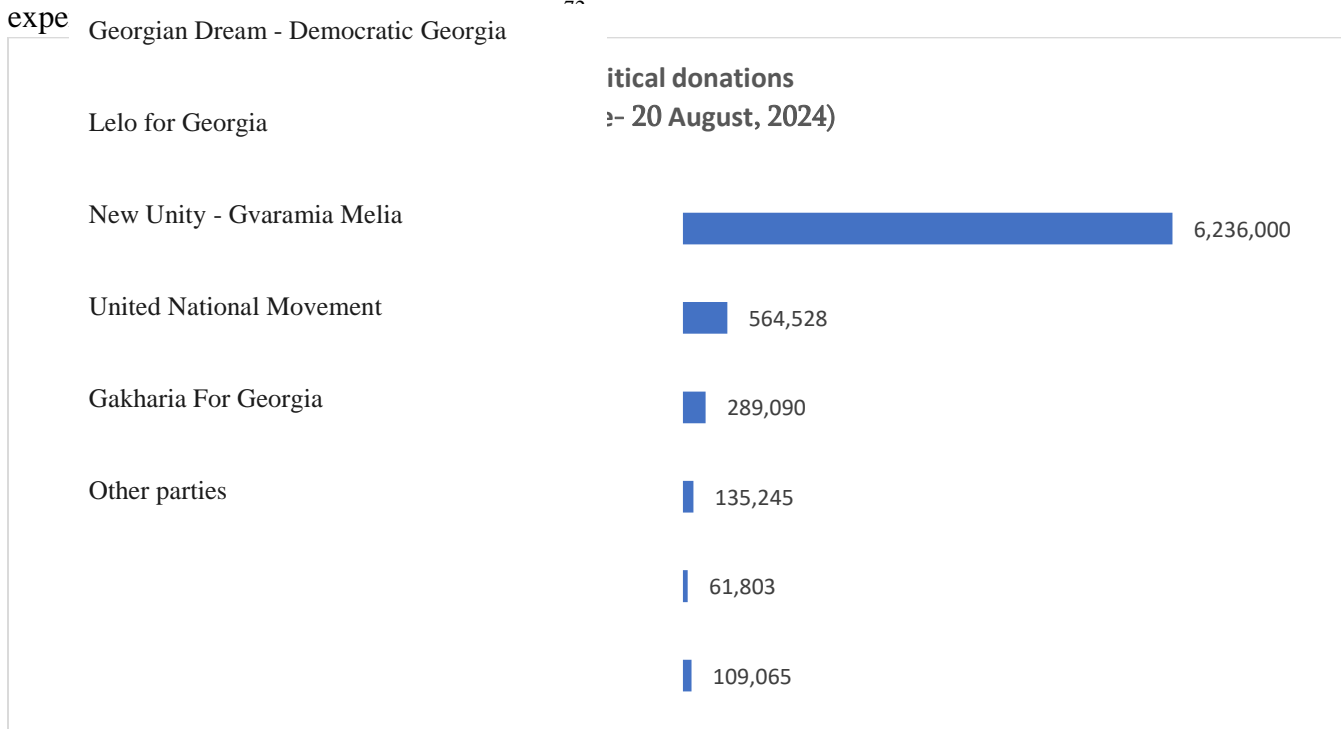
<sup>68</sup> TV Pirveli. "One of the Leaders of 'Unity,' Sofo Japaridze, Met the Residents of Isani with a Team of Doctors." Facebook video, August 21, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?mibextid=WC7FNe&v=476953105131811&rdid=HmJfe19WxnKlidFr>.

<sup>69</sup> Georgian Dream - Tsalenjikha. Facebook post. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/3nXs14ieTWyPGR4O/>; Georgian Dream - Tsalenjikha. Facebook post. <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/XF9sYEWsjrsCkjHs/>.

### 6.3. Political party finance

Funding of political parties in Georgia is based on two main sources: direct state funding and donations.<sup>70</sup> Based on votes received in the 2020 elections, 12 political parties benefit from state funding. The amount they receive annually from the state budget equals 12,742,942 GEL. 40% of the mentioned amount goes toward the ruling Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia party. The remaining 60% is allocated to 11 opposition parties.<sup>71</sup>

According to the data of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, from June 1 to August 20, 2024, 16 political parties received 7,395,731 GEL in donations, more than 84% of which was donated to the ruling party. It should be noted that in July, compared to the previous month, the amount of money donated to Georgian Dream increased five-fold. In the cases of the opposition parties, much smaller increases or decreases were observed. Such unequal distribution of the incomes of political parties in the pre-election period may cause a sharp imbalance in the campaigning capability of political parties. It should be noted that according to the Code of Good Practice in Election Matters of the Venice Commission, equality of opportunities must be guaranteed for parties and candidates, which is also related to political parties' election campaign



Source: Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2024

<sup>70</sup> Shota Narsia & Mariam Chubabria. "Challenges for Election Campaign Finance in Georgia." *ISFED.ge*, September 2023. <https://isfed.ge/eng/kvlevebi/saarchevno-kampaniis-finansuri-gamotsvevebi-saqartveloshi> (accessed August 20, 2024).

<sup>71</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. "Financing of Political Parties." <https://www.cesko.ge/en/chartuli-mkhareebi/politikuri-partiebi/kvalifitsiuri-subieqtobi> (accessed August 20, 2024).

<sup>72</sup> Venice Commission. *Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters: Guidelines and Explanatory Report*, October 30, 2002, CDL-AD (2002), Strasbourg, pp. 10-11. [https://www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Code\\_conduite\\_PREMS%20026115%20GBR.pdf](https://www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Code_conduite_PREMS%20026115%20GBR.pdf)

#### 6.4. Use of administrative resources for electoral purposes

A document adopted at the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen conference emphasized the need for a “clear separation between the state and political parties”. Parties should be given the necessary legal guarantees to enable them to compete with one another based on equal treatment before the law.<sup>73</sup>

The Election Code of Georgia regulates the use of administrative resources during the pre-election campaign. During this period, the following acts are prohibited for the purpose of campaigning:

- Use of buildings of state government bodies and organizations financed from the state budget;
- Use of communication facilities, information services and equipment intended for the state government and organizations financed from the state budget;
- Use of vehicles owned by state authorities or municipal bodies;
- Gathering of civil servants, employees of legal entities of public law, employees of non-entrepreneurial legal entities established by the state or municipality, as well as persons employed in preschools, educational institutions and public schools established by the state.<sup>74</sup> These employees are prohibited from participating in the pre-election campaign during working hours and/or while they are directly exercising their official powers.<sup>75</sup>

Since the pre-election campaign starts 60 days before the elections, the facts recorded during the reporting period do not formally represent a misuse of administrative resources. However, such facts blur the line between the ruling party and the state and have a negative impact on the election environment.

During the reporting period, an incident was recorded when an employee of a library functioning under the Culture and Art Center of the Kharagauli municipality, within the framework of the mobile library project, distributed Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia campaign material to citizens, along with books.<sup>76</sup> Photographic material evidencing this was spread on social media through the library's Facebook page; however, after it was published, the photos were deleted and re-uploaded so that the campaign material was no longer visible. Representatives of the opposition consider this occurrence to represent the use of budget funds for party purposes. However, the deputy mayor of the municipality categorically ruled out issuing someone such a task.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> OSCE. *Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE*, p. 4. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/c/14304.pdf> (accessed June 23, 2024).

<sup>74</sup> Organic Law of Georgia. *Election Code of Georgia*, Article 48, Section 1, Subsection "D." <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=90> (accessed August 29, 2024).

<sup>75</sup> Organic Law of Georgia. *Election Code of Georgia*, Article 45, Section 4, Subsection "H."

<sup>76</sup> Mtavari Arkhi. "The Courier of the Library in Kharagauli Brought Newspapers with Photos of Ivanishvili to the Citizens Along with Books | The City Hall Denies Issuing a Party Assignment." July 10, 2024. <https://mtavari.tv/news/160767-kharagaulshi-bibliotekis-kurierma-cignebtan-ertad>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

According to information provided by ISFED's observers, during the reporting period, a number of cases were documented where the 'delegate' candidates nominated by the ruling party – who are expected to be included in the party list – participated in events financed/organized by the municipality. These facts demonstrate indications of the use of administrative resources in the election campaign, thereby putting Georgian Dream's candidates in an advantageous position. Dato Kodua, who is among the 'delegates' presented by Georgian Dream, actively participated in meetings planned by a local governmental body within the framework of the election campaign. On August 23, together with local representatives of the government, he visited villages in Zugdidi municipality – Jikhashkari, Kulishkari and Alertkari – where natural gas was provided to settlements for the first time. Dato Kodua was accompanied by the State Representative in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region and his first deputy, and also by the mayor of Zugdidi and his deputy. Dato Kodua, together with the employees of the municipality's town hall, visited the opening ceremony for the Scouts of Samegrelo's camp named 'Avatar 2024'. He was present at the opening of the camp together with the deputy mayor of Zugdidi municipality, the chairman of the regional Georgian Dream faction, and other members of the city council.

Furthermore, delegates presented by Georgian Dream were actively involved in events sponsored/organized by other municipalities. For example, the 'delegate' Paata Kvizhinadze attended a ceremony to erect a cross on the dome of the Jruchi monastery in Sachkhere municipality in connection with its rehabilitation. In addition, the 'delegate' Zaza Lominadze attended a summer camp sponsored by Kutaisi City Hall. Moreover, the 'delegate' Irakli Shatakishvili actively attends events sponsored/organized by municipal authorities in the city of Rustavi.

Signs indicating the use of administrative resources were also observed in events organized by the ruling party, where the mobilization of persons employed by budget-funded organizations was highlighted.

- On August 21, 2024, Georgian Dream held an election campaign event in Mtskheta. According to information obtained by a representative of ISFED, administrative resources were actively used during the organization of the event. Specifically, the mobilization of persons employed in public schools and kindergartens, as well as in other budget-funded organizations, was identified. This was confirmed in a television report aired by TV Pirveli, which included some of the citizens present at the event stating that they were teachers in public schools and kindergartens, the employees of public schools and private educational institutions, and were instructed to participate in the event.<sup>78</sup>
- The tendency to use and mobilize administrative resources was also observed at a regional event of Georgian Dream's election campaign held in Ambrolauri on August 25, 2024. According to ISFED's representatives, the meeting was attended by teachers from public schools and kindergartens in Ambrolauri and neighboring municipalities - Tsageri, Lentekhi, Tkibuli, and Oni. Some of the citizens present at the event were transported by minibus taxis, while fuel was

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<sup>78</sup> TV Pirveli. "Mobilization of Public Officials in Mtskheta - 'GD' Is Exposed in Misuse of Administrative Resources." August 22, 2024. <https://bit.ly/4dNLipp>.



provided to car owners. According to ISFED’s representatives, food compensation was also distributed.

### 6.5. Allegedly election-motivated state programs/initiatives

Georgia’s electoral legislation prohibits implementing projects/programs that were not previously included in the State Budget of Georgia, the budget of any municipality in Georgia, or any Autonomous Republic of Georgia in the 60-day period leading up to elections, inclusive of election day itself. In the same period, increasing the amount of welfare benefits is also prohibited.

As the official campaign period for the 2024 parliamentary elections approaches, the ruling party has increasingly initiated large-scale state projects. Although the pre-election campaign and related restrictions officially begin 60 days before the elections, the early planning and implementation of these initiatives during the pre-election period suggest the potential use of administrative resources for electoral purposes. Such activities can negatively affect the election environment. Implementing budget-funded programs and state initiatives that offer voters various financial or non-financial benefits before the elections can be problematic and may influence the outcome.

On July 10, 2024, the parliamentary faction Georgian Dream initiated the Draft Law “On Amnesty”, based on which persons accused and convicted of some crimes stipulated by the Criminal Code of Georgia are exempted from criminal liability and punishment, and the prescribed punishment is reduced. Under the bill, sentence and probation terms are also reduced for probationers and parolees. The Parliament of Georgia approved the draft<sup>79</sup> law in the first reading on July 19. The second and third readings of the law will be held in September.<sup>80</sup>

The condition for amnesty is not to have been convicted of a crime deemed premeditated. In the case of narcotics-related crimes, a different rule is established. In particular, it is noted that a conviction for the crime provided for in Chapter XXXIII of the Criminal Code is not considered an obstacle to amnesty being granted.<sup>81</sup>

According to a decree issued by the Government of Georgia dated July 18, 2024, 250,000 GEL from the contingency fund of the Government of Georgia (2024 state budget) would be allocated by the Ministry of Finance to the administration of the Government of Georgia in order to support events aimed at

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<sup>79</sup> Parliament of Georgia. *Draft Amnesty Law of Georgia, 07-3/460/10*. <https://info.parliament.ge/#law-drafting/28908> (accessed August 5, 2024)

<sup>80</sup> Publika. "Parliament Approved the Amnesty Bill in the First Reading." July 19, 2024. <https://publika.ge/parlamentma-amnistiis-kanonproeqts-pirveli-mosmenit-dauchira-mkhari/>.

<sup>81</sup> With the exception of illegally selling narcotic drugs, their analogues, precursors, new psychoactive substances, psychotropic substances or their analogues, a powerful substance, hemp, or marijuana.

promoting successful Georgians and their professions.<sup>82</sup> According to the decree, there are no defined criteria on the basis of which citizens will be financed, as well as the amount of money and professions for the promotion of which the funds allocated from the government's reserve fund should be used.

According to a decree issued by the Government of Georgia, dated July 23, 2024, an additional 20,000,000 GEL was allocated from the fund of projects to be implemented in the regions of Georgia to promote the involvement of citizens in the implementation of local self-government, and a transfer of 100,000 GEL<sup>83</sup> was determined for each municipality.<sup>84</sup> The remaining amount will be distributed to each municipality according to the data of the 2014 general census. According to the decree, the money will be used based on the municipalities' decisions to implement projects selected through the mayor's representatives, as a result of consultations held with citizens. It is worth noting that in order to smoothly implement the projects within the limited time frame, municipalities should ensure implementation is conducted using simplified procurement procedures.

On July 31, 2024, on the basis of Resolution No. 245 of the Government of Georgia, amendments were made to Resolution No. 177 of May 15, 2023, of the Government of Georgia "On Approving the Rules of Internship in a Public Institution". According to the decision of the Prime Minister of Georgia, from August 2, 2024, plans to announce a competition for paid 4-month internships in public institutions would be implemented. According to the resolution, those who wish to do an internship can apply from August 2, 2024 to August 8, 2024 on the [www.hr.gov.ge](http://www.hr.gov.ge) website, where competitions are announced by various public institutions. People who are studying at the first level of higher education (in the case of the graduating academic year) or at the second level, as well as those who had completed the first or second level of higher education in the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, will be able to apply for the internship.<sup>85</sup> The internship competition starts on August 2, 2024, and will last 4 months, coinciding with the election period.

On July 16, 2024, the Government of Georgia already announced that, based on the program, more than 3,000 graduates will have the opportunity to undergo a paid internship in the public service<sup>86</sup>. Information

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<sup>82</sup> Government of Georgia. *Decree of the Government of Georgia N1024, Regarding the Allocation of Funds from the Reserve Fund of the Government of Georgia for the Administration of the Government of Georgia.* [https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=602&info\\_id=89112](https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=602&info_id=89112) (accessed August 9, 2024).

<sup>83</sup> Government of Georgia. *Decree of the Government of Georgia N1025 on measures to be implemented in order to implement the initiative "Promoting the Development of Citizen Involvement"* [https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=&sec\\_id=602&info\\_id=89113](https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=&sec_id=602&info_id=89113) (accessed on August 9, 2024).

<sup>84</sup> Apart from Tbilisi, Akhlagori, Eredvi, Kurti, Thigvi, Azhara and the municipalities on the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

<sup>85</sup> Resolution No. 245 of the Government of Georgia. "On Approving the Rule of Internship in a Public Institution." <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6239749?publication=0> (accessed August 12, 2024).

<sup>86</sup> Government of Georgia. "Government Has Developed a Program That Will Give Over 3,000 Graduates the Opportunity to Take Paid Internships in the Public Service." [https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=596&info\\_id=89079](https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=596&info_id=89079) (accessed July 16, 2024).

about the internship program was also spread on the official Facebook page of the political party Georgian Dream on August 2.<sup>87</sup>

## 7. Media environment

During the pre-election and election period, ensuring the media's smooth operation is paramount. It is crucial that the media's editorial independence is maintained and that journalists are able to perform their professional duties in a safe environment. Traditional and digital media outlets must both be able to inform voters without interference or obstruction.

### 7.1. Decisions of Georgia's National Communications Commission

During the reporting period, the National Communications Commission of Georgia (hereinafter – the Communications Commission) warned or fined 7 media organizations for violating the rules and norms set forth in Georgia's legislation concerning the placement of political/pre-election advertisements. All cases were related to airing videos with content deemed to represent political advertisement during the non-election period.

The Communications Commission issued a written warning to the television company Mtavari Arkhi for illegally airing advertisements containing political content. According to the information indicated in the commission's statement, the station aired video clips where members of the parliament who supported the Law on "Transparency of Foreign Influence" were displayed and depicted in a negative context. The Communications Commission ruled that the video clips served to hinder the election of political unions and their representatives potentially participating in the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 26, 2024. Therefore, the video clips were classified as political advertising. According to the Communications Commission, it is not permitted to air political advertisements outside of the period and procedures stipulated by the Election Code. As a result of the investigation, the Communications Commission issued a written warning to Mtavari Arkhi and ordered it to remove the videos from its broadcasting network immediately.<sup>88</sup> According to the company's lawyer, "this decision of the regulator sets a precedent whereby the commission can consider a part of a news broadcast as a political advertisement".<sup>89</sup> According to their explanation, the television station was not given the opportunity to attend the

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<sup>87</sup> Georgian Dream. "Registration for the Government Program of Paid Internship for Graduates Has Begun." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1059569332200531&set=a.488868739270596> (accessed August 12, 2024).

<sup>88</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. "ComCom Sanctions 'Mtavari Arkhi' for Airing Political Adverts Outside the Election Period." <https://www.comcom.ge/en/yvela-siaxle/comcom-sanctions-mtavari-arkhi-for-airing-political-adverts-outside-the-election-period.page> (accessed August 6, 2024).

National Communications Commission of Georgia. *Decision of the National Communications Commission of Georgia, 25 July 2024, N G-24-18 / 326 in the Case "On the Imposition of Administrative Responsibility for Mtavari Arkhi" LTD.* <https://www.comcom.ge/ge/legal-acts/solutions/2024--24-18-326.page> (accessed August 22, 2024).

<sup>89</sup> MediaChecker. "Political Advertising in Non-Election Period - Why ComCom Sanctions Part of TV Media." <https://www.mediachecker.ge/ka/mediagaremo/article/98179-aratsinasaarchevno-periodshi-politikuri-reklama-risthvis-asanqirebs-comcom-i-telemidiis-natsils> (accessed August 10, 2024).

commission session and submit its written opinion, since the session was scheduled in an accelerated manner.<sup>90</sup> The Helsinki Commission has voiced concern on this,<sup>91</sup> indicating that the Georgian Dream uses another tactic from Russia's authoritarian strategy to censor the opposition and deprive the Georgian people of the democratic future they are fighting for.<sup>92</sup>

On August 15, 2024, the Communications Commission ruled that Mtavari Arkhi had disseminated another political advertisement during the non-election period, fined the broadcaster 2,500 GEL, and ordered it to remove the video clip from its broadcasting network.<sup>93</sup> The Communications Commission said that "in the video, it is said that the European integration of Georgia was less popular in the regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, however, the research of the civil sector proved that this does not apply to all regions, and the ethnic Azerbaijani media is fighting against stereotypes... At the end of the video, the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" is presented in a negative context, [it] is referred to as a "Russian law" that poses a threat to all parts of society. At the end of the video posted on the broadcast network of "Main Channel" LLC [Mtavari Arkhi] on August 3, the inscription "No to Russian law" appears".<sup>94</sup> The decision of the Communications Commission indicates that the media organization sought to mobilize the public against political parties and their representatives who supported the adoption of Georgia's Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence". According to the Communications Commission, presenting the activities of the supporters of the law in a negative context was aimed at hindering their election prospects.<sup>95</sup> The media organization explained that the video clip was aired as a social advertisement.<sup>96</sup>

It is critically important that during the pre-election period, the Communications Commission is not instrumentalized and does not pursue political interests. It is the assessment of ISFED that, in this case, the Communications Commission failed to present a solid argument as to why the video clip covering the so-called "Russian law" was a political advertisement, thus creating a dangerous precedent and the potential to restrict the freedom of expression of critical media organizations.

The Communications Commission has issued a written warning to the Alt Info television company due to the violation of the law by placing advertisements of political content on the air. The reason for this was the airing of a video in which an Alt Info representative stated that they would participate in the elections despite unlawful moves by Georgian Dream to ban their two political parties, and that they would join forces with other conservative groups to form an alliance and fight for political power under a single party

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> U.S. Helsinki Commission. Twitter, July 26, 2024.

[https://x.com/HelsinkiComm/status/1816823436028555704?fbclid=IwY2xjawERi6xleHRuA2FlbQlXMAABHSdKkceSYbThYofYVOM2R4ETvAenxZVnf2kBoyWXmVo2aDTv8A45s2VGsQ\\_aem\\_Nb--YdsTWWVUOGKIPkI3sg](https://x.com/HelsinkiComm/status/1816823436028555704?fbclid=IwY2xjawERi6xleHRuA2FlbQlXMAABHSdKkceSYbThYofYVOM2R4ETvAenxZVnf2kBoyWXmVo2aDTv8A45s2VGsQ_aem_Nb--YdsTWWVUOGKIPkI3sg).

<sup>92</sup> Formula TV. "Helsinki Commission on ComCom Decision: Ruling Party Uses Russian Strategy." July 27, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/Peaqf>.

<sup>93</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. "ComCom Fines 'Mtavari Arkhi' GEL 2500 and Cautions 'PosTV' for Airing Political Advertising Outside the Election Period." <https://comcom.ge/en/yvela-siaxle/comcom-fines-mtavari-arkhi-gel-2500-and-cautions-postv-for-airing-political-advertising-outside-the-election-period.page> (accessed August 16, 2024).

<sup>94</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. *Decision, Dated 15 August 2024, by the National Communications Commission of Georgia on the Imposition of Administrative Responsibility for Mtavari Arkhi LTD in the Case N G-24-18 / 364*. <https://www.comcom.ge/ge/legal-acts/solutions/2024--24-18-364.page> (accessed August 22, 2024).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, paragraph 68.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

list. The representative also appealed the following: “Stand by us if you want there to be other choices besides “Natsebi” and “Kotsebi” (derogatory terms for UNM and Georgian Dream respectively). The Communications Commission determined that the video served to hinder the election of the political parties Georgian Dream and United National Movement in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Accordingly, the agency warned<sup>97</sup> the broadcaster in writing in accordance with the law.

The Communications Commission also issued a written warning to Kavkasia TV for illegally airing content that was considered political advertising. The Communications Commission ruled that in June of this year, the television station aired an advertisement featuring Mamuka Khazaradze, leader of the political party Lelo. In the ad, he talks about his book; however, he simultaneously emphasizes what he has done for the country, makes pre-election promises, and, as he himself mentions, he outlines in his book his plan for EU integration, raising pensions, as well as creating a successful European state and more jobs. According to the Communications Commission, considering the content of the video clip, the existing context, and the objectives of the advertising campaign, the advertisement serves to promote the book and the election of a political leader.<sup>98</sup>

Similar to the incident above, during the reporting period, the Communications Commission found that Mtavari Arkhi, TV Pirveli, and Formula violated the law by posting advertisements containing political content. According to the Communications Commission, in a video clip aired on these television stations, the leader of the political party Lelo, Mamuka Khazaradze, talks about his book. However, he simultaneously emphasizes what he has done for the country, makes pre-election promises, and, as he himself mentions, outlines in his book his plan for EU integration, raising pensions, establishing a successful European state, and creating more jobs.<sup>99</sup> Before the Communications Commission’s administrative proceedings were initiated, Mtavari Arkhi independently stopped broadcasting the advertisement shortly after it was aired, due to which the Communications Commission only ruled the broadcaster as a violator but exempted it from any responsibility. As for TV Pirveli and Formula, because these television stations have not had a similar violation within the past year, the Communications Commission only warned them in writing and instructed them to pull the video clip from circulation immediately.<sup>100</sup>

The Communications Commission has issued a written warning to the broadcaster POSTV for illegally airing advertisements containing political content. According to the Communications Commission, “video clips were aired about various enterprises and entrepreneurs who talk about the support of state programs and successful projects in the field of entrepreneurship by the Georgian Dream party. In addition, the

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<sup>97</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. "ComCom Sanctions ‘Alt-Info’ for Airing Political Advertising Outside the Election Period." <https://www.comcom.ge/en/yvela-siaxle/comcom-sanctions-alt-info-for-airing-political-advertising-outside-the-election-period.page> (accessed August 6, 2024).

<sup>98</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. "ComCom Warned TV ‘Kavkasia’ for the Distribution of Political Advertising During the Non-Election Period." <https://www.comcom.ge/ge/yvela-siaxle/comcom-ma-politikuri-reklamis-arawinasaarchevno-periodshi-gavrcelebistvis-tv-kavkasia-gaaftrxila.page> (accessed August 6, 2024).

<sup>99</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. "Formula, TV Pirveli and Mtavari Arkhi Violate the Legislation by Airing Political Ads Outside the Election Period." <https://www.comcom.ge/en/yvela-siaxle/formula-tv-pirveli-and-mtavari-arkhi-violate-the-legislation-by-airing-political-ads-outside-the-election-period.page> (accessed August 5, 2024).

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

video clips were captioned: “Over 100 Factories Funded by Georgian Dream”. The purpose of the broadcasted political material was not only to spread information about entrepreneurs or the state program but also to promote the election of the political movement Georgian Dream in the elections of October 26, 2024”.<sup>101</sup>

On August 22, 2024, the Communications Commission warned Obiektivi TV for broadcasting political advertisement in violation of the law. According to the statement published by the Communications Commission, “the video clips include party leaders and other representatives of the political union Alliance of Patriots of Georgia talking about issues such as pensions, land sale to foreign nationals, recovery of deposits, etc. At the same time, the activities of other parties and political forces are criticised”.<sup>102</sup> The Communications Commission ruled that the purpose of the video clips aired by the broadcaster was to promote the political party Alliance of Patriots of Georgia in the upcoming elections and hinder the election of other parties.<sup>103</sup>

## 7.2. Barriers related to journalistic activity

During the reporting period, several instances of the Parliament of Georgia suspending the accreditation of journalists from critical media outlets were reported. According to the order of the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia N1/31/23, dated February 6, 2023, it is established that an accredited journalist is obliged to stop an interview<sup>104</sup> if a member of the Parliament of Georgia, an employee of the office or a person visiting the Parliament refuses to consent to the interview. Otherwise, a journalist’s accreditation may be suspended.<sup>105</sup> This order is a punitive mechanism against journalists,<sup>106</sup> which can obstruct their professional activities.

According to a statement published by the Charter of Journalistic Ethics of Georgia, based on an appeal submitted by People’s Power MP Sozar Subari on June 3, the TV Pirveli journalist Nata Kajaia’s accreditation was suspended for one month. On the same day, at the request of Georgian Dream MP Nino Tsilosani, a journalist from the same TV company, Nini Balanchivadze, was banned from working in the Parliament for one month. At the request of Nino Tsilosani, the accreditation of Sofo Gozalishvili, a

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<sup>101</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. "ComCom Fines ‘Mtavari Arkhi’ GEL 2500 and Cautions ‘PosTV’ for Airing Political Advertising Outside the Election Period." <https://comcom.ge/en/yvela-siaxle/comcom-fines-mtavari-arkhi-gel-2500-and-cautions-postv-for-airing-political-advertising-outside-the-election-period.page> (accessed August 16, 2024).

<sup>102</sup> National Communications Commission of Georgia. "ComCom Cautions ‘Obieqtivi’ for Broadcasting Political Adverts in Violation of the Law." <https://www.comcom.ge/en/yvela-siaxle/comcom-cautions-obieqtivi-for-broadcasting-political-adverts-in-violation-of-the-law.page> (accessed August 22, 2024).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia. *Order No. 1/31/23, Dated 6 February 2023, "On Approval of the Rule for Accreditation of Mass Media Representatives in the Parliament of Georgia."* Article 15, Clause 2, Sub-clause "C." <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/11/akreditacia-2023.pdf> (accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., article 13

<sup>106</sup> Media Advocacy Coalition. Facebook post. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/XWjWgv61JmY9ECPE/> (accessed September 2, 2024).

journalist from the Formula television station, was also suspended for 4-6 months.<sup>107</sup> According to the media, the Parliament's staff make such decisions based only on listening to MPs and without sufficiently considering the merits of each case.<sup>108</sup>

On June 28, the closing day of the fourth spring session of the Parliament of the 10th Convocation, only accredited TV media journalists were allowed to enter and work in the Parliament. A yellow level of security was activated<sup>109</sup> in the building for the Prime Minister's speech, on the basis of which online media, radio, and press journalists were not given the opportunity to work in the Parliament.<sup>110</sup>

The role of the media in a democratic society includes informing the public about political, legislative and other issues. It is critically important that journalists from all media organizations – television stations, online media, radio and print – are given equal opportunities/means to carry out their professional duties. With the aforementioned approach, journalists are prevented from carrying out their professional activities, especially during the election period, when one of the main criteria for evaluating the integrity of the elections is adequately informing voters and the public.

### 7.3. Violence against journalists

During the reporting period, several cases of attacks on journalists were recorded. Among them was an instance of violence against Mtavari Arkhi journalist Vladimir Menabde and cameraman Manuchar Mzhavanadze. On July 25, 2024, the reporter and his cameraman were conducting journalistic activities in the Supsa, Lanchkhuti municipality village. While working on a report, two persons verbally and physically assaulted them. During the incident, the video camera belonging to Mtavari Arkhi was also damaged<sup>111</sup>. Two people were arrested.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Georgia's Charter of Journalistic Ethics. "Georgia's Parliament Persecutes and Confronts Journalists from Critical Media." <https://www.qartia.ge/ka/siakhleebi/article/97854-saqarthvelos-parlamenti-devnis-da-upirispirdeba-zhurnalistsbs-kritikuli-mediasashualebebidan> (accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Parliament of Georgia. "Regulation of Security Protection in the Palace of the Parliament of Georgia, Approved by Order N1/259/23 of the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia." <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/OpenFile/6712> (accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>110</sup> MediaChecker. "'Protests' and 'Persecutions' - Why Parliament Was Closed to the Media." <https://www.mediachecker.ge/ka/mediagaremo/article/98072-protesti-da-adevneba-ratom-daikhura-parlamenti-mediisthvis> (accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>111</sup> Interpressnews. "The Prosecutor's Office Filed Charges Against Two Persons for the Persecution of the Journalist and Cameraman of Mtavari Arkhi." <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/807299-specialurma-sagamoziebo-samsaxurma-mtavari-arkhis-zhurnalistsa-da-operatorze-zaladobis-paktze-ori-piri-daakava> (accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, journalists for TV Monitoring, Beka Pirveli, and Shota Sadaghashvili, were attacked and verbally and physically assaulted<sup>113</sup> at the Didube bus station in Tbilisi. TV Monitoring said they were attacked because of material prepared regarding Gori-Tbilisi minibuses.<sup>114</sup>

The case of Vitali Guguchia, who is accused of violence against a POSTV journalist and the illegal obstruction of her professional activities, is also noteworthy. He was given 5,000 GEL bail.<sup>115</sup>

It is important that relevant agencies investigate violent incidents in a timely and effective manner to ensure journalists are able to carry out their professional activities in a safe and peaceful environment.

## 8. Observation mission and methodology

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) monitors the Parliamentary Elections of Georgia and the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara through 71 long-term observers in all electoral districts of Georgia.

Before the elections, in the event of discrimination on political grounds or violation of voters' right to vote, the organization offers free legal assistance to citizens.

The main areas of observation during the pre-election period include the following issues:

- Analysis of the current political context in the country and its impact on the electoral environment;
- Analysis of election legislation;
- Activities of the election administration;
- Registration of electoral candidates;
- Public meetings and political activities of electoral subjects;
- Cases of pressure, threats, or potential job dismissal for political reasons;
- Alleged vote buying;
- Use of administrative resources;
- Participation of women and underrepresented groups in elections;
- Social media monitoring.

Sources of information used in the monitoring process include public information requested from administrative institutions, as well as information obtained directly from election subjects, media outlets,

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<sup>113</sup> Charter of Journalistic Ethics of Georgia. "The Charter Calls on the Special Investigative Service to Urgently Investigate the Attack on TV Monitoring Journalists." <https://www.qartia.ge/ka/siakhleebi/article/98165-qartia-specialur-sagamodziebo-samsakhurs-tv-monitoringis-zhurnalistebe-thavdashkmis-sastsrafod-gamodziebiken-moutsodebs> (accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>114</sup> MediaChecker. "According to TV Monitoring, Their Camera Crew Was Attacked." <https://www.mediachecker.ge/ka/mediagaremo/article/98163-tv-monitoringis-ganckhadebith-math-gadamgheb-jgufs-thavs-daeskhnen> (accessed August 10, 2024).

<sup>115</sup> Interpressnews. "Court Granted Bail of 5,000 GEL to Vitaly Guguchia Accused of Illegal Interference and Violence Against Journalist." <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/808311-sasamartlom-zhurnalistvis-propesiul-sakmianobashi-ukanonod-xelis-sheshlasa-da-zaladobashi-braldebul-vitali-guguchias-5-000-lariani-girao-sheuparda> (accessed August 13, 2024).



non-governmental organizations, voters, and through social media monitoring. Each fact collected by ISFED is verified with direct eyewitnesses and parties involved in the incident. ISFED periodically informs the public about violations and trends observed during the pre-election period through statements and reports.

ISFED also publishes information about each incident and alleged violation during the pre-election period on the interactive map available at [www.electionsportal.ge](http://www.electionsportal.ge). Any citizen can report an alleged election violation through this website. The organization operates a free hotline at 0 800 800 101.

ISFED observes the pre-election period with the financial support of the European Union (EU), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).