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# **EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION FOR THE OBSERVATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA**

**28 OCTOBER AND 28 NOVEMBER 2018**

**REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION  
HEADED BY MS. LAIMA LIUCIJA ANDRIKIENE**

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## **Introduction and context of the elections:**

Due to the 2017/2018 constitutional reforms, this is the final time that the President will be directly elected. Because this reform was a contentious decision of the parliament, reached without a broad consensus, the elections have a high symbolic value, which turned them into a mid-term test for the ruling party, ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled in 2020. The newly elected President will have considerably reduced powers, concluding the shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system initiated in 2010.

The 2016 parliamentary elections resulted in a constitutional majority for the ruling party, the Georgian Dream (GD), which won 115 of the 150 seats. With 27 seats, the leading parliamentary opposition, the United National Movement (UNM), underwent a party split months after the 2016 elections, with 21 of its members of parliament establishing the European Georgia – Movement for Liberty (EG). The 2017 local elections further consolidated the position of the ruling party, with 62 of 64 mayoral seats and a majority in 63 of 64 local councils.

Several political parties and prospective contestants, including the incumbent President, did not participate in this election, pointing to the limited presidential mandate, as framed in the constitutional reform. The ruling party decided to participate by supporting an independent candidate, reasoning that the president should be a non-partisan figure. The fragmented parliamentary opposition, EG and UNM, each nominated their own candidate. In addition, four of the nine smaller opposition parties under the UNM led coalition “Strength is in Unity”, created in July 2018, also fielded candidates.

The elections took place against a backdrop of social turbulence resulting from a series of street protests and marches that took place in May 2018. These protests were fuelled by the perception of biased justice in two cases, one relating to the killing of minors, the other regarding the alleged mishandling of arrests during an anti-drug campaign. Allegations of corruption involving several high-level officials have also received wide media attention.

The European Parliament received an invitation to observe the elections already in early May 2018, and decided to send a delegation, as this was the case for the previous elections in Georgia in 1995, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2013 and 2016.

## **Composition of the EP delegation and program**

The delegation - which observed both rounds - was headed by Ms Laima Andrikiene (EPP, Lithuania). For the first round on 28 October, it was composed of 7 MEPs, representing 5 political groups and 7 Member States. For the second round, 5 MEPs from 3 political groups and 4 Member States participated. Three Members of DG EXPO and two advisors from political groups accompanied the delegation for both rounds.

The EP delegation was integrated into the ODIHR-led International Election Observation Mission, together with delegations from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO (for the first round only).

Besides the joint programme with other parliamentary assemblies (briefings by the core team, meetings with the candidates - notably Salome Zourabichvili, Grigol Vashadze, David Bakradze, with representatives from the Central Electoral Commission, from the media and the civil society, from other regulatory bodies), the EP delegation met with Mr. Giorgi Margvelashvili, President of Georgia, with Mr. Mamuka Bakhtadze, Prime Minister, and with the Head of the EU delegation and EU missions present in Tbilisi.

On elections days, the EP delegation split into several teams:

- for 1st round, four teams were deployed in Tbilisi & Mtskheta, in Gori & region, in Bolnisi-Marneuli & region, and in Telavi & region.
- for 2nd round, three teams were deployed in Tbilisi, in Gori & region, and in Telavi & region.

### **Principal points and conclusions**

Besides fully subscribing, during both rounds, to the Joint Statement on Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, several concerns were raised by the EP delegation throughout its programmes and notably during the press conferences:

On the positive sides,

- administration of the elections: they were assessed as competitive and professionally administered by the relevant authorities, both at national and local levels. It is also considered that candidates were able to campaign freely and voters had a genuine choice.
- violence: despite fears that incidents of violence would spark on E-Days, no major incidents were reported, neither to the observers - national and international - nor to the relevant authorities.
- turnout: after a rather low-key start of the campaign (notably due to the fact that the elected President will have reduced prerogatives compared to his/her predecessor), interest in the elections has increased in scale. Turnout for second round was significantly higher than for the first round.

However, light was shed on several shortcomings and problems that arose during the campaign or on election days:

- Occupied territories: Unfortunately, Georgians citizens in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali / South Ossetia could not cast their vote. For those outside of the occupied territories, the status of Internally Displaced Person is compulsory to be allowed to vote. For those still residing in the occupied territories, no polling stations were available and on E-day even the administrative border line was closed by the de facto ruling authorities of Tskhinvali / South Ossetia.
- campaigning: the electoral campaign quickly turned very negative, with harsh rhetoric and personal attacks between candidates. This worrying trend, already observed during the first round, undoubtedly worsened for the second round, despite clear warnings and calls for restraints by the international observers. The exchanges between candidates did not focus on concrete visions for the future or their respective programmes and political platforms but

rather took the form of acrimonious invectives, insults and accusations (notably of collusion with Russian interests).

- civil society: independent civil society organisations were highly engaged in the electoral campaign, monitoring the activities of the candidates, analysing the speeches / advertisements / comments, scrutinising the electoral process and the use of funds or other resources by the candidates etc.

Inevitably, they noticed the shortcomings of the campaign, the disproportionate access to financial resources and media bias in favour of the independent candidate backed by the ruling party. This shedding of light on such imbalances backfired on civil society organisations which became the targets of intense verbal and personal attacks by high ranking public figures, or threats. For example, a leading independent civil society organisation was called an “accomplice of fascism” by the Speaker of the Parliament. However, this tension somehow eased in the course of the runoff, notably due to the clear support by the EP delegation and other parliamentary delegations for the work carried by the civil society during the campaign.

- media: the campaign further polarised the media landscape, which did not help to provide a non-partisan platform for debate between the candidates. For the second round notably, the public broadcaster clearly favoured the independent candidate backed by the ruling party, while the main private TV channel favoured the opposition candidate.

- campaign financing: similar concerns were raised by the EP in 2016, notably the strong imbalances in resources, the influence of business in politics, as well as the need for a level playing field and fair competition between candidates. It was noted that some legal provisions do not help transparency: for example, the very high annual cap on citizen donations of up to 60,000 lari, which is equivalent to four-and-a-half years the average salary in the country. As regards total amount of donations, the independent candidate backed by the ruling party collected some 78.8% of all donations.

- misuse of administrative resources: for both rounds, several cases of misuse of administrative resources by senior state officials and by local authorities were reported, as listed in the Statement on preliminary Findings and Conclusions.

- concern of vote buying : the period between the two rounds was marked by grave concern surrounding vote buying, notably the initiative of debt write-off for 600,000 citizens (for an amount of 1.5 billion lari, equivalent to 490 million EUR) by a private foundation connected with the chairman of the ruling party Georgian Dream. Other government initiatives of social benefits, salary increases and the transfer of housing ownership, also contained elements of abuse of state resources.

- pressure and intimidations during e-day: for the runoff in particular, several occurrences of intimidation and pressure through party coordinators were reported. Furthermore, and albeit not prohibited by the law, the ruling party massively campaigned through text messages and pre-recorded phone calls.

**Follow up:**

The press statements delivered by the Head of the EP delegation during both press conferences matched the level of EP expectations for Georgia and for its democratic path. The Head of delegation underlined that the EP would wish highest election standards to be implemented in the country which is a frontrunner in the Eastern neighbourhood while implementing the Association Agreement, and reiterated the support of the European Parliament for Georgian path towards the EU.

The conclusions drawn by the EP delegation and the recommendations contained in the final report of the International Election Observation Mission should form the basis of EP's monitoring of the developments in the country, notably ahead of 2020 parliamentary elections, and EP's work in the field of democracy support, in the framework of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, the Parliamentary Association Committee, or the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group.

**Annexes:**

**A. Lists of participants**

**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA**

1ST ROUND  
28 OCTOBER 2018

**MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ, Lithuania, EPP (*Chair of the delegation*)  
Mr Jaromír ŠTĚTINA, Czech Republic, EPP  
Mr Joachim ZELLER, Germany, EPP  
Ms Ana GOMES, Portugal, S&D  
Ms Anna FOTYGA, Poland, ECR  
Mr Fabio CASTALDO, Italy, EFDD  
Mr André ELISSEN, Netherlands, ENF

2ND ROUND  
28 NOVEMBER 2018

**MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ, Lithuania, EPP (*Chair of the delegation*)  
Mr Joachim ZELLER, Germany, EPP  
Mr José Inácio FARIA, Portugal, EPP  
Ms Ana GOMES, Portugal, S&D  
Ms Joelle BERGERON, France, EFDD

## **B. Statements by the Head of the delegation**

1st round, 28 October 2018

**Press statement by Laima ANDRIKIENE**  
**Head of the European Parliament Delegation to the International Election**  
**Observation Mission to Georgia**  
**Presidential elections**

Tbilisi, 29 October 2018

We are very pleased to be here at the invitation of the Georgian authorities to observe these elections and I would like to thank you for your interest in our joint work today. This may be the last direct presidential elections, for a mandate with reduced prerogatives, but it is a crucial milestone on the path towards the democratic consolidation of the Georgian state.

Georgia remains a priority country for the European Union and the European Parliament. We are successfully implementing the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and the Visa Liberalisation policy, and are actively supporting the strengthening of democracy. This is why we are here today.

The European Parliament delegation is made up of seven members representing five political groups. Together, we fully subscribe to the statement on preliminary findings and conclusions and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the OSCE Special Coordinator, Mr Kristian Vigenin, for our close cooperation. I also thank Ambassador Ahrens and his team for their hard work.

As regards Election Day, let me emphasise that we are very happy to see that, this time, cases of violence have not been reported. This allowed citizens to safely exercise their democratic right. Of course, we deeply regret Russia's occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as the decision of the *de facto* ruling authorities of South Ossetia to close the administrative border line with Georgia. This deprived many Georgian citizens from casting their ballots. As we highlighted in previous elections, we commend the high engagement of women in running the electoral process, notably in the polling stations.

We should point out however that the pre-electoral debate has too often been focused on negative campaigning and personal attacks, including very harsh accusations, rather than on concrete visions for the future. The polarization of the media landscape did not help to provide a non-partisan platform for debate between the candidates.

Still, we welcome the high level of engagement by the independent civil society organisations, especially those observing the electoral process. We note with great concern that some of them have been targeted by intense verbal attacks despite - or maybe because of - the quality of their work. Georgia, a country which aspires to join the European Union,

cannot have its highest office holders calling citizen observers organisations “accomplices of fascism”. Words have meaning, and the Georgian citizens deserve more than such language. A thriving democracy needs a vibrant and independent civil society which must be heard, trusted, protected and supported in its important work. This is what the European Union is committed to and this is what we will keep doing in the years ahead.

The electoral framework has been reformed but still, more can be done. Let me stress in particular the issue of campaign financing: in 2016, we already highlighted the strong imbalances in resources, the influence of business in politics, and the need for an even level playing field and fair competition between candidates. This is still true today. For example, we remain sceptical about the very high annual cap on citizen donations of up to 60.000 Georgian lari which is, to put this into context, equivalent to 4,5 years of an average salary in the country ! Loopholes such as this one should be closed for future elections.

All these remarks, we also conveyed to the President of Georgia, Mr Giorgi Margvelashvili, and to the Prime Minister, Mr Mamuka Bakhtadze. We were glad to hear that they fully agreed with us, especially on the treatment of civil society organisations.

As you know, the European Parliament will remain focused on the developments in Georgia, one of the countries associated with the European Union. In two weeks, at our next plenary session in Strasbourg, we will hold a debate which, I am sure, will be the occasion to reaffirm our conclusions on these elections, and emphasise once more our support to Georgia and its citizens.

Thank you.



2nd round, 28 November 2018

**Press statement by Laima ANDRIKIENE**  
**Head of the European Parliament Delegation to the International Election**  
**Observation Mission to Georgia**  
**Presidential elections**

Tbilisi, 29 November 2018

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

I am very pleased to be back in Georgia for the second round with the European Parliament delegation. Our presence here for both rounds is a proof of our commitment to Georgian people and their democracy.

We share the observations which have just been drawn and subscribe to the conclusions that are presented, and we are relieved to see that no major incidents were reported throughout Election Day.

I would like however to underline that some of the elements that we had voiced following the first round are, regrettably, still relevant today.

We are definitely concerned at seeing that the very negative campaign and the harsh accusations between the candidates, already pointed out on 28 October, have worsened. They have reached an unacceptable level which may jeopardise the consolidation of democracy in a country which we consider a frontrunner in our neighbourhood.

We still strongly believe in Georgia's European aspirations, but this electoral process was divisive, and brought much antagonism in society. We really hope that the President of Georgia who has been elected yesterday will be willing and able to reconcile the nation in order to allow the country to address fully the many challenges it faces. On its path to the EU, Georgia needs a true democratic, non-confrontational dialogue between all actors, in order to safeguard political stability.

The fact that Georgian voters could not, once more, cast their ballot in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali / South Ossetia is also a matter of great concern. These citizens must not be forgotten and left to their own fate.

We note that the choice of the date for this second round was not in the interest of all the voters, and was not made in an inclusive manner, leading to suspicions that it could have been politically motivated.

It is also with great surprise that we learned about the debt relief plan for 600.000 citizens to pay off their loans. Even though we understand this was the result of a long standing process, the fact that such a major political and financial decision is announced a few days before a much disputed second round and that it is made possible thanks to an entity owned by the Chairperson of the ruling party affected public perception in the voters' minds. This inevitably fueled legitimate suspicion about the real intention behind this measure. If we judge by the different pieces of legislation that regulate this electoral process, this large scale action may be considered as vote buying, as mentioned in our joint statement. More clarity is therefore needed on this important matter: such debt relief did not bring credit to these elections, on the contrary.

We finally note with concern the cases of intimidation and pressure on voters that have been reported to us: these have to be inquired thoroughly. Furthermore, the mass text messages and pre-recorded phone calls by the Chairperson of Georgian Dream to all voters on Election Day, irrespective of whether in or out of the polling stations, and inviting them to vote in favor of the candidate backed by his party, constitutes campaigning on E-day. As we would not expect such methodology to be used to persuade voters in a genuine democratic process, we are disappointed.

We remain, however, a committed friend of Georgia, and hope that the recommendations issued at the end of this electoral process will be read in this light. On our end, the European Parliament will continue its efforts in observing and accompanying Georgia's democratic choices.

We wholeheartedly hope that the next time we observe elections we will not witness the repetition of such a campaign but one based on a genuine discussion between candidates, on projects for Georgian society. This is definitely what citizens need and deserve.

Thank you.

## C. Press statements by the International Election Observation Mission

1st round, 28 October 2018



### **Voters in Georgia’s presidential election had a genuine choice and candidates campaigned freely, but on an unlevel playing field, international observers say**

TBILISI, 29 October 2018 – Georgia’s 28 October presidential election was competitive and professionally administered. Candidates were able to campaign freely and voters had a genuine choice, although there were instances of the misuse of state resources, and the involvement of senior state officials from the ruling party in campaigning was not always in line with the law, the international observers concluded in a preliminary statement released today. A substantial imbalance in donations and excessively high spending limits further contributed to an unlevel playing field, the statement says.

While the public broadcasters provided all candidates with a platform to present their views, the sharp polarization of the private media and a lack of analytical reporting, along with negative campaigning and harsh rhetoric by participants, limited voters’ ability to make a fully informed choice, the observers said. Legal changes that increased the representation of the ruling party at all levels of the election administration and the insufficient transparency in the selection of non-partisan members of lower-level commissions undermined public perception of their impartiality.

“In this election, Georgia showed the maturity of its democracy. This further raises expectations. Therefore, while praising the achievements, it is important to be aware of the shortcomings related to the campaign environment, finances and the legal environment in general,” said Kristian Vigenin, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “We hope that the Georgian people will actively participate in the second round and that the outcome will fully reflect their will.”

While fundamental freedoms were generally respected and contestants were able to campaign freely, several campaign events were disrupted and some party offices or campaign materials were vandalized. The campaign was dominated by polarizing topics, negative campaigning and harsh accusations between the ruling and one of the opposition parties.

“Yesterday voting was well organized, and electors made their choice without restrictions,” said Andrej Hunko, Head of the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. “An astonishing amount of money has been spent in the electoral campaign – and this in a country with a high level of poverty. Another point of concern was the substantial number of candidates apparently campaigning on behalf of others, thus undermining the equality of opportunity and weakening the citizens’ confidence in the electoral process.”

Margareta Cederfelt, Head of the delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, said: “With yesterday’s vote, Georgia proved that efforts are being made to improve its electoral process. I encourage all election stakeholders, and especially the media and civil society, to exercise the highest level of professional ethics, particularly during the campaign for the second round. I would like to commend the Georgian people, and the youth in particular, for once more showing their great commitment to democracy.”

Concerns were raised about the collection of voters’ personal data by the ruling party, and pressure associated with this practice was observed on election day. Voting was assessed positively, despite some procedural issues during counting and the fact that many citizen observers and media representatives acted on behalf of political parties.

Representatives of candidates and from citizen and international organizations are allowed to observe the entire electoral process, and accreditation was inclusive and professionally managed. During the pre-election period there were intense verbal attacks on the work and representatives of citizen observer groups by high-ranking members of the ruling party and senior public officials. Nonetheless, the observation efforts of over 70 citizen observer organizations contributed to the transparency of the process.

“We welcome the competitive nature of the election and the high level of engagement by independent civil society organizations, but are concerned that some of these were targeted by verbal attacks by senior state office holders,” said Laima Andrikiienė, Head of the delegation from the European Parliament. “We also regret that Russia’s occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and that the decision by the de facto authorities in South Ossetia to close the administrative border line with Georgia for the elections deprived many Georgian citizens from casting their ballots.”

A total of 25 candidates – 16 from political parties and 9 as independents – were registered in a process that was transparent and inclusive. Voter data were available for purchase, and there was no effective mechanism for checking the authenticity of support signatures. It became clear during the campaign that a significant number of candidates had registered so they could use public funding and free airtime to support other contestants, giving those an unfair advantage.

“Georgia is a positive example of reform, and a leader in Euro-Atlantic integration. Yesterday, I was impressed to see many citizens determined to exercise their democratic right,” said Rasa Juknevičienė, Head of the delegation from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. “But these elections show that, without strong safeguards, the concentration of power and resources can be a risk for democracy.”

Positively both public national broadcasters decided to offer all candidates the same amount of free airtime and hosted numerous debates in which they could present their views. The media regulator was not always transparent and impartial when intervening in the campaign. Media monitoring results showed clear bias in private media coverage.

“The visible commitment shown by the voters should not be undermined by campaigning members of the political class. Unfortunately, we witnessed sharp confrontation, gross exaggerations, negative campaigning and personal insults,” said Ambassador Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, Head of the election observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). “If there is a second round, the ODIHR election observation mission will remain here to observe.”

The legal framework provides an adequate basis for democratic elections. Although amendments to the election code in 2017 and 2018 introduced technical improvements, certain shortcomings remain, and recent amendments were a missed opportunity to address other prior ODIHR and Council of Europe recommendations and eliminate gaps and inconsistencies, the statement says.

Party and campaign finance legislation lacks uniformity, and recent legislative amendments did not address longstanding recommendations by ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO). The lack of regulation for obtaining loans for campaign expenses and reporting on the use of these funds potentially contributes to an imbalanced playing field. While the State Audit Office verified and promptly published reports before the election, the lack of clear deadlines for addressing violations and the institution's insufficient resources raised concerns about the effectiveness of campaign finance oversight.

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2nd round, 28 November 2018



## **Candidates campaigned freely in competitive Georgia run-off, though one side enjoyed undue advantage and negative character of campaign undermined process, international observers say**

TBILISI, 29 November 2018 – The second round of Georgia’s presidential election was competitive and candidates were able to campaign freely, however one side enjoyed an undue advantage and the negative character of the campaign on both sides undermined the process, the international observers concluded in a preliminary statement released today. While the election was well administered, the absence of regulations for key aspects of election run-offs led to a lack of legal certainty, the statement says.

The campaign for the 28 November vote was marred by harsh rhetoric and isolated incidents of violence, as well as by an increase in the misuse of state resources, further blurring the separation of party and state, the observers said. Private media continued to demonstrate sharp polarization and bias in coverage, while the public broadcaster did not ensure editorial independence and impartiality, the observers said.

“Georgian citizens made their choice. Now all of the concerns raised in our preliminary conclusions today and in the upcoming final report on the election have to be dealt with by the authorities without delay,” said Kristian Vigenin, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “I believe that we have a common goal – to improve the electoral process, thus strengthening democracy in the country. I hope that now, after months of tense campaigning and polarization in society, the newly elected president will spare no efforts to ensure the unity of the nation.”

The second round of voting took place after no candidate received more than 50 per cent of valid votes in the first round, on 28 October. The decision by the Central Election Commission (CEC) on the run-off date of 28 November – a Wednesday – became a contentious issue and led to objections from opposition parties and calls from civil society to reconsider. While the CEC acted within its authority in choosing the date, the circumstances surrounding the decision reduced confidence in the body. At the same time, the election was well managed and the CEC provided training to address procedural shortcomings noted in the first round.

Campaign activities intensified in the run-up to the second round, and a number of anti-opposition and anti-government demonstrations before the run-off increased tensions between the two sides. The use of negative, harsh and at times violent rhetoric went unaddressed by authorities. Along with the misuse of state resources, a number of social and financial initiatives were announced, in particular debt relief for 600,000 people funded by a private financial institution linked to the chairperson of the ruling party. These incidents and the involvement in the campaign of senior state officials from the ruling party continued to blur the line between state and party, the statement says.

“We note that the choice of the date for the second round was not made in an inclusive manner and was not in the interest of all voters, leading to suspicions that it was politically motivated,” said Laima Andrikenė, Head of the delegation from the European Parliament. “The announcement just a few days before a fiercely contested second round of debt relief benefitting 600,000 citizens and made possible by an entity owned by the head of the ruling party could be considered an attempt at vote-buying. Cases of intimidation and pressure on voters have to be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted. Further, the practice of mass sending pre-recorded phone calls and text messages is highly questionable.”

Margareta Cederfelt, Head of the delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, said: “In this run-off election the Georgian people once again expressed their commitment to democracy by actively participating in the electoral process. Regrettably, the increased use of harsh rhetoric in the campaign between the two rounds contributed to a rise in tension in the electoral environment.”

The gathering of voter data and political preferences raised concerns about the potential for intimidation and about voters’ ability to cast their ballots free of fear of retribution. These concerns were reinforced by the environment outside of polling stations on election day, as candidates’ supporters used lists of voters to track who was coming to vote, the observers said. Opening, voting and counting on election day were assessed positively in almost all polling stations observed, and procedures were generally followed, although citizen observers and media representatives often acted on behalf of political parties and, in some instances, interfered in the counting.

Campaign finance reporting requirements for the second round were determined less than two weeks before the vote. The substantial imbalance noted during the first round in campaign donations in favour of the candidate backed by the ruling party remained for the run-off. There is no requirement to report on campaign activities by third-parties, including public protest movements, which mainly benefitted the candidate supported by the ruling party. Both contestants received support from political parties without candidates in the second round, and these contributions went unreported. The fact that most campaign finance-related complaints from both rounds were still pending at the time of the second vote continued to raise concerns about the enforcement of campaign finance rules, the statement says.

“The second round of the presidential election confirmed concerns expressed by the PACE delegation after the first round – in particular, the surprisingly generous system of campaign and party funding from the state budget and private donations. In addition, one can question the timing, just before the second round, of the government’s announcement of a debt-relief operation for hundreds of thousands of electors, financed by a private foundation affiliated to the ruling party’s leader,” said Andrej Hunko, Head of the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. “This increase in the role of money in politics in a country with a high level of poverty and without efficient control mechanisms did not contribute to public confidence in democratic elections.”

Unclear regulation of the campaign led to a lack of legal certainty and to inconsistent and contradictory interpretations. Further, recent amendments did not rectify problems identified in previous two-round elections or address previous ODIHR recommendations to provide explicit run-off regulations.

The lack of clear regulation also effectively limited the period for official campaigning in the media. While not required by law, most national broadcasters did provide free airtime to both candidates. The national public broadcaster displayed a clear bias against the opposition. Private media continued to demonstrate sharp polarization and clear bias in reporting, some becoming more vocal about their political positions ahead of the second vote, media monitoring revealed.

“Georgia has a good international standing as a democracy, and the corresponding commitment shown by citizens and voters was visible and impressive. The quality of the election was undermined, however, by unnecessarily sharp confrontation, negative campaigning and personal insults by some members of the political class, who did this rather than dealing with issues really important for Georgia, such as the rule of

law and economic inequality,” said Ambassador Geert-Heinrich Ahrens, Head of the election observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. “These negative practices were even worse than in the lead up to the first round.”

Nearly 700 complaints were filed following the first-round election day, mainly concerning procedural violations during voting and counting. A large number of cases were dismissed on procedural grounds, demonstrating a limited understanding of the procedures by complainants. There was lack of proper consideration of the substance of complaints, and commissions adopted narrow or inconsistent interpretations of the law, all of which undermined the right to effective remedy.

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